Minneapolis
City of Lakes

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Minneapolis Ranked-Choice Voting Ballot Design Workgroup

Designing the ballot to administer Ranked-Choice Voting (RCV) for municipal elections in the City of Minneapolis presents unique and complex challenges. In order to ensure voters understand and are comfortable using the RCV ballot, the City committed to continual analysis and improvement. To that end, the City sought to maximize its conformity with ballot format styles established in Minnesota Statutes and Rules for statewide elections. Because of the relatively small number of jurisdictions in the United States utilizing RCV, combined with the lack of agreed ballot standards and formatting, the City's Elections & Voter Services Division (EVS) of the Office of City Clerk established an RCV Ballot Design Workgroup to undertake a review of potential alternative design formats.

A primary objective for this workgroup was exploring options to increase the number of choices (rankings) in each race on the ballot within the overall framework established in state laws and regulations. Options also needed to be compatible with existing, certified technology that complies with the tabulation methodology set forth in the Minneapolis Code of Ordinances [Chapter 167]. Key stakeholders were invited to participate in the workgroup, which convened four times over the course of five months, from February to June 2015. The members of the workgroup included:

City of Minneapolis	Casey Carl, Grace Wachlarowicz, and Anissa Hollingshead
Hennepin County	Ginny Gelms, Kristen Reid, and Jim Howitt
Office of the Secretary of State	Lisa Klinger
Election Systems & Software (ES&S)	Herb Deutch and Luke Bellant
SeaChange Print Innovations	Doug Sunde
FairVote MN	Jeanne Massey
Citizens for Election Integrity, MN	Daniel Peterson

Current Capabilities

Hennepin County is responsible for the "election definition" that accompanies each election event; this includes, among other tasks, the responsibility for programming ballot design, maintaining election equipment, and facilitating election reporting across all precincts. The systems controlled by Hennepin County are limited in flexibility by the capabilities of the existing equipment and software. Each jurisdiction within the county must use a single election definition common to all jurisdictions conducting an election on a given day, as current software does not support two distinct election definitions or ballot designs within the voting system. This creates a technological barrier that must be factored into any decision about alternative design options for RCV ballots.

Ballot Design Styles

After considering existing state laws and regulations governing ballot design and the current capabilities of the existing election equipment (hardware, software, and firmware), the workgroup focused its efforts on evaluating essentially three possible alternative options; these included a 3-column ballot design, similar to the ballot used in both the 2009 and the 2013 municipal elections; a 3-column "stacked" design; and a "grid" design, sometimes referred to as a "Cambridge style" ballot. As mentioned above, one of the primary issues was whether any of these options would support an increase in the number of choices in each race on the ballot while remaining compatible with available systems.

THREE-COLUMN (EXISTING STYLE) BALLOT DESIGN

The current three-column ballot design (Figure 1, shown below) allows voters to indicate up to three choices (rankings) for a given race on the ballot. While consistent with the design of ballots used in state primary and general elections, adding additional choices to the existing, three-column ballot style would necessitate a multiple-page ballot for each voter, and this would result in serious technical issues. Among other issues, the AutoMARK[1] machines cannot process a multi-page ballot and the Cast Vote Record (CVR)[2] exportable data file—which was introduced in 2013 for expediting tabulation processes for RCV elections—cannot reconcile the number of voters to the number of ballots cast.

