

2022 Candidate Questionnaire - Los Angeles Mayor and City Council

Name: Alex Gruenenfelder Smith

- (1) Do you support increasing the number of seats on the Los Angeles City Council from the current 15 to a larger number of City Council members? If so, how large and why? If so, would it be using single-seat or multi-seat districts and why?

I strongly support increasing the number of seats on the Los Angeles City Council, in line with most major cities in the United States. It is absurd that a city of more than four million people is represented by just fifteen individuals on the City Council. I am open to a proposal including both single-seat and multi-seat districts, but I think that smaller districts is the key to more representation. The number of seats should be at least doubled, to ensure that all voices from across the many communities of Los Angeles are able to be represented.

I serve on the Echo Park Neighborhood Council. Neighborhood councils are the bodies of government that are supposed to be most connected to everyday Angelenos. However, the system is flawed and the power held is limited. As a result, I think expanding the City Council can help fix our system of representation and return control of city governance to the people.

- (2) Do you support using ranked-choice voting (RCV) to elect the Los Angeles City Council? If so, do you support using RCV in conjunction with single-seat or multi-seat districts and why?

I have long been a supporter of ranked-choice voting, and believe that Los Angeles should adopt it for all city elections. Ranked-choice voting is superior to “first-past-the-post” in nearly every way, and it allows for a less expensive and more democratic system. We have seen this work in places like New York City, and the facts show that it could work here as well. Ranked-choice voting guarantees candidates who appeal to more people, rather than hyper-polarized figures, and can bring more third-party and independent voices into the conversation.

As I have stated, I am open to a proposal that would include multi-seat districts for the City Council, but I would need to study the issue in more detail. Regardless, we should start using ranked-choice voting immediately with the districts that we already have, in order to fix the flaws in our system and increase democratic participation.

- (3) Do you support amending the process for Los Angeles City Council redistricting from the current model where elected officials appoint members to the Los Angeles City Council Redistricting Commission and then the Commission’s recommendation is forwarded to the Los Angeles City Council for approval and/or amendment? If so, what model would you support?

It is clear that the system for redistricting that the Los Angeles City Council has historically used and continues to use encourages gerrymandering. When elected officials exercise control the drawing of their own districts, incumbency advantage is strengthened and gerrymandering becomes rampant. It is a system like this that leads to the City Council being a club for political insiders who largely think and vote the same way. It’s a broken system that conjures images of Republican stage legislatures in the South, and it is not what we should

have here in Los Angeles.

I support what the facts back up as the best way to handle this issue: a nonpartisan commission. Incumbent politicians should not have control over the redrawing of districts, neither by appointing representatives to the Commission nor by their veto power over the final map. The state of California has already realized the flaws of this system, and created a nonpartisan commission to redraw the districts. Though this system too is flawed, creating a nonpartisan commission and ensuring a strong system of checks and balances is necessary to create a political system in Los Angeles that works for all of us.

(4) What model for Los Angeles City Council elections do you believe best provides the ability to meet the goals of the California Voting Rights Act, and why?

I believe that a system of ranked-choice voting, with strong campaign finance reform and a great expansion of the number of City Council districts, will best provide the ability to meet the goals of the California Voting Rights Act. These reforms will all make important change on their own, but adopting them together would lead to better chances for grassroots campaigns, reduce the hurdles that non-incumbent candidates face, and help make politics reflect everyday people over special interests.

(5) The Green Party strongly supports the direct democracy rights of initiative, referendum and recall; but believe these processes can be improved. Do you support amending the recall process for City Council members (and other elected officials) as described in the City Charter? If so, how and why?

These direct democracy rights are imperfect, and we should reform them in order to ensure that they are kept strong for the people. I am in agreement with the Green Party that we must ensure that the right of the people to recall their elected officials remains intact, but it is certainly flawed. The flaws in this system can lead to incredibly costly elections that do not reflect the will of the people, as well as situations in which a candidate receiving a minority of the vote can replace someone elected by the majority. There are fewer flaws in the system here at the local level, as described in the City Charter, than there are at the state level, but there is great room for improvement. We must engage in an honest and open dialogue about the ways that we can fix the flaws in this system.

