



**MINUTES OF THE
MINNETONKA CHARTER COMMISSION**

June 9, 2020

1. CALL TO ORDER

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

2. ROLL CALL:

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

Members absent: None.

3. APPROVE MINUTES OF MAY 26, 2020 MEETING

Northrup recommended that the minutes be revised at page 5 to reflect that he had expressed interest in obtaining voter feedback as a source of new ideas. Larson asked a question concerning the first sentence at the top of page 6, and the city attorney clarified that the sentence referred to reviewing the schedule of upcoming meetings, beginning with elections staff on June 9.

Northrup moved, Anderson seconded, to approve the minutes of the May 26, 2020 meeting as revised. By roll call vote, all voted in favor.

4. CITY ATTORNEY REPORT REGARDING JUNE 8, 2020 CITY COUNCIL MEETING

City attorney Corrine Heine reported that the city council had adopted Ordinance No. 2020-12 at the June 8, 2020 regular council meeting. Under state law, the commission has 60 days (Aug. 7, 2020) to review the ordinance and report back to the council. The commission may extend the review period for an additional time period, up to a total of 150 days.

Anderson asked whether there was a deadline for the commission to make a decision about extending the deadline. Heine responded that the commission needed to make a decision within the initial 60-day period, by August 7.

**5. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION WITH ELECTION OFFICIALS
REGARDING RANKED CHOICE VOTING**

Moranda Dammann introduced the elections staff persons who had been invited to provide information to the charter commission:

- David Maeda, director of elections for Minnesota Secretary of State's Office.
- Ginny Gelms, election manager for Hennepin County
- Melissa Kennedy, city clerk for St. Louis Park
- Casey Carl, city clerk for City of Minneapolis

Ms. Dammann presented the staff report, beginning with the information included in the packet for the March 17, 2020 meeting that had been canceled. Her slide presentation has been saved as an addendum to the agenda packet for the meeting.

David Maeda said that 2020 would be a very challenging election year and complimented the quality of the Minnetonka elections staff. Maeda explained the requirements for certifying election equipment. Because there is no state law that allows ranked choice voting, the Secretary of State's office would not certify equipment for that purpose. He gave a brief overview of legislation introduced in the 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 sessions, but the legislation did not pass.

Dammann continued with the presentation of the staff report, including the information provided in the agenda packet addendum.

The Minneapolis City Clerk Casey Carl responded to questions the commission had asked. Answering the question of snags that the city had encountered, he said Minneapolis made several process improvements since it first implemented ranked choice voting. In the first year, it took 15 days to tabulate all the results but by 2017 the results were reported within 24 hours. He reported that the city had seen an increase in voter turnout, with 40 percent turnout for its municipal election in 2017.

Carl reported that Minneapolis is conducting a special election concurrently with the statewide primary in August. The city is using a mixed ballot style that will include the statewide primary and the municipal special election. Minneapolis will be testing a software program for automatic tabulation. He believes the software will enable Minneapolis to report election night results.

Carl indicated that Minneapolis does a post-election survey of voters, non-voters, candidates and election judges. The city has a great amount of information at its website, including information on costs. The city has seen a growing trend in surveys that people understand ranked choice voting and find it easy to use. The city has also

seen an increase in diversity of its candidates and currently has one of the most diverse councils in its history.

Carl addressed the differences between Minneapolis and St. Paul ballot designs. Minneapolis has 22 races in every municipal election as compared to St. Paul, which has only a single candidate (mayor or council member) at the time. Minneapolis only has elections every four years, while St. Paul has an election every odd year. He mentioned that the Minneapolis charter commission is looking at moving the municipal elections to even-numbered years.

Minneapolis has expanded its voter outreach and education program every year. The city tries to reach the needs of all the demographic groups in the city. The city has made a policy choice to spend money on voter outreach, and it counts for a significant portion of the city's elections budget.

