

Charter Review: Elections

Somerville MA City Council
January 11, 2023

Tonight's Agenda

Conclusion of Public Hearing

Anticipated Schedule

Reminder of Procedure

Elections Section: 5 Recommendations for Review

Public Hearing

- **If In-Person**

- Please use the sign-up sheet and approach the podium when recognized

- **If Attending Remotely**

- Please use the “Raise Hand” icon to indicate your interest in speaking
- You will need to unmute your microphone when recognized using the orange “Mute Audio” button in your GoToMeeting control panel

Anticipated Schedule

- **In-Chambers Public Hearing conclusion, January 11**
 - Followed by deliberation on Topic Area: Elections
- **Virtual or In-Chambers, January 25**
 - Topic Area: Balance of Power
- **Virtual or In-Chambers, February 8**
 - Topic Area: Budget/Finance
- **Virtual or In-Chambers, February 22**
 - Review of Language from Prior Policy Requests

Resources and Process

- **Subject Matter Experts: Collins Center consultants**
 - Contract still in process
 - Legislative Policy Analyst **Brendan Salisbury** to serve as City Council liaison
- **Subject Matter Experts: Charter Review Committee members**
 - Bev Schwartz (member) and Anna Corning (Mayor's Office), liaisons
 - Questions submitted through the Chair in advance will give time to research answers and arrange for attendees to help with discussion
- Topic Areas will be published in advance, on Agendas
- **Online Document repository: tinyurl.com/hashtagCharterReform**

Parliamentary Procedure

- **Deliberation**
 - Largely focused on the current topic area; Rules of the Council prevail
- **Resolutions are “in order”**
 - Resolutions to recommend adoption of the Committee’s suggested text
 - Resolutions to request amended text to address the Council’s intent
 - Motions to amend are not, there is no text before us
 - Amended text will be reviewed at a future meeting
- Once all topics have been resolved, a final HRP Text will be submitted

Elections

Expand Voting Rights to Non-Citizen Residents

Expand Voting Rights to 16- and 17-Year-Old Residents

Reducing Signature Requirements for Several Elected Offices

Establish a Ranked Choice Voting Study Committee

Establish a Public Financing of Municipal Campaigns Study Committee

Expanding Voting Rights to Non-Citizens

Recco #27: Expand municipal voting rights to include non-citizen residents

- Policy Considerations: In accordance with the recommendation of 2019's Clean and Open Elections Task Force and the City Council's 2021 HRP, restoring the historical right of non-citizen residents to vote was considered important to making Somerville's government more just.
- Community Feedback: 60%+ of respondents to surveys and in meetings supported this change.

Expanding Voting Rights to 16+ Residents

Recco #28: Expand municipal voting rights to include 16- and 17-year-olds

- Policy Considerations: In accordance with the recommendation of 2019's Clean and Open Elections Task Force and the City Council's 2019 HRP, documented positive long-term impacts of early engagement with municipal voting and civic engagement was a key driver in the committee's decision to include this in the charter.
- Community Feedback: 66% of community meeting attendees supported this change, but survey respondents were more mixed (48% opposed, 42% in favor).

Expanding Voting Rights

Recco #27: Expand municipal voting rights to include non-citizen residents
Recco #28: Expand municipal voting rights to include 16- and 17-year-olds

- Text from proposed charter:
 - SECTION 7-1: ELIGIBILITY TO VOTE IN MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS
 - In addition to individuals eligible to vote according to the General Laws, in the City of Somerville the following individuals may upon application have their names entered on a list of municipal voters established by the Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Somerville and may thereafter vote in any election for municipal offices and municipal ballot questions in accordance with this charter. Such municipal voters shall remain eligible to vote in any election for municipal offices and municipal ballot questions in the city for so long as they remain domiciled in the City of Somerville:
 - (i) Any non-citizen residing in the City of Somerville, who is ineligible to vote due to citizenship status under federal or state law, rule, or regulation, but who is otherwise eligible to vote; and
 - (ii) Any 16 and 17 year old residing in the City of Somerville, who is ineligible to vote due to age under federal or state law, rule, or regulation, but who is otherwise eligible to vote.

Reducing Signature Requirements

Recco #30: Reducing signature requirements for most offices to get on the ballot.

- Policy Considerations: As it aligned with the committee's value of empowerment to lower barriers to running for office, the committee recommended reducing or maintaining the signature requirements for all city council and school committee seats.
- Community Feedback: At a community meeting most respondents indicated the current signature requirements were "about right" or "too high".

Reducing Signature Requirements

Recco #30: Reducing signature requirements for most offices to get on the ballot.

- Text from proposed charter SECTION 7-3: PRELIMINARY ELECTION PROCEDURES
 - (a) Signature Requirements - The number of signatures of municipal voters required to place the name of a candidate on the official ballot to be used at a preliminary election shall be as follows:
 - (i) Mayor - at least 250 certified signatures;
 - (ii) At-Large City Councilor - at least 100 certified signatures;
 - (iii) Ward City Councilor - at least 50 certified signatures, all of which shall be certified as being from the ward from which election is sought;
 - (iv) School Committee Member – at least 50 certified signatures, all of which shall be certified as being from the ward from which election is sought.
- Current requirements: Mayor 250, At-Large 150, Ward and SC 100.

