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Missouri Towns Can Opt Out of Local Elections

(KTNC)--Small towns in Missouri may be able to opt out of holding elections every April, under a new law passed by the Missouri legislature.

Holt County Clerk Kathy Kunkel is making towns in the county aware of Senate Bill 593, which changes the state's election law to allow towns and villages with under one thousand residents to hold what's called a "non-election" in the April Municipal Elections. That means those towns wouldn't have to hold local elections when there are no contested races on the ballot.

The option has been available in the past to political subdivisions like school, fire, ambulance, and road districts, and is now being extended to municipalities...though towns will have to approve the move to the non-election option during April's Municipal Election, and would then have to approve the option again after four years.

Kunkel says the measure would reduce the cost of holding local elections. In Holt County that would be about \$16,000. As an example, Kunkel says it cost \$148 this past April for 20 people to vote in Fortescue – even though there were no contested races. The cost was \$1,092 to hold the April election in Oregon, where there are 618 voters.

Kunkel says she sees one serious drawback. That is that it could leave the cost of paying for the county's local election on fewer residents if enough towns opt to not hold elections.

Another possible downside is that write-in candidates would not be able to be elected in those communities. And Kunkel says there is some concern about whether the non-election option would discourage potential candidates from seeking public office. Kunkel says there are provisions in the law that make it a criminal offense for people to coerce potential candidates to not run for an office.

All towns in Holt County would be eligible for the non-election status, based on population, except Mound City.

And while the November election is still two weeks away, Kunkel says the filing period for next April's Municipal Election in Missouri begins on December 16.

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