Northrup said Minnetonka's median age is 45, which is higher than either Minneapolis or St. Paul. He wondered what training and outreach the city elections staff would provide, given the different demographic population. Dammann said election judges would be trained on how ranked choice voting would affect their specific duties. For voters, the city would hold mock elections and send sample ballots. The voter outreach would depend upon the resources made available to them. Casey Carl said election judges are ambassadors for the city. The judges had no difficulty adapting to ranked choice voting. Minneapolis has found that election judges and older voters have taken to ranked choice voting without problem.

Schneider was impressed with the 40% turnout. He asked how much of that might have come from the voter outreach rather than ranked choice voting. Carl indicated that he did not have hard data. The city has seen an increase in competitive races year over year, which drives voter turnout. There are a lot of dynamics, not one of which is responsible for increased voter turnout.

Melissa Kennedy said St. Louis Park had done robust voter outreach and education. She felt that helped with voter turnout. She encouraged Minnetonka to think about how to engage voters.

Allendorf indicated that the city had had four primaries over 20 years. He would like to see the costs of ranked choice voting over a five year period or something similar. He noted that a staff person would not work in only the election year. Dammann indicated she could try to forecast a five year plan. She noted that Allendorf had asked how an increase of \$219,000 would impact the taxes on an average home. Dammann reported that it would result in an \$8 increase in taxes on an averaged value home in Minnetonka (averaged value home is \$378,500). Allendorf noted that, if every \$400,000 represents

a 1% increase in the city budget, the \$219,000 would result in an approximate 0.5% budget increase.

Anderson asked whether the voter education and outreach is the same every year. Carl said the city sends a voter guide every year, for all elections. In 2013, the voter guide was \$.49 per unit but the city has reduced the unit cost to \$.44. Minneapolis hires a significant number of staff, but not just for ranked choice voting. He offered to try to provide more of an apples to apples comparison of costs.

Northrup asked how long it might take for the electorate to fully understand ranked choice voting. Carl said it is not a fast process and does require a lot of work the first time. Minneapolis produced a short video and developed flyers, did mock elections and produced the voter guide. Minneapolis has continued its education campaign every year. Carl indicated that in every election cycle, the number of people who like ranked choice voting increases and the number who don't decreases.

Wiersum asked whether Carl had seen differences based on age for voter satisfaction with ranked choice voting and the rate of exhausted ballots. Carl indicated that in Minneapolis, older voters vote with greater frequency, and that has continued with ranked choice voting.

David Larson expressed concern about pushing ranked choice voting forward under time constraints. He felt that one size doesn't fit all. Kennedy indicated that the St. Louis Park city council was clear in its goal. The city did not have ranked choice voting as a ballot issue. The council was most concerned about getting greater engagement and more diverse candidates. Carl said there is no perfect election system. They are all based on values and all have pros and cons. What he appreciates about ranked choice voting is that he has seen an increase in access for both voters and candidates. He had seen campaigning strategies change with ranked choice voting and become less adversarial. He also felt that the diversity in the council makeup was due in part to the increased access to the ballot.

Sodergren asked whether St. Louis Park had done a post-election survey. Kennedy responded that the city did not hire a consultant. The city hopes to be able to allocate resources to it in the future, but the city is being thoughtful and wants to make sure it will measure voter turnout over time.

Northrup asked if Maeda could forecast when there might be an automated process for ranked choice voting. Maeda said that because there are so few jurisdictions using ranked choice voting, there aren't vendors that are anywhere near close to developing a system. Maeda felt it would be many years. Gelms agreed with Maeda. She indicated there are systems that can help but the systems do not meet the federal certification

standards. Maeda noted that the recent legislative proposal would have allowed cities to use an automated system without the state certifying it.

Anderson asked what other cities are looking at ranked choice voting. Maeda responded that Red Wing had been looking at it, but it holds its elections in even years, and the Secretary of State's office does not believe that can be done because of ballot conformity issues. He had also heard Bloomington is considering it.

Schneider asked if there was a two page ballot and there is an error on the first page, what happens to the second page. Maeda said that the voting equipment gives the voter the opportunity to correct the error.

Schneider asked how the spreadsheet works. Gelms responded that the names are pulled directly from the ballot counting system. She said write-ins can be tricky, but the system takes a picture of the write-in vote and inserts it into the spreadsheet.

