NORTHAMPTON MASSACHUSETTS RANKED CHOICE VOTING COMMITTEE

Meeting Date: 1/27/2022
Meeting Time: 5:00 pm

1/27/2022 - Minutes

1. MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

At 5:03 pm Chair Boulrice called the meeting to order. Member Mark Ventola moved to open the meeting. Member Catherine Kay seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 4 Yes (Mark Ventola, Robert Boulrice, Catherine Kay, John Crowley), 1 Absent (Bill Dwight).

2. PUBLIC COMMENT

None

3. REVIEW & APPROVE MINUTES FROM PREVIOUS MEETING

Member Kay moved to approve the minutes; Member Crowley seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 4 Yes (Boulrice, Crowley, Kay, Ventola), 0 No, 1 Absent (Dwight).

4. Discuss draft legislation & related topics

The committee addressed the seven questions associated with the draft legislation.

1. When should a ballot be concluded?

Member Kay preferred the language in the draft legislation: "a ballot is concluded when it does not rank any continuing candidate or contain an overvote.

Member Crowley does not agree with any language that provided for manual intervention & adjudication; it seems that this could lead to questioning of the process. The voter has the ability to correct the discrepancies if they cast their own ballot; however, there is not the opportunity to do this if a ballot is mailed in (this is consistent with what happens today).

Options for Skipped or Overvoted races

For races with Skipped Rankings there are three options:

- *Choose the machine setting that allows the algorithm to assign SKIPPED RANKINGS to the set of exhausted ballots (conclude a ballot when a skip occurs).*
- *Use Default machine setting where any rankings that are left empty by the voter will be skipped by the algorithm and the next available ranked candidate will be used instead (promote skipped ranks). - PREFERRED BY COMMITTEE*
- *Adjudicate skips.*

For races with Overvoted Rankings there are two options:

- *Choose the machine setting that allows the algorithm to skip overvoted rankings and proceed to the next ranking. No overvotes will be recorded. - PREFERRED BY COMMITTEE*
- *Use Default machine setting where overvotes will be recorded.*

Attorney Seewald agreed to take a look at the definition of "Highest-ranked continuing candidate"; perhaps it could be made specific to include highest ranked candidates that are such because of skipped ranks.

2. When must ranked choice voting be used?

There was a discussion about whether RCV should be used when the number of candidates per seat does not require its use (such as a one-seat race with only 2 candidates). In theory, ranking could come into play if there are any strong write-in candidates, which as happened in a past state election.

As a matter of simplicity, one ballot style would be preferred for all races, regardless of number of candidates. This would require section (b) would need to be amended. Attorney Seewald agreed to make this adjustment.

3. When should tabulation be complete?

The committee agrees with the language in section 8.8 (c) as drafted:

(c)   In any single-seat election, each round shall begin by counting the number of votes for each continuing candidate. Each ballot shall count as 1 vote for its highest-ranked continuing candidate. Concluded ballots shall not be counted for any continuing candidate. Each round shall end with 1 of the following 2 outcomes:

(1)   If there are more than 2 continuing candidates, the last-place candidate shall be defeated or the last-place candidates shall be defeated in batch elimination, and a new round shall begin; or

(2)   If there are 2 continuing candidates, the candidate with the fewest votes shall be defeated, the candidate with the most votes shall be elected, and tabulation shall be complete.

4. Should the threshold be recalculated each round?

The committee agreed that the threshold should be calculated only in the first round. The committee does not support re-calculating the threshold in subsequent rounds.

5. How should ties for the fewest votes be resolved?

The committee supports "backwards tie-breaking" when batch elimination does not apply. In this case, if there is a tie, the candidate with with the least votes in the previous round is eliminated.

6. Who has authority to fill in gaps and make small changes to the implementation?

The Clerk is required to send City Council the draft language for ballots. Clerk Powers can include any

layout options that the Council can approve. The goal is also to avoid having to go back to the Legislature to make "tweaks" to the language. Attorney Seewald feels that the City Council would like to have a say in election matters. He wonders if some of the language in the draft legislation could be placed in an ordinance which is approved at the local level.

7. Do you want to include a local approval provision in the text?

The committee feels that approval to use RCV for Northampton elections should be brought before the voters for buy-in. The earliest time that that this can be done is likely Nov. 2022.

Rep. Sabadosa has reached out to find out the status of this project. She is prepared to spearhead this legislation through the legislative process on behalf of Northampton. She has asked that we share our legislation with the Elections Division @ the Sec. of the State's Office prior to submission.

5. **NEW BUSINESS**

None.

6. **FUTURE MEETING DATE(S)**

The next meeting is scheduled for February 10, 2022 @ 4 pm.

7. **ADJOURN**

At 5:50 pm Member Kay moved to adjourn the meeting; Member Ventola seconded the motion. The motion was approved on a roll call vote of 4 Yes (Boulrice, Crowley, Kay, Ventola); 0 No, 1 Absent (Dwight).

Minutes Prepared by City Clerk Pamela L. Powers

For questions, please call 413.587.1223