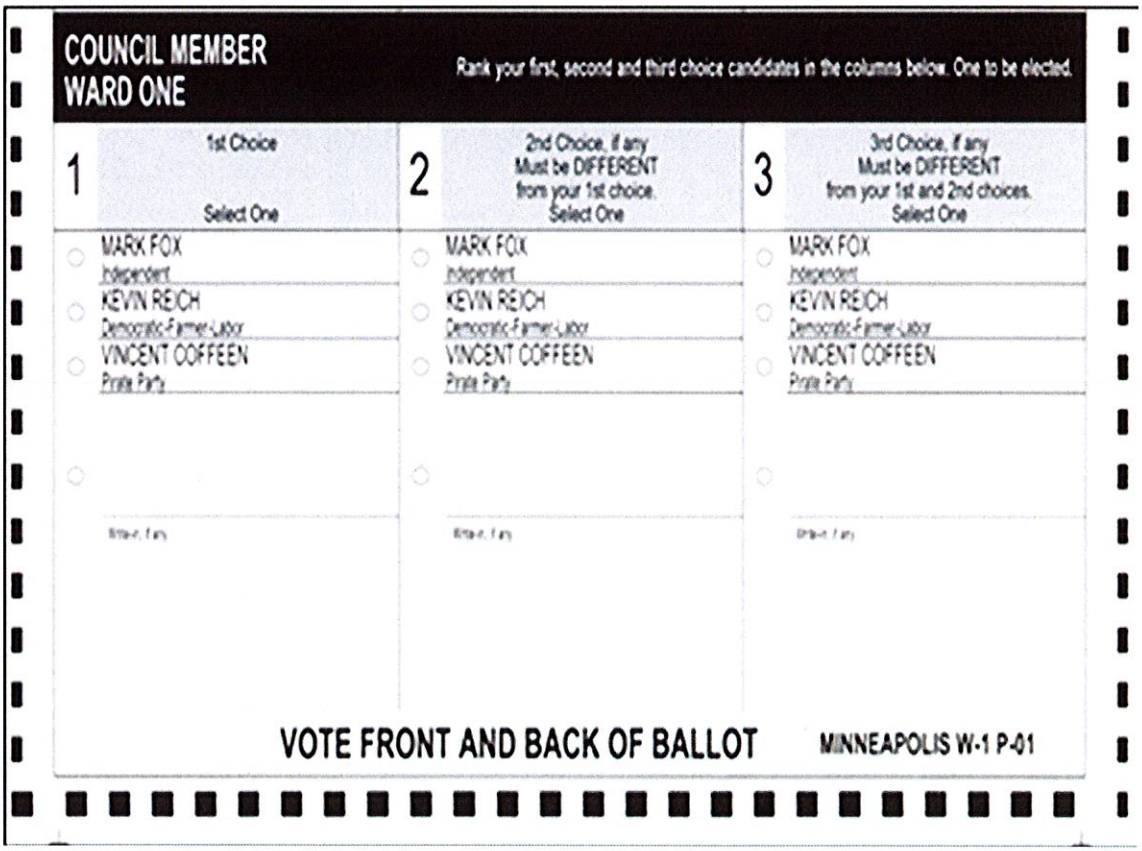

Figure 1. Three-Column Ballot Design

THREE-COLUMN STACKING (VERTICAL OR HORIZONTAL) BALLOT DESIGN

Using a "stacked" approach to ballot design provided two options: one that was stacked in a horizontal orientation (Figure 2, next page) and one that was stacked in a vertical alignment (Figure 3, next page). The stacked approach retains the overall page layout of the existing ballot; that is, it presents the voter with three columns on the page which minimizes potential voter confusion. Races would either be stacked horizontally in rows across the page within the three column structure, or else up-and-down the page in the vertical columns. However, both stacked orientations pose similar challenges to those outlined above for the existing three-column ballot design. Specifically, the assistive marking device (AutoMARK) is not capable of processing two-ballot elections and the CVR cannot reconcile the number of voters to the number of ballots cast.

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[1] AutoMARK – Assistive Marking Device

[2] Cast Vote Record – used for RCV tabulation, creates a separate line of data for each race per ballot, and cannot "tie" first ballot page to the second ballot page.

In addition, there it is uncertain whether or not a stacked ballot style would comply with Minnesota Statutes and Rules governing ballot design and layout. Finally, the workgroup expressed concern that the stacked style—whether in a horizontal or vertical orientation—did not efficiently use ballot space.

