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## MEDIA RELEASE

# FOUR YEAR TERMS FOR CITY COUNCILLORS?

## Councillor Michael Walker Says Take the Question to The People

**THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2006 – TORONTO** – City Councillor Michael Walker (*St. Paul's, Ward 22*) will bring a motion to the next meeting of City Council proposing that a plebiscite question be added to the ballot for this November's municipal election. The question is simply: "Do you agree with extending the term of office for your Mayor and City Councillor to 4 years from 3 years? Yes or No?"

On February 21<sup>st</sup>, Premier McGuinty proposed increasing the term of office for municipal representatives to 4 years from 3 years. This proposal is assumed to be linked to the new *City of Toronto Act (Bill 53)*, but it is unclear how this change would support that *Act*. In November 2005, the City Council appointed *Governing Toronto Advisory Panel* recommended 4 year terms for City Councillors, stating longer terms would allow greater functionality of the term and allow Councillors to focus on City-business for more of their term of office before the next election. This now dissolved, non-governmental, 3-person *Advisory Panel* does not give real, tangible reasons for this major change.

"Local democracy requires greater accountability, not less, and this proposed 4 year term would reduce the accountability of elected officials," said Councillor Walker. "The mandate of 3 years is plenty long enough to balance the citywide vision and local representation. If a Councillor does not represent the wishes of the residents of the Ward he or she represents, then the residents need to be able to vote that representative out sooner rather than later; incumbent Councillors should not be allowed to further entrench themselves. Keeping 3 year terms helps level the playing field for challengers to incumbents. Conversely, if the Councillor is doing a good job, then the people will continue to have the ability to give that Councillor a stronger mandate sooner."

"Until the early 1940s, Mayors and City Councillors had 1 year terms; after that until 1982, Mayors and City Councillors had 2 year terms; since then we have had 3 year terms. Each time the term has increased the experts have argued it was needed to address the bigger issues of the City. I don't buy it, especially now. If you can't do it in 1000 days, you're probably not going to be able to do it in 1400 days," said Councillor Walker.

"This proposal strikes at the heart of local democracy. A simple plebiscite question on the ballot would clarify the wishes of the electorate. **A plebiscite will let the people decide.**"

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