



**MINUTES OF THE
MINNETONKA CHARTER COMMISSION**

May 26, 2020

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Northrup called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

Members present: Dick Allendorf, Karen Anderson, John Cheleen, David Larson, John Northrup, Terry Schneider, Linnea Sodergren, LuAnn Tolliver, Brad Wiersum.

Members absent: None.

2. APPROVE MINUTES OF NOV. 12, 2019 MEETING AND JAN. 28, 2020 MEETING

Anderson moved, Cheleen seconded, to approve the minutes of the Nov. 12, 2019 meeting. By roll call vote, all voted in favor.

Anderson noted that she had identified some typographical errors, which the city attorney had corrected. Anderson moved, Larson seconded, to approve the minutes of the Jan. 28, 2020 meeting. By roll call vote, all voted in favor.

3. DISCUSSION OF RANKED CHOICE VOTING STUDY PROJECT AND WORK PLAN FOR PROJECT

City attorney Corrine Heine presented the staff report. Northrup stated that the commission had scheduled a meeting for March 17 that had been canceled, and he invited the commission to discuss the work plan going forward.

City attorney Heine informed the commission that the speakers for the March 17 meeting had been rescheduled to the June 9 charter commission meeting and that it might be difficult to reschedule them for another date. Schneider and Larson each commented that hearing from the election officials was necessary and that June 9 was an appropriate meeting for that purpose. Anderson concurred that the background put together for March 17 meeting was valuable and raised a lot of questions. She felt that election officials would provide a neutral view.

Northrup asked about other topics. Allendorf asked for information about cost comparisons, including a realistic comparison between conducting a primary and

ranked choice voting. Anderson asked to add the costs in a broader sense, including costs of informing voters and the public and the ongoing costs. She noted that the information from Minneapolis mentioned nine different items, including a voters guide, survey, outside consultant, independent analysis, publication of the amendment, and a new election website. Northrup stated that he wanted to understand the cost savings better, looking at a payback analysis of ranked choice voting over time. Allendorf indicated that some of the information had shown a need to increase staff, and he wanted to consider that ongoing cost. Wiersum suggested that the city could come up with a historical cost of primaries to come up with an annual average cost.

Schneider thought the commission should hear from both sides about the unintended consequences of approving ranked choice voting. He mentioned the potential to essentially disenfranchise a segment of voters who might find the process confusing. He questioned how the commission could verify that it would not be making the voting process unduly difficult, and how could those consequences be mitigated. He mentioned that when the charter was amended to change the mayor's term, there was due diligence by the commission and council in reaching out to the public before it went to the voters.

Tolliver asked whether the commission could identify issues for election staff to address on June 9. Northrup stated that the elections officials would not be giving presentations but will respond to questions. Schneider suggested that they should have a list of questions in advance of the meeting so the elections officials could be prepared. One of his questions was how you do recounts with ranked choice voting. He asked commission members to submit questions to the city attorney. The city attorney suggested that the questions be submitted by June 2 so that the officials would have time to prepare. Northrup expressed interest in the details on the recount that had occurred in Minneapolis.

Allendorf said he was interested in Dr. Morris's review of Minneapolis elections. He noted that the group that preferred the traditional method was the over-64 age group. He would like to hear more about that. Cheleen said it would be interesting to have information about those under age 64 and whether ranked choice voting would draw those voters in. Sodergren said it would be helpful if elections staff would comment on what they would have done differently, whether they encountered any snags that Minnetonka might avoid.

Northrup expressed interest in a voter outreach and education plan that would accomplish what Minnetonka wants to accomplish. Anderson wanted to know how the voter outreach plan would be handled with the pandemic still in place versus the traditional method. Going back to the cost issue, she thought the work plan should consider the cost of technology and equipment that might be needed, as well as

personnel costs. Northrup indicated that software is not available for fully automated ranked choice voting. One of his questions would be when a fully automated and certified system might be available for Minnetonka's use.

Schneider said he felt the commission needs to clearly define what problem the city is trying to solve. Then, once the problem is defined, the commission should look at whether there is evidence that ranked choice voting will solve or improve that problem. As a corollary, Cheleen said the commission should ask whether the city has enough time to really educate people before the November election. Larson asked whether this is a solution in search of a problem and noted that Minneapolis and St. Paul are much larger than Minnetonka. He would like to see whether St. Louis Park voters were happy with ranked choice voting.

Schneider said that raised another thought. As he recalled, there is no limit on how many candidates can run. He noted that when the city council has appointed to fill a vacancy, the city has received 25-30 applicants. He wondered how you manage the process.

Wiersum said the commission needs to make sure that there can be robust input. The commission needs to look at the issue from a number of sides and make sure it has considered all issues. Northrup said that Prof. Schultz had suggested that ranked choice voting gets new faces to run. He noted that incumbency has two sides – someone can be in office too long, but incumbents also have wisdom. He would like to know if the process encourages or discourages incumbency, and what value Minnetonka places on incumbency.

