

Subject: Further Comment on Article 26 / Ranked Choice Voting

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Dear members of the Arlington Select Board,

The Election Modernization Committee would like to thank you for taking the time to understand our proposal for Ranked Choice Voting ("RCV") in Arlington, and we would like to address the amendment offered by Adam Auster. While our committee believes that the method we proposed ("proportional RCV") is the better approach for town elections, we also believe that the Auster proposal ("majoritarian RCV") is better than the system we have today and would address the objections raised by Mr. Schlichtman. Recognizing that 64% of Arlington voters voiced their support for RCV on the November statewide ballot, we strongly believe that it is important to place one of these two proposals before this April Town Meeting.

Both proportional and majoritarian RCV offer the same ballot and voter experience, and they are identical when applied to single-seat elections. In addition, they share numerous benefits: 1) voters can express their real preference without fear of vote-splitting; 2) they encourage more people to run for office and increases voter participation; 3) they encourage candidates to run positive campaigns; and 4) they produce results that better reflect the will of the voters. As such, they would both greatly improve upon the system we have today.

The two proposals differ only in their application to multi-seat elections. Proportional RCV is intended to better represent the political diversity of the voters. Imagine the town is divided 60:40 on a particular issue and there is a two-seat Select Board election. Under proportional RCV, regardless of the number of candidates, one seat will likely go to a candidate representing the 60% position and the other will likely go to a candidate representing the 40% position. Under majoritarian RCV, both seats would go to candidates reflecting the 60% position. Under our current system, the seats could be won by anyone depending on factors having nothing to do with the actual preferences of the voters.

To reiterate, our preference is still for proportional RCV, the original proposal. However, if the Select Board prefers the majoritarian proposal, we will strongly support that as preferable over a vote of No Action.

Thank you,
Greg Dennis
Clerk, Election Modernization Committee

BLUE TEXT: APPEARS ONLY IN ORIGINAL, PROPORTIONAL PROPOSAL

RED TEXT: APPEARS ONLY IN AMENDED, MAJORITARIAN PROPOSAL

ARTICLE: HOME RULE LEGISLATION/RANKED CHOICE VOTING

To see if the Town will vote to authorize and request the Select Board to file Home Rule Legislation to elect Town offices by Ranked Choice Voting, or take any action related thereto.

MOTION: "VOTED: That the Town does hereby request and authorize the Select Board to file Home Rule Legislation to provide substantially as follows:

"AN ACT AMENDING THE TOWN MANAGER ACT OF ARLINGTON RELATIVE TO RANKED CHOICE VOTING"

Section 1. Chapter 503 of the Acts of 1952 (The Town Manager Act of Arlington) as subsequently amended, is hereby amended by inserting a new Section 8B "Ranked Choice Voting" as follows:

Section 8B. Ranked Choice Voting

The offices of Select Board, School Committee, Town Clerk, Moderator, Housing Authority, and Assessor shall be elected by ranked choice voting at the annual election. "Ranked choice voting" shall mean a method of casting and tabulating ballots in which voters rank candidates for office in order of preference. Ranked choice voting shall apply to a single-seat office only when the number of candidates exceeds two and to a multi-seat office when the number of candidates exceeds the number of seats to be elected. Ranked choice voting elections shall be tabulated in rounds as follows.

(a) For the purposes of this section, the following terms have the following meanings:

