

RCV Minutes 09/08/2022
8:00 PM via Zoom

Scott Ananian
Ben Kaufman
Joan Lautenschläger
Alex Neary
Mike Sandman
Joan Sawyer
Jay Sweitzer-Shalit
Greg Dennis (member of the public)
Perry Grossman (member of the public)
Paul Hanna (member of the public)

Chair Scott Ananian opened the meeting and confirmed that there was a quorum online. Minutes of the August 25 meeting were approved unanimously by roll call vote.

Jay Sweitzer-Shalit continues with his explanation of the ways in which votes can be counted:

Proportional RCV	Sequential RCV
Is proportional	Is not proportional
Does not elect “clones” or slates as easily	Elects “clones” or slates – a party with over 50% support will have a monopoly
Produces a more diverse set of winners	Produces a set of winners likely to have similar views
Is more difficult to explain	Is relatively simple to explain
Bottom vote getter drops off and their votes are distributed to the others	Top getter is elected and their excess votes get distributed
Winners should be in proportion to the votes	Possible for a slate that gets 51% to take all the seats

Arlington is petitioning the legislature to use sequential (because it’s simpler to explain, and for SB and SC, proportionality of views may not be beneficial, although it’s better to have diversity in TM); others in Mass. are petitioning for proportional.

Alex reported that there is a potential voting rights issue with sequential RCV, although it’s less exclusionary than the current first past the post method. The question is which offices should be elected using RCV:

Single candidate – Moderator, Town Clerk, Housing Authority
A few multiple selections – Select Board, Library Trustees School Committee, Constables
Five or more candidates for five or more seats – Town Meeting

Single candidate – RCV is beneficial if there's a third or fourth candidate, but in a head-to-head contest there's effectively no difference with first-past-the-post.

Multiple selection – still a small number of candidates; candidates with similar views don't reduce the chances of their fellow candidates. Write-in and minority candidates' votes are not "thrown away." In a first-past-the-post, candidates may benefit from bullet voting if there are two or three open seats.

Discussion about examples in Brookline.

Town Meeting – Magnifies the pros and cons.

Pros: Allows clearer expression of voter intentions in close elections. Helps candidates with better name recognition, which means first-time candidates can get some traction.

Cons: There may be a limit of 15 names on the ballot with the machines we have, although there may be work-arounds. It's not easy to know enough about multiple candidates to rank them if there are, say 10 or 15. Voters need to educate themselves.

We frequently have 1-year or two-year elections for TM if someone resigns before their three. Year term ends. We need to have a mechanism for that eventuality.

Getting an RCV article onto the November warrant: SB may be able to insert an article into the Special within a Special, or we could get our own Special with 200 signatures.

Joan Lautenschläger: Have other towns opted to phase RCV in, as a way to acclimate voters?

Alex: Is there a state requirement for the census year elections that would conflict with RCV?

Ben: The more complex the list, the more likely the voter is to blank the whole ballot.

Vote by mail changes the calculus somewhat – 55% voted that way in the 9/6/2022 primary.

Next meeting: Thursday 9/16 @ 7:30 PM.