Reducing Signature Requirements

Recco #30: Reducing signature requirements for all offices to get on the ballot.

- Current Charter Text: ARTICLE VI. - MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, Sec. 3. - Requirements for nomination.
 - Any person who is qualified to vote at any regular or special election for a candidate for any elective municipal office in said city, and who is a candidate for nomination thereto, shall be entitled to have his name as such candidate printed on the official ballot to be used at a preliminary election for nomination therefor; provided, that if he is a candidate to be voted for in a single ward he is a registered voter in the ward wherein he is a candidate; and provided, further, that on or before five o'clock in the afternoon of the eighth Tuesday preceding such regular or special municipal election there shall be submitted to the board of election commissioners, hereinafter called the board, a nomination paper prepared and issued by the board, wherein the candidate sets forth in writing his candidacy, and wherein the petition is signed by voters of the city qualified to vote for a candidate for said office to the number of at least two hundred and fifty for the office of mayor, one hundred and fifty for the office of councilors at large and one hundred for the office of ward councilor and of member of the school committee, whose signatures are certified as hereinafter provided.

Ranked Choice Voting Study Committee

Recco #36: Establish a Ranked Choice Voting Study Committee within 6 months.

- Policy Considerations: Consistent with the 2019 COETF recommendation and 75% support for the 2020 Ballot Initiative, the Committee supported implementing RCV. Interview feedback from critical members of city staff and elected officials noted several concerns about the complicated nature of RCV and issues other states had with the implementation. Because of these, the committee voted to recommend that **within 6 months of the passage of the charter the city shall convene a Ranked Choice Voting Commission to adopt RCV** and outline an implementation strategy for Somerville.
- Community Feedback: 67% of survey respondents supported RCV, and the Committee received 85 public comments in support of RCV.

Ranked Choice Voting Study Committee

Recco #36: Establish a Ranked Choice Voting Study Committee within 6 months.

- Text from Proposed Charter: SECTION 9-7: TIME OF TAKING EFFECT, (c) CREATION OF RANKED CHOICE VOTING IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE
 - **Within 6 months of the passing of this charter**, the city council shall create a Ranked Choice Voting Committee to propose a measure to adopt ranked-choice voting and submit a report on ranked-choice voting in Somerville. A voting method shall be considered ranked-choice voting if the municipal voter ranks candidates in order of preference. The Committee's report shall include: a) the elected offices to be selected by this voting method, b) a timeframe and strategy for implementation, c) infrastructure and equipment requirements, d) a cost analysis, e) a comparative analysis of other voting methods, f) an analysis of potential equity concerns, and g) a community education plan. If the city council has already taken action consistent with this provision, no action is necessary.

Ranked Choice Voting Study Committee

Recco #36: Establish a Ranked Choice Voting Study Committee within 6 months.

- Continued Text from Proposed Charter
 - The goal of this committee is to implement ranked-choice voting in order to more accurately reflect the will of the voters, increase the number and diversity of candidates, lower barriers to candidate participation, and increase transparency of elections.
 - The committee shall consist of seven members: one shall be the Chairman of the Board of Elections Commissioners or their designee, two shall be community members appointed by the city council, two shall be community members appointed by the school committee, two shall be community members appointed by the mayor. The committee shall elect a Chair and establish the schedule of its meetings.
 - **The committee shall propose a measure to the city council within 18 months. The city council shall take action on the measure within 90 days of receipt.**

Public Muni Campaign Finance Study Committee

Recco #34: Establish a Public Financing of Municipal Campaigns Study Committee

- **Policy Considerations:** The 2019 COETF recommended creating and implementing a public financing model, but emphasized the importance of “further study and research” on how it would work in Somerville. Currently, no municipality in MA has public finance options, although the state has a partial public finance option for statewide elections. Small donor match systems have been implemented in cities such as San Francisco and New York City, with the latter heavily contributing to electing the most diverse council in the city’s history.
- **Community Feedback:** 52% of community survey respondents support exploring a public campaign finance option; only 23% felt the current process “worked well”.

Public Muni Campaign Finance Study Committee

Recco #34: Establish a Public Financing of Municipal Campaigns Study Committee

- Text from Proposed Charter: SECTION 9-7: TIME OF TAKING EFFECT, (a) CREATION OF PUBLIC FINANCING OF CAMPAIGNS COMMITTEE
 - **Within 6 months of the adoption of this charter,** the city council shall create a Public Financing of Campaigns Committee to study public financing mechanisms and prepare recommendations with the goal of making running for office in Somerville more accessible to potential candidates. The directive of this study committee is to consider a full range of options as practicable, provide analysis on the potential benefits and barriers of each option, and consider which are the best fit for Somerville. If the city council has already taken action consistent with this provision, no action is necessary.

Public Muni Campaign Finance Study Committee

Recco #34: Establish a Public Financing of Municipal Campaigns Study Committee

- Continued Text from Proposed Charter
 - The committee shall consist of seven members: one shall be the Chairman of the Board of Elections Commissioners or designee, two shall be community members appointed by the city council, two shall be community members appointed by the school committee, two shall be community members appointed by the mayor. The committee shall elect a chair and establish the schedule of its meetings.
 - **The committee shall issue recommendations to the city council within 12 months of creation. The city council shall take action on the recommendations within 90 days of receipt.**