

★ Ward

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number of votes it takes to get elected to city council, Buck said.

Conover said last week that to approve the change in the city charter to the new electoral system it would have to be approved by well over 50 percent of those who cast ballots.

Mrs. Gleason couldn't be reached for comment, but has generally voted along with fellow Democrats. The Rev. E.G. Hall, the fourth Democrat on council, originally voted against holding the second referendum, but did an about-face in early March when city council approved the May referendum.

The lone Republican on council, Thomas E. Albro, has attacked the second referendum as a "sham," a waste of time and money, and "an insult to the public."

If city council approved a change in the city charter for the new system, it would still have to be approved by the General Assembly. The U.S. Justice Depart-

ment also would review the new system to ensure that it does not discriminate against blacks.

Officials have said the first council election under the new system would probably be held in 1986.

One strange twist in the issue has been in regard to the annexation issue between Charlottesville and Albemarle County. If the city annexed part of the county, the city could be forced to adopt a ward system whether its council wants one or not, city attorney Roger C. Wiley has said.

Wiley said last March that if a boundary change incorporated a large number of white voters into the city, the justice department might require a ward system so that black votes would not be diluted.

The mixed ward and at-large system was recommended by a citizens panel in October 1980 as a way to increase the chances of blacks and residents of all parts of the city to get on council. Most councilors in the past two decades have lived in the predominately

white, relatively affluent Walker precinct.

Many observers contend that under the system, Democratic candidates vying for three of the ward seats would be at a disadvantage.

In balloting for the ward seats, voters could only select candidates from their own ward. Thus, the observers say, the advantage now enjoyed by the well-organized Democrats in citywide elections would be lost because the heavily Democratic black voting bloc would be useful only in the majority-black ward.

Albro said that some Democratic leaders "got the surprise of their lives" when the November referendum passed.

"It's no secret that the only reason we're having the second referendum is that (the results of the first) didn't suit certain people in certain parties," Albro said.

Democratic councilors dismiss these charges, saying that a clear mandate is required before pursuing such a dramatic change in city

government, which some opponents fear would pit ward against ward, encourage housing segregation and promote political bosses.

In November, the referendum carried where it was expected to — in the city's heavily black precincts — and did well in some areas where it was not expected to — such as in the white-collar areas near the University of Virginia and in some of the city's most established older neighborhoods.

Since then the arguments haven't changed much and, although there have been a few heated exchanges between proponents and opponents of the change, it's still an issue that could draw a massive yawn from Charlottesville's electorate Tuesday.

If the voters are apathetic, some observers say that apathy would spring from the advisory nature of the referendum. A telephone poll could do the same thing, one observer said.

"My personal opinion is that

nonbinding referenda carry little interest," city registrar Charlotte Riddick said.

Asked to gauge the mood of the electorate, Mrs. Riddick said, "I see no interest in anything — period."

Other observers said they sensed more voter interest this time around.

Cyndi Stratton, president of the Charlottesville chapter of the NAACP, which in 1979 began the drive for the switch, said, "I don't think that (voter apathy) will happen this go round because I think there has been a lot more equal publicity.

"Before the last vote," she continued, "there was a lot of (publicity) about what's good about it. Now we have some opposition, not necessarily from any particular party or individual, just folk in general."

This has brought about a more open debate that has kept the public informed, she said.

Virginia Carrington, a former NAACP president and staunch

advocate of the change, said, "I think people are really stirred up" and predicted a substantial vote Tuesday.

Mayor Buck, an outspoken opponent of a new system, said, "I think it's going to be a very close vote."

Last week the NAACP repeated its endorsement of the plan, saying in a press release, "The matter is one of better government, more representative government and (more) fair government. All citizens, black and white, will profit."

The NAACP noted that the Democratic candidates for council have opposed the plan, while the Republican candidates haven't taken a stand, except to state that they would support the outcome of the referendum vote no matter what the margin. The release also noted that Kate Borland, the Citizens Party candidate, is the only candidate to endorse it; independent Robert E. Putney III has opposed the plan.