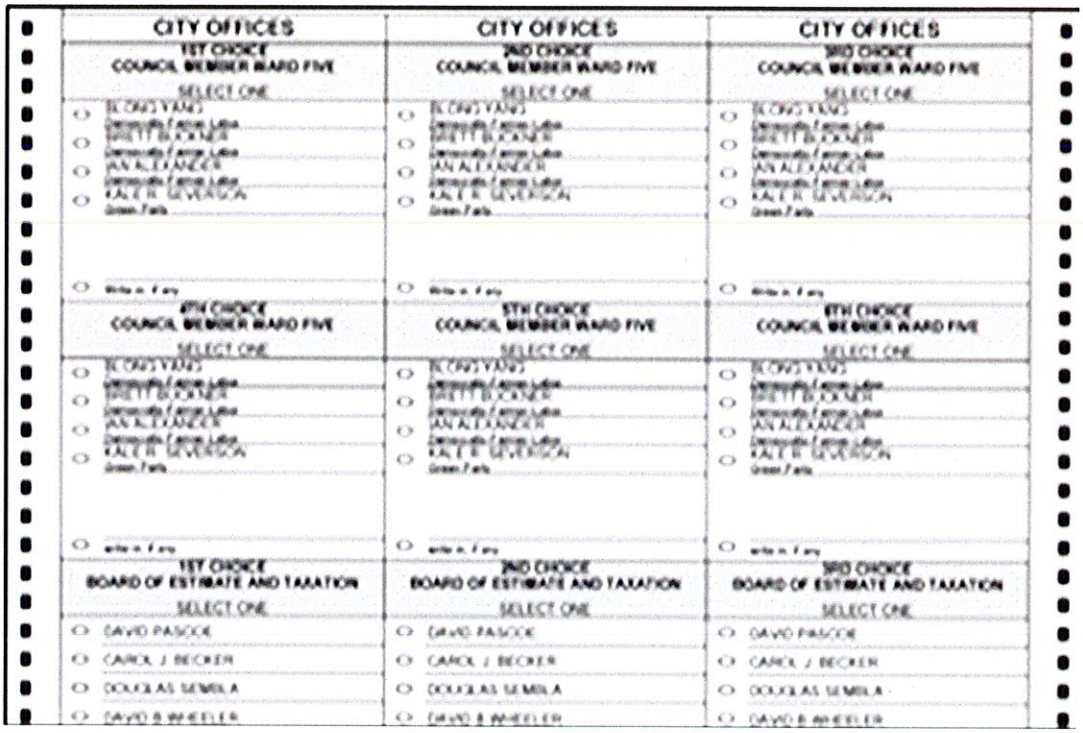


Figure 2. Three-Column Horizontal Stacking Ballot Design

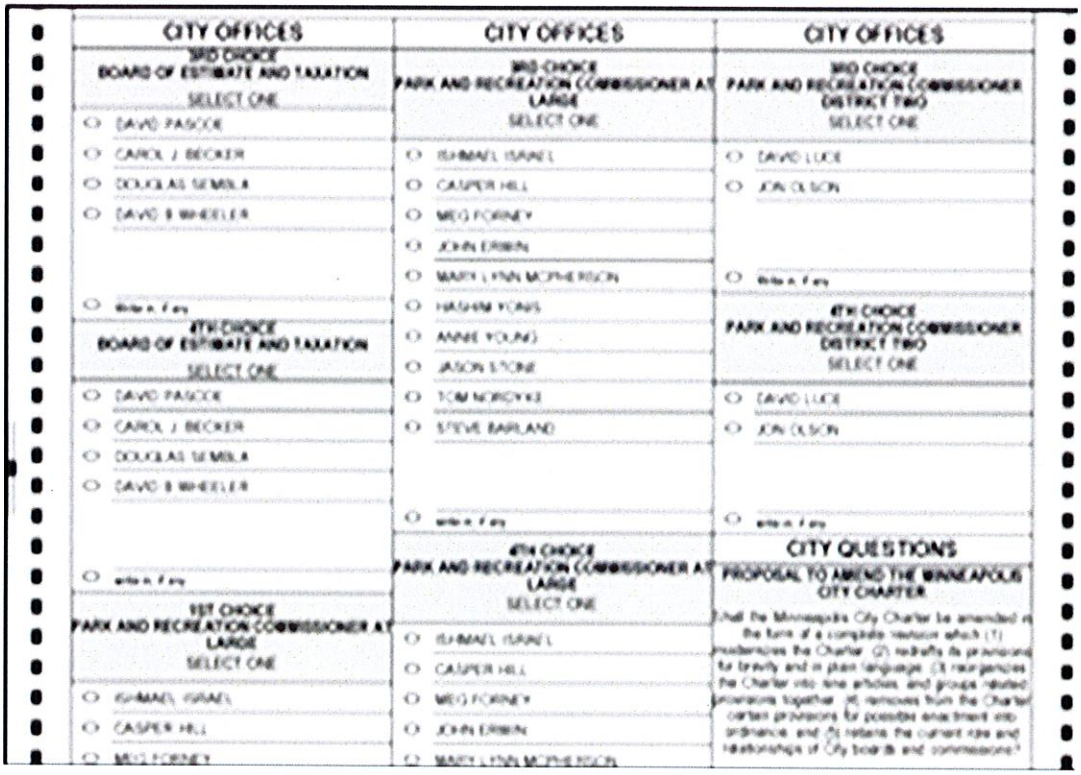
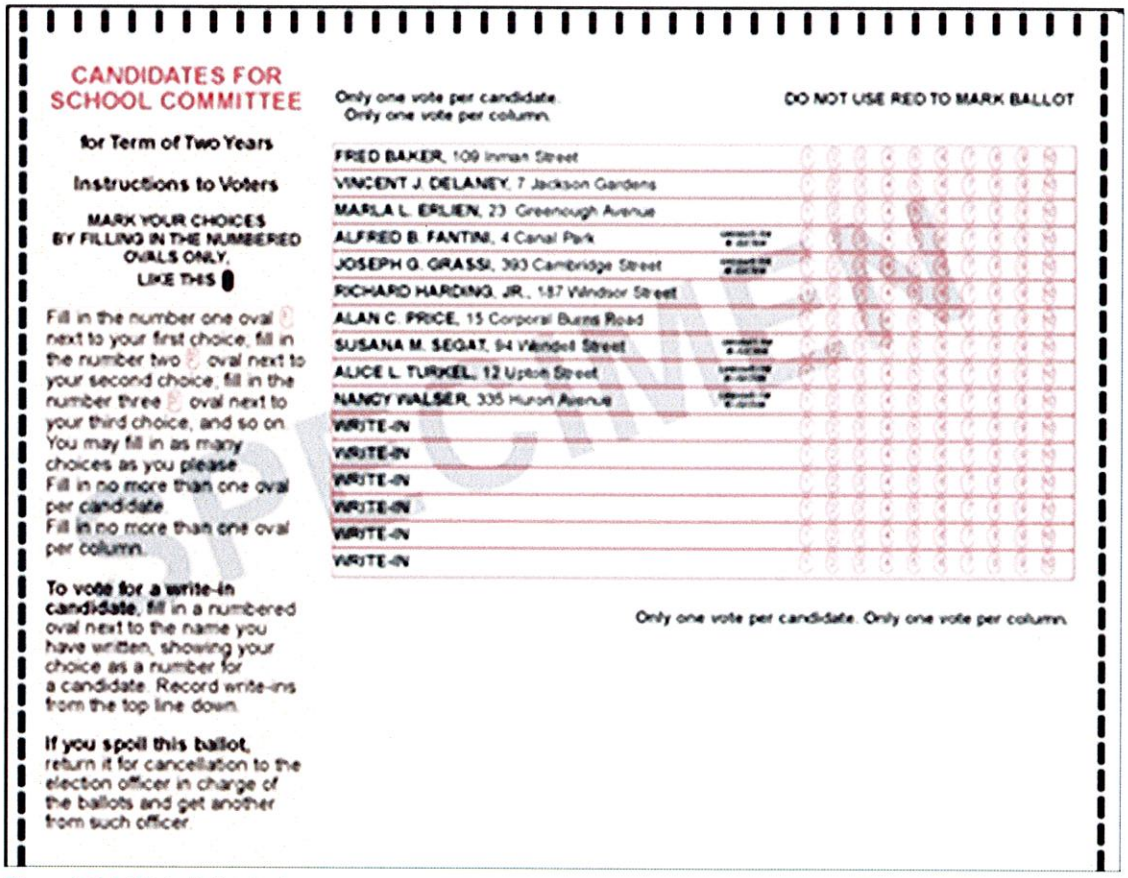


Figure 3. Three-Column Vertical Stacking Ballot Design

GRID-STYLE DESIGN

The grid-style design (shown in Figure 4, below)—which is sometimes referred to as a "Cambridge style" ballot—lists each candidate's name once with the choices (rankings) displayed in the adjacent area to the right of all candidate names. This ballot design has not been certified by the State of Minnesota and is not supported by current software. While potential workarounds were explored, the process to tabulate vote totals would need to be developed, tested, vetted, and verified to ensure the accuracy of votes cast using this style of ballot. As with the other alternative designs, there were concerns about the inability of the AutoMARK machines to process this ballot style, which means it would fail to satisfy federal accessibility standards. State legislative changes or special authorizations would also be required to enable the City of Minneapolis to pursue use of a grid-style design.

