

## **Former Aberdeen Councilman Begins Campaign to Reduce Size of Council** **Local News**

Posted by: David Haviland

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ABERDEEN, Wash. - Former Aberdeen City Councilman Paul Fritts has announced he is collecting signatures to place a measure on the ballot to reduce the size of the Aberdeen City Council from 12 to seven members. Aberdeen and its neighbor Hoquiam are the only cities in the state with 12 council members. Aberdeen has roughly 17,000 residents and consists of 12 square miles. By comparison, Seattle, with a population of 608,660 and consisting of 142 square miles, only has nine council members. While seated on the council, Fritts, a 41-year-old Grays Harbor County Sheriff's deputy and lifelong Aberdeen resident, and fellow council member Tim Alstrom attempted to pass a resolution through council to place the issue on the ballot in 2008. The resolution was voted down 8-4. Council members John Smith and John Erak joining Fritts and Alstrom in voting yes. "It was somewhat disheartening to see how some members took the issue as an attack on them as opposed to a difference of opinion about an issue," Fritts says. He added that both he and Alstrom could feel the tension between themselves and a couple council members who were outwardly angry at the issue being brought up. He added this was not true of all council members, specifically pointing out Kathy Hoder and Margot Shortt whose professionalism regarding the issue was beyond question.

Fritts said he wants to allow the citizens to decide the size of their council. To place a proposition on the ballot, according to the city charter, signatures must be collected from at least 15 percent of those who voted in the previous general election. Fritts says County Auditor Vern Spatz told him 3,784 people voted in the last election; so 567 valid signatures need to be collected. Fritts wants to reduce the council for efficiency and accountability. "Right now," he says "it is too easy for a council member to hide and/or be ineffective with very few from the community any the wiser. Over and over I saw the same council members doing the lion's share of the work with others just tagging along. It became frustrating watching some council members who never prepared themselves for the meetings by educating themselves on the issues they were voting on." Fritts declined to point out specific members. "I just want the public to have a say in the process," Fritts says. "During my mayoral campaign last year I knocked on more doors than I care to count. Too many times while speaking with citizens the conversation turned to council size. It was obvious there was interest in revisiting this issue. Whether or not the majority feel the same way can only be determined in an election." Fritts says the issue was last brought to vote in 1987 and was narrowly defeated at that time. There should be no additional cost in placing the measure on the ballot, Fritts says. The proposition would be placed on the same ballot as the next council elections so would just be a part of those costs. Fritts is quick to shoot down the idea that a smaller council would need to be paid more and have less time to complete tasks. "Any person who says they need to be paid more to be a member of a smaller council is on the council for the wrong reasons," Fritts added. "I had a schedule as busy if not busier than almost all the other council members yet I found time to do plenty of research on the issues, visit City Hall, ask the questions that needed to be asked and still had time to be with my family and to volunteer with a variety of youth sports. I still had time to spare so I don't even begin to give that argument credibility." Fritts wants this to be a true citizen's petition and does not plan on asking

for donations to offset expenses. If citizens wish to help in collecting signatures or want to sign the petition he says you can contact him by phone or text at 360-581-3177 or by email at [reduceourcouncil@gmail.com](mailto:reduceourcouncil@gmail.com). Information about the petition is available on line at [www.facebook.com/reduceourcouncil](http://www.facebook.com/reduceourcouncil). Fritts will bring the petition to anyone unable to travel to soon-to-be-announced petition sites.