Sodergren asked if there were any cities that had voted down ranked choice voting or that had rejected ranked choice voting after implementing it. Maeda said Duluth had rejected ranked choice voting. Gelms was not aware of any city that had rejected ranked choice voting in Minnesota, but Aspen, Colorado had had ranked choice voting and then got rid of it.

Wiersum asked what the elections officials liked best and least about ranked choice voting from an administration perspective. Gelms said what she likes best is that it is relatively easy for voters to understand ranked choice voting. The part she liked least was trying to explain how the counting process works so that voters can understand strategic voting. Multiple seats are very difficult to explain. Maeda said that what he likes least is the same thing that Gelms mentioned. What he like most, as a voter, is that ranked choice voting has caused him to learn more about each candidate so that he can cast an informed vote. Carl said his favorite part is that it increases access to the ballot for voters and candidates. What he does not appreciate is that there is not a fully automated system out there.

Schneider said that with COVID-19 there would likely be more absentee ballot, and he wondered if there would be a problem for absentee voters who don't have the ability to walk in and have someone explain the process to them. Kennedy said St. Louis Park included a set of instructions that was mailed out with every absentee ballot application. When they opened the absentee ballots, the ballots did not have errors, and the voters seemed to understand how to complete the ballot. Maeda mentioned that his office had been concerned about absentee balloting for the presidential primary because every voter received a ballot for each party. However, it had worked fairly well.

Anderson asked about school district elections at the same time as municipal elections. Kennedy said the school district seats were on one side of the ballot and the city seats on the other side. The city was deliberate about educating people, and it worked.

Northrup thanked the guests for sharing their time and information.

Sodergren asked whether the city would need to hire a full-time permanent staff person. Dammann said that navigating a voting method change would require more staff time, but if the council approved an additional position, that person could work on ranked choice voting as well as increasing voter turnout .

Schneider said the city would want to do ranked choice voting the right way with appropriate staffing. He also wondered what the implications would be for the 2021 budget. Schneider said the city should look at implementing ranked choice voting for only special elections, as a way to phase in ranked choice voting. He was encouraged by the increased voter turnout that Minneapolis reported. He felt that the robust voter engagement might be part of the reason for the increased turnout.

Tolliver would like to see the charter have both voting options in it. She would not be in favor of taking out the existing voting scenarios.

Wiersum said that to be honest in the assessment of the cost of ranked choice voting, the analysis of cost should reflect what portion of the cost is attributable to increasing voter outreach and what portion relates only to ranked choice voting implementation.

Northrup said that looking at the cost over a five-year period would make sense. He also would like to separate the short term launch or transition costs from the ongoing costs.

6. REPORT FROM CHAIR REGARDING WORK PLAN STATUS AND FUTURE MEETING SCHEDULE

Northrup reviewed the schedule for upcoming meetings on June 23, July 7, July 14 and July 21. He commented that the voter outreach and education plan should be added to one of the meetings.

Allendorf said it made sense but it was too many meetings. Allendorf would like an articulation of the problem that Minnetonka is trying to solve. Northrup suggested adding it to the June 23 meeting. Schneider suggested it should be discussed at the July 7 meeting.

Northrup said he was concerned about how to get public comment from all of the constituencies, including young and old and minority populations. Wiersum said that the time table is tight and makes the process more challenging. Wiersum mentioned innovative methods that the city used when the comprehensive plan was reviewed.

Heine noted that the July meeting schedule contemplates meetings every week. She said the commission by-laws require the agenda to be delivered one week in advance of the meeting, and the commission would need to suspend its bylaws in order to accommodate that schedule. Tolliver asked if the change would be temporary, and Heine responded that it is only temporary and not an amendment of the by-laws. Allendorf moved, Anderson seconded, to suspend the by-law requirement related to delivery of the packet. On a roll call vote, all voted in favor.

Anderson raised the issue of an additional meeting in July or August. Heine indicated she would check into room availability.

7. ADJOURNMENT

Tolliver moved, Anderson seconded, to adjourn the meeting. By roll call voted, all voted in favor. The meeting was adjourned at 9:36 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

LuAnn Tolliver
Secretary