If this ballot style were certified and permissible under Minnesota Election Law, Minneapolis could conduct a municipal election with the support of Hennepin County; however, additional work-around procedures would need to be developed and put into place to support Election Night reporting, since a grid-design would necessitate an entirely different election definition supported by the County compared to all other jurisdictions conducting elections at the same time. Consequently, the most likely scenario would require the City of Minneapolis to manually compile results, and this would eliminate the ability to report results on Election Night for any race that could not be determined solely by first-ranked choices. Alternatively, the City could choose to disconnect from Hennepin County and provide its own "back-end" support for election definition, programming, and reporting functions. This would require the City to purchase the necessary software and equipment at an estimated cost of almost $800,000 for just the municipal election, above and beyond current funding levels. In addition, Minneapolis would have to assume the cost of testing, programing, and other administrative requirements which are currently handled by Hennepin County, which have not been quantified.



CANDIDATES FOR SCHOOL COMMITTEE

for Term of Two Years

Instructions to Voters

MARK YOUR CHOICES BY FILLING IN THE NUMBERED OVALS ONLY, LIKE THIS ●

Fill in the number one oval ① next to your first choice, fill in the number two ② oval next to your second choice, fill in the number three ③ oval next to your third choice, and so on. You may fill in as many choices as you please. Fill in no more than one oval per candidate. Fill in no more than one oval per column.

To vote for a write-in candidate, fill in a numbered oval next to the name you have written, showing your choice as a number for a candidate. Record write-ins from the top line down.

If you spoil this ballot, return it for cancellation to the election officer in charge of the ballots and get another from such officer.

Only one vote per candidate. Only one vote per column.

DO NOT USE RED TO MARK BALLOT

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
FRED BAKER, 109 Inman Street										
VINCENT J. DELANEY, 7 Jackson Gardens										
MARLA L. ERLIEN, 23 Greenough Avenue										
ALFRED B. FANTINI, 4 Canal Park										
JOSEPH G. GRASSI, 393 Cambridge Street										
RICHARD HARDING, JR., 187 Windsor Street										
ALAN C. PRICE, 15 Corporal Burns Road										
SUSANA M. SEGAT, 94 Wendell Street										
ALICE L. TURKEL, 12 Upton Street										
NANCY WALSER, 335 Huron Avenue										
WRITE-IN										
WRITE-IN										
WRITE-IN										
WRITE-IN										
WRITE-IN										
WRITE-IN										

Only one vote per candidate. Only one vote per column.

Figure 4. Grid-Style Ballot Design

Recommendation to Election Committee

Having evaluated the various alternative ballot styles and the associated challenges of each design, the RCV Ballot Design Workgroup reached a consensus to recommend that the City of Minneapolis continue to use the existing three-column ballot design used in the 2009 and 2013 municipal elections for the regularly scheduled 2017 Municipal Election (Tuesday, November 7, 2017).

The workgroup shares the City's goal of pursuing a ballot design which maximizes a voter's opportunity to express more than three preferences in any race, potentially to offer as many rankings as candidates in a race. However, given existing legal limits on ballot layout and design, required voting system certification standards, and technical limitations of existing systems, any such alternative design options are impractical at this time.

The stakeholders represented by this workgroup agree to continue collaborating on future improvements that include potential changes in ballot design regulations as well as operating systems and other technical enhancements that might achieve a workable alternative ballot design. The RCV Ballot Design Workgroup will reconvene in 2019 with a similar scope to investigate options in advance of the regularly scheduled 2021 Municipal Election.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the
RCV BALLOT DESIGN WORKGROUP—

Casey Joe Carl
City Clerk & Chief Election Official
City of Minneapolis