- 1. "Batch elimination" means the simultaneous defeat of multiple candidates for whom it is mathematically impossible to be elected.*
- 2. "Concluded ballot" means a ballot that does not rank any continuing candidate, contains an overvote at the highest continuing ranking, or contains two or more sequential skipped rankings before its highest continuing ranking.*
- 3. "Continuing candidate" means a candidate who has not been defeated or elected.*
- 4. "Election threshold" means the number of votes above which a candidate is elected in a multi-seat election. It is calculated by dividing the total number of votes counting for continuing candidates in the first round by the sum of one and the number of seats to be elected.*
- 5. "Highest-ranked continuing candidate" means the continuing candidate with the highest ranking on a voter's ballot.*
- 6. "Last-place candidate" means (i) the candidate with the lowest vote total in a round of the ranked-choice voting tabulation; or (ii) a candidate that is defeated in batch elimination.*
- 7. "Overvote" means a circumstance in which a voter ranks more than one candidate at the same ranking.*
- 8. "Ranking" means the number assigned on a ballot by a voter to a candidate to express the voter's preference for that candidate. Ranking number one is the highest ranking, ranking number two is the next-highest ranking and so on.*
- 9. "Skipped ranking" means a circumstance in which a voter does not use a ranking and ranks a candidate with a subsequent ranking.*
- 10. "Surplus fraction" is a number equal to the difference between an elected candidate's vote total and the election threshold, divided by the candidate's vote total.*

11. "Transfer value" means the proportion of a vote that a ballot will count to its highest-ranked continuing candidate. Each ballot begins with a transfer value of one. If a ballot counts to the election of a candidate under subsection (c)(1), it receives a lower transfer value.

(b) In any single-seat election, each round begins by counting the number of votes for each continuing candidate. Each ballot counts as one vote for its highest-ranked continuing candidate. Concluded ballots are not counted for any continuing candidate. Each round then ends with one of the following two outcomes:

1. If there are more than two continuing candidates, the last-place candidate is defeated, or the last-place candidates are defeated in batch elimination, and a new round begins.
2. Otherwise, the candidate with the fewest votes is defeated, the candidate with the most votes is elected, and tabulation is complete.

(c) In any multi-seat election, each round begins by counting the number of votes for each continuing candidate. Each ballot counts, at its current transfer value, for its highest-ranked continuing candidate. Concluded ballots are not counted for any continuing candidate. In the first round only, the election threshold is then calculated. Each round then ends with one of the following three outcomes:

1. If at least one candidate has more votes than the election threshold, then all such candidates are elected. Each ballot counting for an elected candidate is assigned a new transfer value by multiplying the ballot's current transfer value by the surplus fraction for the candidate. Each elected candidate is deemed to have a number of votes equal to the election threshold in all future rounds, and a new round begins.
2. If no candidate has more votes than the election threshold and the sum of the number of elected candidates and continuing candidates is more than the sum of one and the number of seats to be elected, the last-place candidate is defeated, or the last-place candidates are defeated in batch elimination, and a new round begins.
3. Otherwise, the continuing candidate with fewest votes is defeated, all other continuing candidates are elected, and tabulation is complete.

(c) In any multi-seat election, the first seat is filled by the tabulation in subsection (b). The remaining seats are filled by repeated application of subsection (b); provided, however, that all choices marked for candidates who have already been elected shall be disregarded and votes for an elected candidate shall instead count for the next highest-ranked continuing candidate.

(d) A candidate is defeated in "batch elimination" if the number of elected and continuing candidates with more votes than that candidate is greater than the number of seats to be elected, and if one of the following applies: (i) The candidate's current vote total plus all votes that could possibly be transferred to the candidate in future rounds is not enough to equal or surpass the candidate with the next-higher current vote total; or (ii) the candidate has fewer votes than a candidate described in (i).

(e) If two or more last-place candidates are tied and batch elimination does not apply, the candidate with the fewest votes in the prior round is defeated. If two or more such tied candidates were tied in the prior round, the second tie shall be decided by referring similarly to the standing of candidates, in terms of votes, in the second-prior round. This principle shall be applied successively as many times as necessary, a tie shown in any prior round being decided by referring to the standing of the candidates in the round immediately preceding the tie.

(f) The Town Clerk shall have the authority to make any changes to the ranked choice voting ballot and tabulation process necessary to ensure the integrity and smooth functioning of the election, provided that ranked choice voting shall still be used and the smallest number of changes are made to achieve such purpose.

Section 2. This Act shall take effect upon approval of the majority of Arlington voters by local ballot question."