

Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) Report to the Elections Committee

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I. DEFINITIONS

Council Members raised the issue of multiple terms which are used interchangeably to describe the proposed voting system. The ordinance language uses the terms Instant Runoff Voting, Ranked Choice Voting and Single Transferable Vote.

The following definitions were gleaned from a number of sources including, "A Survey of Basic Voting Methods" by James Green-Armytage, and The PR Library: Readings in Proportional Representation, created and maintained by Professor Douglas J. Amy, Department of Politics, Mount Holyoke College.

SINGLE-OFFICE SYSTEMS

Instant run-off voting (IRV)

A majority voting system used in single-member district systems and single-office elections. Voters mark their preferences on the ballot by putting a 1 next to their first choice, a 2 next to their second choice, and so on. A candidate who receives over 50% of the first preference votes is declared the winner. Otherwise, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated and their votes are reallocated to the voters' second choices. This reallocation process continues until one candidate receives a majority of the votes.

Majority system

A single-member district system or single office election system that tries to ensure that the winning candidate receives an absolute majority of the votes. Examples include the two ballot run-off system and instant run-off voting.

Ranked Choice Voting

*Instant-runoff voting is known by a number of other names. It is known as *Alternative Vote (AV)* in the United Kingdom and *preferential voting* in Australia. It is also sometimes known in the U.S. as *Ranked Choice Voting*.*

MULTIPLE OFFICE SYSTEMS

Single transferable vote (STV)

Another term for choice voting.

Choice voting

*A proportional representation system in which voters rank the candidates on the ballot. Candidates receiving votes beyond the *quota* needed to get elected are declared winners. Voters' ballots are re-allocated to their next preferences when their first candidate is eliminated or when there are surplus votes for an elected candidate.*

Proportional representation

A group of voting systems whose major goal is to ensure that parties and political groups are allocated seats in legislative bodies in proportion to their share of the vote.

Therefore, a party receiving 30% of the national vote should receive 30% of the seats in the national legislature under a proportional representation scheme.

Threshold

In a *proportional representation* system, the minimum portion of the vote that a party must receive in order to receive any seats in the legislature. Known technically as the threshold of exclusion because if a party reaches this threshold it cannot be excluded from winning a seat.

Quota

Another term for *threshold* – the minimum proportion of the vote needed to receive any seats in a PR system.

Our ordinance allows for the use of two different counting methods, one for single and another for multiple-seat offices. Cambridge MA and Burlington VT use the term Instant Runoff to refer to a single seat race, and Proportional Representation to refer to a multiple seat office. The term Ranked Choice Voting was chosen by San Francisco and other California jurisdictions because it seemed to best describe how a voter marks the ballot and does not imply that there is anything “instant” about how the election is conducted or votes are counted.

II. BALLOT LANGUAGE

Only two sections of statute apply in the format of the question. Minn. Stat. § 410.12 subd. 4 says, “...the statement of the question on the ballot shall be sufficient to identify the amendment clearly and to distinguish the question from every other question on the ballot at the same time.”

MN Rules Section 8250.0390 Subp. 2 offers guidance in the form of the question saying:

- The words "CITY QUESTION BALLOT" must be printed at the top of the ballot in upper case letters.
- Instructions for marking the ballot must be included
- A number must be assigned
- If more than one city question is on the ballot each must be designated by a number and must be preceded by the words "CITY QUESTION"
- The City Clerk or governing body must provide a title of not more than ten words
- The City Attorney must review and approve the title to determine whether it accurately describes the question asked
- The title must be printed in upper case letters above the question
- The body of the question must be printed in upper and lower case letters

Exact format of the question will be determined by the County Auditor, who is responsible for ballot format in November. Council's focus in their discussion should be the actual language of the question.

In the past, Minneapolis has used two different formats; one which contains a very brief description prior to a descriptive question, and one which provides a summary of the ordinance as a preamble to the actual question. Please note that the “title” simply identifies the number of the question.

Sample 1:

CHARTER AMENDMENT NO. 110

**STAGGERING TERM OF THE MAYOR WITH
THAT OF COUNCIL MEMBERS**

Beginning with the City election in 1989, shall the Mayor be elected to a two year term while the City Council Members continue to serve a four year term, with the Mayor's term to be extended to four years in 1991, thereby establishing separate elections and terms for the Council and Mayor?

Sample 2:

CHARTER AMENDMENT NO. 129

Section 5. Community Services Bureau (Crime Prevention) – Appointment of Director

There shall be established in the Police Department a Community Services Bureau (Crime Prevention) with duties as the Chief of Police may assign to it. The City Council shall by ordinance determine how and by whom the Director of this Bureau is to be appointed. The Director of Community Services Bureau (Crime Prevention) shall serve in the unclassified service and is not required to be a peace officer.

Shall Charter Amendment No. 129 be adopted?

The format of Sample 2 has been used most often for past charter amendments. It remains the recommendation of the Elections Department and City Attorney's Office to use language derived from the ordinance rather than attempting to summarize the issue. Summaries are often construed as attempts to persuade the voter. Council had also requested that a brief statement regarding the city offices to which the question pertains be added, and that is presented here.

Recommended Ballot Language:

CHARTER AMENDMENT NO. ####

Amending Chapter 2, of the Minneapolis City Charter relating to the municipal election of the Mayor, City Council and members of the Library Board, Park Board and Board of Estimate and Taxation.

1. Requiring Single Transferable Vote, sometimes known as Ranked Choice Voting or Instant Runoff Voting, to be used in the first municipal election following adoption and all subsequent elections, unless the City Council certifies, by ordinance, no later than four months prior to the election, that the City will not be ready to implement the method.
2. Requiring City Council to establish by ordinance the ballot format and rules for counting votes.
3. Eliminating primary elections for Mayor, City Council and members of the Library Board, Park Board and Board of Estimate and Taxation,

amending filing dates, and clarifying that general election laws will not govern when the Single Transferable Vote method is used.

Shall Charter Amendment # ____ be adopted?

Yes

No

III. CENTRAL COUNT/MAIL BALLOT SYSTEMS

Federal Standards relating to voting equipment require that voters be provided with an opportunity to change their ballot or correct errors before the ballot has been cast. The system must also notify voters that they have over voted a ballot. Compliance with Federal standards by local jurisdictions is not required in all states, but is required in the State of Minnesota

Spoiled ballots are those ballots cast in an election which contain errors or mistakes, most often made by the voter in marking the ballot. In our current system these mistakes are detected by the precinct count equipment and the ballot is returned to the voter. The voter may then present the faulty ballot to the election judge for replacement with a new ballot. During the 2005 local election a total of 755 spoiled ballots were collected.

Under a central count system, voters mark their ballot and ballots are transported to a central location for counting. Because voters are not provided with the opportunity to correct ballots rejected by the counting system at the central location, the system does not comply with the Federal standard.

Some rural Minnesota jurisdictions have been allowed to continue using central count as long as the AutoMARK equipment is available in the precinct which can be used to check a ballot for errors. However, the option of checking the ballot on an AutoMARK takes between 1 and 3 minutes per voter. Minneapolis precinct turnout in the 2005 local election averaged 541 voters each. Several precincts had over 1000 ballots cast.

Regarding Mail Ballot elections, Minneapolis is not authorized to conduct a mail ballot election per Minn. Stat. § 204B.45 Mail Balloting.