

**ELK GROVE CHARTER EXPLORATORY AND ELECTION REFORM COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBER, 8400 LAGUNA PALMS WAY
MONDAY, August 27, 2007**

1. CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL

The Regular Committee meeting of August 27, 2007 was called to order by Chair Orrock at 6:02 p.m.

Present: Committee Members – Allen, Chaires, Loveland, Orrock, and Perez

Absent: Committee Members – None

(Assigned staff/Presenters)

Also Present: Lucy Eidam, Richard Miadich, and Susan Blackston

2. PUBLIC COMMENT (on non-agenda items)

None.

3. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

MOTION/VOTE:

The Committee, on motion of Member Chaires/Loveland second, unanimously approved the August 13, 2007 minutes as presented.

4. QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Follow up to August 13 presentation regarding (Part 1 of 2) Primary / General Elections and 50% Plus 1 Voting

There were no questions from Committee Members regarding the August 13 presentation.

5. PRESENTATION

Topic: Part 2 of 2 – Presentation regarding Primary / General Elections; Instant Run-off Voting; and 50% Plus 1 Voting

Richard Miadich, Associate with Olson, Hagel & Fishburn, distributed and reviewed a document entitled, "Outline and Notes for Presentation on Instant Run-off Elections" (filed).

Jill LaVine, County of Sacramento Registrar of Voters, distributed and reviewed the following information (all filed):

- City and County of San Francisco text of proposed charter amendment to use a ranked-choice, or “Instant run-off” ballot and arguments in favor of and against the proposition;
- San Francisco Chronicle article dated July 25, 2007 entitled, “Officials scurry to find solution to longtime vote machine problem”;
- WCAX-TV Channel 3 News report regarding an instant runoff voting system in Montpelier, Vermont;
- The News Tribune (Pierce County, Washington) article dated August 19, 2007 entitled, “No ranked-choice votes just yet”;
- Aspen Daily News (Aspen, Colorado) article dated August 20, 2007 entitled, “Aspen not ready to change voting systems just yet”.

Ms. LaVine reported that, currently, there is no voting equipment certified to conduct instant run-off/rank choice voting. Benefits of this voting process were touted to be an increase in voter turnout; however, John Arntz, San Francisco Director of Elections, who conducted rank choice voting in 2004 believed that candidates increase voter turnout, not the method of voting. An extensive public outreach effort was undertaken in San Francisco, though Mr. Arntz stated that, after three years, costs have still not been recovered.

Ms. LaVine estimated that a stand alone runoff election in Elk Grove would cost over \$233,000, whereas a runoff consolidated with a General Election would cost \$32,000. Voting equipment must be certified at both the state and federal level, which takes six to twelve months. The cost for federal certification is \$500,000 and state certification costs \$400,000. Currently there is no code, policies, or procedures for instant run-off voting. The process requires two ballots, i.e. one for first choice and a second for instant runoff. Ms. LaVine warned that voters can be easily confused about varying processes and candidates might be concerned about voters understanding of the system.

Discussion ensued regarding estimated costs for implementing instant runoff voting in Elk Grove, at the conclusion of which an estimate of \$1 million was surmised, as well as an additional \$100,000 over what Elk Grove currently pays for election costs.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Sharon Lynes noted that Committee Members receive information prior to the meetings and asked whether it, and the meeting minutes, are available on the Internet, to which City Clerk Peggy Jackson replied in the affirmative.

Lucy Eidam, President of Lucy & Company, displayed the following “characteristics” and asked for feedback from Committee Members regarding their advantages or disadvantages, to which responses are indicated below.

Characteristics of Primary and General Elections

- Primary elections may be used by charter cities to narrow the field of candidates that appear on the general election ballot.

Advantages: The primary election allows an opportunity for voters to consider multiple candidates; it narrows the field of candidates if there were a large number; could help elicit key issues that the community is most interested in.

Disadvantages: It would be an unnecessary hurdle and expense if there were a small number of candidates.

- General law cities may not use primary elections and must hold general elections on the dates specified in the Elections Code.

Advantages: Helps to keep election costs down.

Disadvantages: If there were a large number of candidates it would be more difficult for voters to understand the positions of each; could add to voter confusion.

- Charter law cities may hold primary and/or general elections on any dates they choose.

Advantages: Flexibility to address issues of importance on dates most advantageous to the city; independence.

Disadvantages: A special election would increase costs; subject to politics, e.g. could choose date beneficial to desired outcome.

- Some scholars have suggested that holding multiple elections, including possibly use of the primary-general format, may reduce voter turnout.

This characteristic is a disadvantage.

- Some scholars have also suggested that voter turnout in city elections is lower when they are not held on the same day as national elections.

This characteristic would be a disadvantage if voter turnout was decreased; however, a stand-alone election might draw voters to issues of specific interest to them.

Fifty-Percent-Plus-One Elections

- Fifty-percent-plus-one elections require the winning candidate to receive a majority of the votes cast.

Advantages: Candidates have to appeal to a broader/diverse electorate; it is beneficial to candidates in having the support of a majority of voters in the community.

Disadvantages: It would almost guarantee the need to hold both a primary and general election, which would increase costs; increases voter fatigue in having to vote twice and they may be less likely to follow through on both elections.

- General law cities are limited to using “plurality” elections where the candidate who receives the most votes wins even if that number is less than a majority of the votes cast.

Advantages: Simplicity in the process; do not have to wait between a primary and general election to know who elected officials will be; campaign expenses are lessened; reduces perception of special interest involvement/impact.

- Charter cities may use fifty-percent-plus-one type elections.

Advantages: Provides choice and opportunity to exercise options.

Disadvantages: General law cities cannot use 50% plus 1 voting method.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

Sharon Lynes expressed her opinion that voter turnout could be lower if elections were held on untraditional election dates. A benefit of plurality elections is that it decreases the amount of “harassment” voters are subjected to from phone and mail campaign solicitations.

6. NEW BUSINESS / CLOSING

Richard Miadich mentioned that the next meeting would be the first of three sessions devoted to the topic of campaign finance.

Member Perez asked that the topic of campaign ethics also be included.

Lucy Eidam stated that a partial draft of the written report delineating advantages and disadvantages of topics considered by the Committee will be presented at the next meeting.

7. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business to come before the Committee, the meeting was adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

ATTEST:

/s/ Susan J. Blackston
Chief Deputy City Clerk