

RCV Minutes 9/15/2022  
7:30 PM via Zoom

Scott Ananian  
Ben Kaufman  
Joan Lautenschläger  
Alex Neary  
Mike Sandman  
Jay Sweitzer-Shalit  
Andy Anderson (member of the public)

Andy Anderson representing Voter Choice Massachusetts attended and reported that the Amherst, Arlington, and Northampton home rule petitions were reported favorably by the legislature's Election Committee just before the end of the formal session, and that he expects they will be approved during the current informal session. Amherst's state representative and Senator were active in supporting Election Committee approval, as were the other communities' State House representatives.

Ranked choice is written into Amherst's charter, assuming their home rule petition becomes law. The Town Council has five districts with two councilors each and three at large, and all are elected by RCV. The charter does not provide for staggered terms for any of its elected bodies (Town Council, School Committee, Housing Authority, Library Trustees).

Arlington kept staggered terms and has sequential RCV, not proportional. Scott Ananian asked for comments on whether to retain staggered terms. Alex Neary noted that we already do staggered terms, and Scott commented that the higher percentage of a body that are elected at one time by RCV, the more representative the results of the vote would be.

On which positions should be elected via RCV:

- Jay Sweitzer-Shalit commented that he preferred that all positions be elected by RCV, and that we use proportional vote counting. Alex is still making up his mind about TM elections, and if all 15 slots are open, that could be confusing to voters.
- Mike Sandman preferred staggered terms especially for town-wide positions, which entail a learning curve, and preferred RCV for all positions, including TM.
- Joan Lautenschläger preferred staggered terms, but is concerned that as there are more candidates and slots, as with TM, RCV can be confusing.
- Ben Kaufman agreed with Joan's suggestion that we look at what has worked well in other communities regarding which offices are included in RCV.
- Andy reported that there are no towns with representative town meeting that have RCV, but Cambridge has 9 city council seats open at the same time, with up to 27 candidates in total. Few people went beyond ranking 15 candidates, but Cambridge has now limited voting to no more than 15 due to limits in their technology.

## On whether to use proportional or sequential counting for multi-winner elections.

- Alex is looking for an accurate representation of the voters' voice, and elimination of gamesmanship [like bullet voting]. Proportional meets those criteria; sequential does not.
- Mike agreed, especially regarding the importance of providing voice to minority opinions (or, for that matter, demographic minorities).
- Jay supported proportional counting.
- Joan was concerned that proportional counting can be confusing, and she wants to be sure that the votes can be manually recounted.
- (Ben reported that proportional can be recounted, although Cambridge has some unusual tweaks. Mike reminded the group that RCV and proportional counting were originated before the advent of computerized ballot counting.)
- Scott said that his opinion is shifting since he has seen that other town (except Arlington) are using proportional RCV

## Ballots:

When Cambridge counted by hand, they marked the ballots sequentially, so they knew which ones had been counted first. Andy reported that the counting algorithm in the machines is the "weighted inclusive Gregory method." This ensures that majority rule is preserved even if one very popular candidate gets a very high percentage of #1 votes.

- Summary:

Scott summed up that the main question is whether to use RCV for Town Meeting elections. (Earlier, he had noted that Cathleen Cavell had suggested RCV only for multi-winner elections.)

For the next meeting, we will look at the details of listed in the charge and in the template home rule petition.

Alex suggested that we take care of the basics first and finalize the counting method. He also asked Andy about provisions for voter education. Home rule petition typically do include a clause requiring voter education using local funds.

Mike suggested tackling the technical issues such as incomplete terms, and that we'd have a better sense of what to do with TMM elections once the technical bits were agreed on.

Jay agreed and suggested that we try to sound out support [from TMMs], since TM has to pass the home rule petition.

Ben suggested asking our legislators to speak to the committee and to seek opinions from TMMS.

Andy Anderson provided these links so we can see how the various home rule petitions were written:

<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H777>

<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H4207/BillHistory>

<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/192/H4885>

And he quoted this provision from the State regarding voter education for RCV:

“A city or town which accepts this section shall conduct a voter education and outreach campaign to familiarize voters with ranked choice voting.” Last session’s local option bill:

<https://malegislature.gov/Bills/190/H2897>

Scott will follow up with an agenda that fits the discussion, and he’ll send out a Doodle poll to set the next meeting date, provisionally set for Thursday 9/15 at 7:30 PM. Mike will circulate the minutes from both 9/8 and 9/14.