

August 28, 2007

John Gastil
2325 N 61st St
Seattle, WA 98103

Dick Spady, President
Easy Citizen Involvement (I-24)
4426 2nd Avenue NE
Seattle, WA 98105-6191

Dear Mr. Spady,

I was delighted to see that you have gathered the requisite number of signatures and qualified Initiative 24 for the fall ballot in King County.

As you know, I have studied and written about different deliberative processes for over fifteen years. In all that time, I have yet to see a unit of government within the United States enact a significant reform designed to create more structured, institutionalized public deliberation. Some have tinkered with public hearing processes, and others have commissioned one-time pilot projects. But I-24 would be unique as a new deliberative citizen institution in the U.S.

My favorite features of the I-24 experiment, as currently formulated, are:

- direct involvement of the County Auditor's office, to ensure relevant topics;
- keeping the process open to all citizens who wish to participate;
- the heavy use of citizen volunteers to organize and facilitate discussions; and
- the aim to create a structured summary report that could be sent back to county officials.

The I-24 proposal is an *experiment* because, like any other public venture, we can not yet be sure of its success. First, we will have to see whether the process is sustained by numerous small donations from the general public, rather than by large donations from a select few contributors (or none at all). Broad financial support will be important to sustain the public credibility of the process. Second, we will have to see what quality of deliberation occurs in the small group discussions that I-24 will organize. Effective recruitment of diverse participants, well-structured topics, and solid facilitation will be keys to high-quality deliberation. Finally, we will have to see whether the discussions have a tangible policy impact. If they do, I anticipate that they will flourish as powerful opportunities for citizen engagement.

It is my sincere hope that I-24 is made into law this fall, by council action or a public vote. Please keep in touch, and let's see how this democratic innovation unfolds.

Sincerely,



John Gastil, Professor
Department of Communication
University of Washington