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Millbrae to discuss removing district-based elections

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Millbrae will discuss the possibility of removing district-based elections as well as electing an at-large mayor rather than using a rotating system at its upcoming March 26 meeting.

The request for conversation on the topic comes from Councilmember Gina Papan and Vice Mayor Maurice Goodman, according to a staff report.

“This is a great opportunity to unite our city,” Papan said. “Districts were very divisive. We are technically a small city, and in the past there’s been discourse on the mayor rotation, so let’s let the people decide.”

District-based elections were implemented in 2022 after Millbrae and nearly all San Mateo County cities were either served with threats of litigation that claimed at-large elections systems violated the California Voters Rights Act or decided to make the shift on their own.

A recent California Supreme Court ruling in a case alleging Santa Monica’s at-large voting system dilutes the rights of Latino voters left the lawsuit unresolved, according to the League of California Cities. However, it did find that CVA violations “must prove vote dilution and racially polarized voting,” among other findings.

The suit “opens the door for cities like ours” to consider the possibility of moving back to at-large voting systems, Papan said. She added that removal of district elections would give voters a larger selection of candidates from which to choose.

“I’m excited about it,” Papan said. “I think really is a wonderful opportunity to unite the city.”

The City Council meeting is 7 p.m. Monday, March 25, at City Hall, 621 Magnolia Ave. The council will also be deciding on a date for an upcoming recall election for two of its members, Goodman and Angelina Cahalan.