



**The Commonwealth of Massachusetts**  
**House of Representatives**  
**State House, Boston, MA 02133-1054**

**Denise Provost**  
**Representative**  
27<sup>th</sup> Middlesex  
District

Committees:  
Transportation,  
Higher Education,  
Personnel and  
Administration, &  
State House Room 473B  
Boston, MA 02133  
Tel. (617) 722-2263

Somerville Board of Alderman  
c/o, John Long, Clerk  
93 Highland Avenue  
Somerville, MA 02143

May 17, 2013

Honorable Board Members:

I would like to comment on the pending proposal for filling vacancies on the Somerville Board of Aldermen, a matter to which I have given much thought. In 1993, I almost unseated a long-time incumbent alderman, who resigned a year later, triggering an appointment to fill the vacancy. In 2006, I myself resigned from the Board of Aldermen, after many strenuous months of serving in that position, as well as my duties in the Massachusetts State House after my election to that body.

I applaud the Board's move to toward a more democratic method of filling vacancies. As I read the current proposal, I would say that it does not go quite fair enough in creating an optional non-electoral process. I think it is vitally important, if an elected post is filled by appointment that it be done in a manner maximizes the support and satisfaction of the electorate.

Please note the "if" in the sentence. I am not convinced that it is vital to fill every vacancy that occurs on the BOA within a year of the next city election. The Massachusetts Legislature never fills vacant seats by appointment, and does not typically direct a special election to fill a vacant seat if there are only a few months before the next regular election. Occasional short gaps in the representation of a district do not seem to cause any great hardship.

Indeed, there are major democratically- organized nations of the world that go on for months without an organized government being formed, as we have seen happen at least twice in the last year. I'm not suggesting that Somerville radically change its system of government. I simply

want to point out that a vacancy – or even two – on a body that has four at large members in addition to seven ward aldermen does not necessarily constitute a governmental emergency.

So, I would consider the option of simply leaving vacant seats vacant. I would consider changing the year in-to-election measure in the charter, and possibly having different consequences for vacancies of different length. I would recommend soliciting public input on all possible options.

I would also rethink the procedure which is now under consideration. If a vacancy is to be opened up to all interested candidates, all should be considered simultaneously, in the same time-frame – in much the way that candidates for school superintendent are vetted, before appointment by the school committee. It seems to me that the current proposal, “sequential” approach, gives the edge to whoever can get before the bat first, and secure six rates – a method which is for, in process and effect, from choice by the electorate.

Thank you for grappling with the issue of vacancies on the Board. I appreciate your consideration of my remarks.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Denise Provost". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Denise Provost