(5a) Within reform of the recall process, do you support changing Los Angeles City Charter Sec. 437. Election of Candidate to Succeed Recalled Officer from a contingent run-off where if no replacement candidate receives a majority vote, a run-off is held between the top two finishers, to a single replacement election conducted by ranked-choice voting? Why or why not?

I absolutely support such a proposal. As previously stated, I am a strong supporter of ranked-choice voting, and believe that we should implement it throughout our elections system. In the case of a recall, I would argue that this is all the more pressing.

When someone is recalled from office, it is usually because they have done things that have caused harm to a wide coalition of people, often for very different reasons. This should not

be an opportunity for a lengthy campaign season, attempting to sway people's views like any other election. A candidate in such a time should be elected by ranked-choice voting because it would emphasize their unifying factor at a time where unity is clearly needed. By holding a single replacement election, it will also guarantee higher turnout, making sure that the will of the people is as directly reflected as possible.

Let us implement ranked-choice voting wherever possible in Los Angeles. This is a great place to start, via the City Charter.

(6) Do you support convening a charter review commission to explore any/all of the above changes? Why or why not? If so, are there any other potential electoral and/or campaign finance reforms you would support to be considered by a charter review commission? If so, what model would you support for a charter review commission - elected/appointed/citizens assembly/other - and why?

I support convening a charter review commission to explore the above changes, which I think can seriously enhance democracy on a local level. I believe that an elected commission could end up becoming politicized in the same way that an appointed one would be, and this should be a nonpartisan commission. As a result, I believe a fully transparent process of bringing in experts, scholars, and community members would be strongest in building a commission with actionable results. I think it is time we as a city have a discussion about how we can best accomplish this.

(7) Are there any other potential electoral and/or campaign finance reforms you would support to be enacted by statute?

It is clear that there are improvements that could be made within our system here in the City of Los Angeles, and I would support enacting such reforms via statute. Campaign finance is broken in our city and, while things are better here than they are nationwide, I support robust action to reduce the effect special interests can have on the democratic process compared to everyday voters. I look forward to engaging with groups like the Green Party to outline strategies that will get money out of politics and allow people-powered campaigns to flourish.

(8) If voters approve charter amendments to the number of seats/manner of election of City Council members and/or to the redistricting model itself, would you support an early redrawing of City Council districts as provided for in the Los Angeles City Charter before regular redistricting would occur in 2032? Why or why not?

In such a situation, I would absolutely support redrawing of districts prior to the regular redistricting. If the voters want to expand the size of the City Council, which I absolutely support, they should not be forced to wait nearly a decade to see their views put into action. Should the voters approve charter amendments in this manner, a commission should be convened immediately to handle the redistricting process and make sure it is carried out in a timely manner. There is no excuse for putting off the will of the people for what would be arguably political purposes.

(9) Please include a link on your website to your campaign platform, and to any other candidate questionnaires you filled out that you would like to share with us.

My website is MayorAlex.com, and there one can find my platform's comprehensive proposals to tackle issues like homelessness, public safety, and free transit. I have filled out numerous questionnaires as part of this campaign, but I do not believe that any of them are presently public. If anyone has any questions about my positions on issues that matter to them, they can contact me via my website at MayorAlex.com.

(10) Would you be willing to attend a Zoom/webinar with other candidates, sponsored by the Green Party, to talk about your electoral reform proposals?

I would absolutely be willing to attend a webinar with other candidates to talk about my electoral reform proposals. Electoral reform is crucial to the functioning of our democracy, and I support policies that will increase participation and representation. I am interested in participating in any forum that will allow us to get our progressive vision to the people, including any that may be hosted by the Green Party, on Zoom or in-person.