

Briefing Document for the Kansas City Charter Review Commission Municipal Voting System Revision

Current state

- Relevant Charter language
 - Art. VI Sec. 605. – Results of Elections
 - (a) Primary election.
 - (1) General. **The two candidates for Mayor, the two candidates for at-large members of the Council, and the two candidates for district Council members, who receive the highest number of votes in the primary election for each office, respectively, will be placed on the general election ballot.** As soon as determined, the City Clerk will provide the required information to the election authorities for the general election.
 - (b) General election. The candidate for Mayor, the candidate for member at large of the Council from each district and the candidate for member of the Council from each district, who shall receive the greatest number of votes at the regular municipal election for each such office, respectively, shall be declared elected.
 - Other sections impacted: Art. II Sec. 206; Art. VI Sec. 601, 604
- Historical context: what changes to this language have been made previously?

Why consider a change?

- Inefficiency of requiring candidates who receive a majority of the vote in the primary/first election of the cycle.
 - Over the last three municipal primary election cycles, 25 candidates for Mayor or Council have received 50% or more of the primary vote. Every one of them went on to win the general election. (reference pages 3-4)
- Campaign finance implications – reduces the need for unnecessary campaign fundraising, allowing social capital to be directed more effectively to address community needs.
- Voter turnout impacts – even lower voter turnout in primaries right now, compared to general election; this would place clearer import on the first election.
- Administrative ease – this could yield shorter ballots for general/runoff elections, which may simplify experience for voters and election authorities.

Proposed change

- Adopting a majority electoral system (i.e., 50+1 voting or general/runoff system)
 - Implementation considerations
 - Some voters may be used to waiting to engage in elections until closer to the general election – education on the change will be important to make sure these voters do not unintentionally miss their opportunity to weigh in on certain races. This may be a greater risk in cities where there are longer timelines between the primary and the general.
 - Cost and ease of implementation across multiple different counties
 - Ease for voters to understand minimal change
 - Chicago example – change implemented in 1999; mayoral runoffs held in 2015, 2019, 2023
- Other options considered
 - Ranked Choice Voting (i.e., Instant Runoff Voting)
 - Overview: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y47yDXmeNmY> and reference materials
 - RCV is typically pitched as a method to reduce partisanship/negativity in campaigns, attract more candidates, and increase voter interest/turnout. RCV opponents point to risks of creating confusion that may decrease voter participation (either by discouraging less engaged voters from turning out or ballots being thrown out after being filled out incorrectly) or decrease trust in the election process (particularly if there are significant delays in tabulating votes).

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- There were citizen petition drives to put Ranked Choice Voting on the ballot in Kansas City and statewide in 2022.¹ Each drive failed to garner the required number of signatures to put this issue on either ballot.
 - Without statewide action, the City is limited in how far we could adopt RCV (i.e., state and federal elections would likely appear on ballots very differently from municipal candidates if RCV were only adopted locally).
- Unclear if all election authorities in Kansas City have capacity to implement. Will seek their input during review process.
- Limited research on impact of RCV in practice. <https://www.ncsl.org/elections-and-campaigns/ranked-choice-voting-in-practice-implementation-considerations-for-policymakers>
- Examples from elsewhere: [New York City](#), [San Francisco](#), [Oakland](#), Minneapolis and St. Paul
- Approval voting: allows voters to vote for as many candidates as they wish and the candidate chosen the most wins
 - Overview: <https://youtu.be/db6Syys2fmE> + <https://electionscience.org/library/approval-voting/>
 - Pros: allows voters to express support for all candidates that may appeal to them, simplicity for voters (and less risk of spoiled ballots as a result) and election authorities (less reconfiguration of ballots needed)
 - Cons: some additional administrative burden in tabulating results (which can lead to delays), experiences of cities elsewhere has not shown significant impacts on candidate or voter behavior <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/in-st-louis-voters-will-get-to-vote-for-as-many-candidates-as-they-want/>
 - Approval voting has been subject of possible statewide legislative efforts but not clear any proposal will advance
 - Examples from elsewhere: St. Louis, Fargo (only two cities with this voting system)

¹ <https://clerk.kcmo.gov/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=5641961&GUID=26C05B5F-316D-4242-A297-281E128135FF> & <https://www.kcur.org/politics-elections-and-government/2022-06-18/missourians-probably-wont-get-a-chance-to-cast-ballots-on-ranked-choice-voting-proposal-this-year>

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Municipal Primary Candidates w/ > 50%		
Apr 2023		
Mayor	Quinton Lucas	81.5%
	Clay Chastain	18.5
1st At-Large	Kevin O'Neill	64.5
	Ronda Smith	20.3
	Pam Mason	15.1
3rd At-Large	Melissa Hazley	62.7
	Brandon Ellington	37.3
6th At-Large	Andrea Bough	61.4
	Jill Sasse	21.4
	Mary Nestel	17.2
1st District	Nathan Willett	67.6
	Chris Gahagan	32.4
2nd District	Wes Rogers	100
3rd District	Melissa Robinson	84.7
	Sheri Hall	15.3
4th District	Eric Bunch	54.5
	Henry Rizzo	25.3
	Crissy Dastrup	20.2
5th District	Ryana Parks-Shaw	100%
2019		
1st At-Large	Kevin O'Neill	98.3%
2nd At-Large	Teresa Loar	97.9
3rd At-Large	Brandon Ellington	56.9
	Wallace Hartsfield II	41.9
4th At-Large	Katheryn Shields	71.4
	Robert Westfall	15.3
	Austin Strassle	12.5
6th At-Large	Andrea Bough	57.8
	Stacey Johnson-Cosby	41.4
1st District	Heather Hall	97.7

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	Dan Fowler	65.6
2nd District	Kevin McEvoy	33.8
	Ryana Parks-Shaw	56.6
5th District	Edward Bell	15.2
6th District	Kevin McManus	98.7%
2015		
	S. JAMES	84.2%
	V. LEE	8.9
Mayor	C. CHASTAIN	6.2
	S. WAGNER	73.1
1st At-Large	J. ROBERTS	26.2
	T. LOAR	70.2
2nd At-Large	J. HODGES	29.4
	Q. LUCAS	51.4
	S. GORDON	11.1
	V. EVANS	11.1
	K. COLEMAN	9.5
	C. GATLIN	9.4
3rd At-Large	F. BEASLEY	6.8
	L. BARNES	72.6
5th At-Large	D. ANTHONY	21.7
6th At-Large	S. TAYLOR	97.6
2nd District	D. Fowler	100
	J. REED	57.0
	J. KENDRIX	17.5
	R. RILEY	11.1
	B. DIAL	7.5
3rd District	S. AKHTAB	6.6
	J. JUSTUS	73.7
4th District	J. FIERRO	26.0
	K. MCMANUS	69.9
	T. NASH	16.8
6th District	H. KLEIN	13.0%