Homer Bludau, former City Manager

Is having a directly elected Mayor good for Newport Beach?
A little history might shed some light on the issue of whether Newport Beach should have a directly elected Mayor. In 1953, Newport Beach voters elected 15 citizens to develop and propose a City Charter that was approved by a City-wide vote in 1954 and took effect in 1955. Over the past 66 years, our city government has operated under the Council/Manager system provided for under this Charter and has greatly thrived during that time.

The Charter was approved <u>excluding</u> a directly elected Mayor due to early 1950s history, when it was strongly felt by many local residents that just a few people had too much influence in how the City operated and therefore, the whole community was not sufficiently represented in local government decisions. The Charter intended to solve this problem by creating seven districts, each represented by a City Councilmember elected by the whole community and then having the City Council select a City Councilperson to be Mayor each year. The Mayor's position was purposely intended by the Charter to be mostly ceremonial and no stronger than any other City Council position in order to ensure local residents, and not a strong Mayor, had significant influence in how local issues were decided by the City Council.

Fast forward until today. For the past 66 years, this community has realized the benefits of its current city government decision-making process – a process that facilitates a great deal of public input and the building of both a community and City Council consensus. Having a directly elected Mayor would hugely change that successful model of how City Council decisions have been made.

Having a directly elected Mayor would result in the following detrimental consequences:

1. Reduces the number of Council districts, resulting in City Council members representing more, not less, district residents than they currently represent.
2. Results in having both the Mayor and another City Councilmember both live in the same district, thus providing greater representation for one district over the others, potentially at the expense of those other districts.
3. Changes the current co-equal relationship of the Mayor with the City Councilmembers, and in doing so, changes the way City Council consensus is reached.
4. Changes the long-established Charter relationships of the Mayor with the City Manager and City employees, and by doing so, reduces the influence of the other City Councilmembers with the City Manager, City Attorney and City Clerk positions.
5. Results in Mayor election campaigns that could easily cost $500,000-$1,000,000, thereby making successful candidates more likely to be influenced by big donors' contributions.
6. Such expensive elections could result in the election of a Mayor who has no experience with City government and has had little involvement in City issues and no understanding of the City operations or the City Charter.
7. Would work against the current practice of having a very deliberative and sometimes lengthy public input process due to the Mayor having greater influence over the Council's agenda, operations and decision making.

8. Is likely to result in the Mayor openly backing other City Council candidates in order to personally gain even greater control over City Council decision-making.
9. In summary, creating a strong Mayor would inject a huge degree of politics into Council decision-making to the detriment of good community governance.

The current Charter's structure of City Council decision-making has served this community remarkably well. We live in a hugely respected, admired and well-run city; the residents love living here, and our City has been largely devoid of the embarrassing political messes that many neighboring cities have experienced over the years. There is nothing broken here. Just the opposite. Everything about this City reflects excellence with City Council decisions historically being based on the needs of the community as a whole, rather than political interests.

Your current City Councilmembers are the beneficiaries of 66 years of a well thought out form of local governance. Please do not change the decision-making dynamics that have helped to make this community so special and successful. Creating a greater degree of politics in city government is no way to improve Newport Beach. Please respect and honor those City leaders who have gone before you and shown the current manner in which our Mayor is selected is both wise and prudent for the benefit of all Newport Beach residents.

It is for the above stated reasons that I am strongly opposed to changing the City Charter and having a directly elected Mayor.

Homer Bludau was the Newport Beach City Manager from 1999-2009.