



NORTHAMPTON MASSACHUSETTS RANKED CHOICE VOTING COMMITTEE

Meeting Date: January 12, 2022
Meeting Time: 4:00 pm

1/12/2022 - Minutes

1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

Bill Dwight moved to call the meeting to order. Mark Ventola seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a roll vote of 5 Yes (Dwight, Crowley, Kay, Ventola, Boulrice), 0 No.

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

None

3. Approve minutes of December 16, 2021 meeting

Bill Dwight moved to accept the minutes; Catherine Kay seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of of 5 Yes (Dwight, Crowley, Kay, Ventola, Boulrice), 0 No.

4. Consideration of the election outcomes under various formats

Jeff Silvestro of LHS was present at the meeting. As requested by the committee, he re-ran the Man's Best Friend race so that thresholds would be calculated. This materials were sent to the committee prior to the meeting. Mr. Silvestro explained that a "flip of the coin" was used to determine a winner for each round where there was a tie. Batch eliminations, it was explained, will eliminate the need for a lot of tie breakers, but may not eliminate the need completely. Mr. Greg Dennis clarified that using coin toss in Massachusetts elections is not legal. The software has the option to eliminate ties the option to use batch elimination for ties only; Mr. Silvestro explained that the setting "single & tie elimination only" will achieve this objective.

Batch elimination is an option is to remove candidates that have no chance of winning under any circumstance. This makes the process more efficient; however, using batch elimination may cause more questions about in which round a particular candidate is eliminated.

Ranked transfer voting most accurately represents the effect of a voter's #2 vote when the voter's number one candidate is eliminated.

Education will be important part to help the voter understand how their vote will be counted. Surplus

transfer math .is most complicated when using for multi-seat elections. It is not as complicated for single winner seats. Majoritarian is easier to explain; however, it is not most representative of the entire voter population regarding a most preferred candidate if a number one candidate is eliminated.

Education is one of four challenges. The other three are: is it legal; does it provide the result that the majority of voters prefer; can the results be explained. The purpose of education is to introduce the system and to explain the benefits of the new system.

Chair Boulrice points out that in our mock election, when evaluating STV model with or without a threshold calculated, and the IRV method without a threshold, the same three candidates won. However, when using the Majoritarian model, there was one of the three winners in the STV/IRV models that did not win. The question is: under which model are we presenting a result that reflects what the voters expressed when they cast their votes?

Mr. Silvestro emphasized that voter education is critical, even beyond explaining how to fill out a RCV ballot. The adjudication process may change the outcome of an election from election night until the results are finalized. Clear communication is necessary to help candidates and voters understand that results will not be instantaneous.

As one way to gain voter trust, Mr. Dennis suggested that the cast vote record be published after an election. This will allow people to calculate the results for themselves. This is something that Cambridge does. Mr. Silvestro explained that what is generated by the software is a raw text file and not physical images of the ballots. Andy Anderson suggested that this is something that may be included in the RCV legislation. Attorney Seewald commented that existing data in our systems must be made available to the public as long as it doesn't violate anyone's privacy.

What will happen after an election? The tabulators at each polling location will report the first round of votes for that single polling location only. For city-wide elections, votes from all of the polling locations would need to be added together at the central tabulation facility (city clerk's office). If a candidate obtained votes above the threshold, they could be declared the winner on election night. More realistically, however, the winner will be determined on a different day once all of the ballots have been processed through the RCV software and problem ballots have been adjudicated. Attorney Seewald suggests that for the areas that can be defined at the local level, the ordinance process be used. This will give the City Council, and perhaps the Mayor, a chance to weigh in on any changes to the allowed variables.

Catherine Kay asked how, when using the Majoritarian method, a person's vote would have more weight vs. STV method. Member Crowley explained that subsequent votes will count as a whole vote, not as a fraction. A person could have their votes counted for every open seat at a full vote value. You run a single seat election tallies until a winner is declared; then you take out the winner and re-run the results until the next winner is declared. This process continues until all seats are filled. Under the STV everyone gets one whole vote. Under the sequential majoritarian way of voting, everyone gets as many votes as there are seats. When this happens, it allows the majority to control and determine the winner of every single seat. This happens today using plurality method, and it is not a feature that is removed by selecting the majoritarian method of voting.

5. Consideration of various options for multi-seat elections

The committee reviewed the 5 options for electing multi-seat elections:

- At-Large Plurality (currently in use today)
- Sequential RCV (Majoritarian)
- Bottom-Up RCV (no surplus transfer)
- Proportional RCV (random ballot surplus transfer)
- Proportional RCV (fractional surplus transfer)

Each of the methods were compared based on various criteria:

- Will the ranked ballot be the same as for single seat elections?
- Is it supported by Dominion software?
- Will the majority always win at least half of the seats so that the board as a whole reflects the will of the majority?
- Does it prevent vote-splitting (two candidates cancelling each other out)?
- Will randomness be eliminated in the outcome?
- Is it a fair representation of voter diversity?
- Does it make preliminary elections unnecessary?
- Are there only whole numbers in the tally?

Member Crowley believes that community values come first and that proportional RCV method is a better representation of our community values. Member Kay wondered about the idea of designing a voting system based on a value such as we want it to reflect a certain level of diversity, rather than electing the people who get the most votes. She feels that this is a change in our voting system, and she wonders if we want to design a way of counting votes that drives a certain outcome in terms of representation (social engineering)? Is it appropriate for a voting system to be manipulated so that it provides opportunity that wasn't previously existing? Councilor Dwight states that there is the expressed desire to improve opportunities for more diverse representation. Chair Boulrice agrees that this is a desired result of changing the voting method. Member Crowley appreciates the depth of the dialogue by the committee. He feels that through the discussion he has gained a better understanding of the process and gained a better understanding of all voting methods.

Chair Boulrice polled the committee to determine which method each member preferred:

Boulrice	Proportional
Crowley	Proportional
Dwight	Proportional
Kay	Majoritarian
Ventola	Proportional

6. NEW BUSINESS

Chair Boulrice suggested that the committee review the legislation previously proposed, and that the committee evaluate the seven questions previously brought before the committee. Answering those seven questions is the next phase that the committee will be working on.

7. FUTURE MEETING DATE(S)

The next meeting date is January 27, 2022 @ 5:00 pm.

8. ADJOURN

At 6:10 pm, member Dwight moved to adjourn; member Kay seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 5 Yes (Dwight, Boulrice, Ventola, Crowley, Kay), 0 No.

Minutes Prepared by City Clerk Pamela L. Powers
For questions, please call 413.587.1223