Schneider stated that it is not an all or nothing proposal. The commission should consider whether there are applications where ranked choice voting would be useful.

Schneider said the council could look at education and voter outreach could mean educating voters before they vote, but he wondered how the commission could do outreach to get direct feedback on how this might impact them. He wasn't sure how a community forum could be conducted during a pandemic. He felt the decision should not be rushed but should be thoughtful. He wondered if there was an ability to do a survey or sampling.

Wiersum said that the time table cuts out the notion of broad discourse and community input, and he is concerned because residents typically ask for more opportunity to comment. Allendorf said the commission needed to educate themselves, then determine how to educate council on why commission recommends what it does, and finally there would be a need to educate voters. The commission does not have time to do that by November.

Anderson said the commission needs to move ahead in good faith and schedule meetings. She said the issue has been driven by FairVote, and the commission needs to devote some time to hear other points of view. She noted that there is no organized opposition and the FairVote has advertised for paid advocates. She also said the commission should find out what the status was on legislative efforts to allow ranked choice voting. Schneider said that some residents had raised questions about ranked choice voting and they should be invited to attend and participate. There should be one meeting focused on the opposing point of view.

Norhrup said he would like to understand more about how voter intent would be determined and how that impacts the ranked choice voting environment. He noted that Minneapolis and St. Paul have different processes for tabulation and also different ballot design, and he would like to understand why those cities do things differently. Anderson noted that Minneapolis allows three choices and St. Paul allows more.

Anderson said an overall question she has is whether ranked choice voting actually improves voter turnout. She noted that information from Minneapolis that had been in the March 17 packet indicated that might not be the case.

Schneider asked whether there was a consensus on the commission that Aug. 10 is not a realistic timeline for getting the study done. He asked whether the commission should ask the council not to adopt the ordinance. Allendorf stated that he would favor that idea and would like to get the work done without being under pressure. Schneider said he did not see a consensus for the idea so that it might be best to let it ride. Wiersum said he would withhold opinion but he is curious about what others think. Northrup said he thinks the process will be informative and he doesn't think rushed a process is a good idea. He wants to do a diligent job and with the right amount of citizen input. Anderson said she felt a sense of pressure but wants to move forward in a good faith effort. She would like the council to know the commission is feeling rushed but will do the best it can within the time the council gives it. Tolliver said everyone wants to do a good job and is feeling rushed, and maybe the commission needs to have meetings in July. The commission also has the ability to extend the time if needed.

Wiersum said that the pandemic and ability to hold meetings remotely may provide more flexibility than if there were no pandemic. The city attorney noted that commission can meet remotely only because of the pandemic. Because the pandemic is unpredictable, she needs to schedule meetings on dates when a room is available at city hall, because it is not possible to predict a month in advance whether the commission will be able to meet remotely in the future.

Northrup said voter outreach is important. He felt the commission needed to work on a

plan for that right away. Schneider said that public engagement is one of the most important parts of the process. He wondered if there were other ways to get voter feedback. Anderson said she thought the commission's job was to get as much information as possible and report to the council, and the council would need to get voter input. Cheleen said the commission could move ahead to gather information and report to the council, but the commission could let the council know that the ability to get information to voters should be considered. Northrup said he was interested in voter feedback as a source of new ideas.

Heine said there is a difference between getting resident input to help the commission make a decision and providing information to voters to assist them in voting on the issue. She suggested that she might be able to provide an outline of a communications plan at the June 9 meeting.

Sodergren asked what the downside would be if the issue didn't go on the ballot in November. Larson said he thought it would be November 2021. Heine said the council could put the issue on the ballot in November 2021 or at a special election.

Wiersum said he wanted to be mindful of staff bandwidth. There is a presidential election, and the pandemic has stretched the resources for the communication staff. He wants the commission to be realistic in what it is asking of staff.

Northrup asked whether there were other topics to be added to the work plan. Schneider suggested that the chair work with staff to set a work schedule and game plan that the commission could review on June 9.

Anderson wanted to know what cities have rejected or repealed ranked choice voting and why. The commission reviewed the work plan notes and completed its review of the plan. Wiersum wondered if there is a demographic look at whether exhausted ballots are more common with certain groups. Tolliver wondered whether undervoting is more common with an older demographic. Schneider said he had heard comments that some candidates focus on being placed as a second choice. Northrup mentioned the use of strategic voting. Allendorf would like to know if ranked choice voting brings in new candidates. A copy of the completed work plan is attached to these minutes.

4. SCHEDULE NEXT MEETING

Northrup recapped the schedule of upcoming meetings, beginning with the elections staff on June 9. Schneider indicated the June 23 meeting would be a good time for unintended consequences and people with opposing viewpoints. For July meetings, Heine will determine room availability and poll commissioners on their availability. Northrup reiterated that the opportunity for resident input is important.

The next meeting of the commission is scheduled for June 9, 2020.

5. ADJOURNMENT

Anderson moved, Sodergren, to adjourn the meeting. By roll call voted, all voted in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 8:31 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

LuAnn Tolliver
Secretary