

Resolution Relating to

PROPOSED CHARTER CHANGE RE RANKED CHOICE
VOTING FOR MAYOR, CITY COUNCILORS AND
SCHOOL COMMISSIONERS

RESOLUTION _____

Sponsor(s): Councilors Hanson, Pine,
Tracy

Introduced: _____

Referred to: _____

Action: _____

Date: _____

Signed by Mayor: _____

CITY OF BURLINGTON

In the year Two Thousand Nineteen

Resolved by the City Council of the City of Burlington, as follows:

- 1 That WHEREAS, under our current municipal electoral system, a candidate receiving just 40% of the vote
- 2 can be elected as mayor, city councilor, or school commissioner, resulting in candidates being elected despite
- 3 a majority of voters preferring one or more other candidates; and
- 4 WHEREAS, a ranked choice voting system requires a candidate to receive over 50% support to win;
- 5 and
- 6 WHEREAS, independent and non-major party candidates face a disadvantage under the current
- 7 election system, because voters who support those candidates are often forced to choose between voting for
- 8 their favorite candidate or voting “strategically” between the top two candidates in the race; and
- 9 WHEREAS, a ranked choice voting system encourages participation in the electoral process because
- 10 additional candidates can run without fear of “vote-splitting” or “the spoiler effect” whereby pulling away
- 11 voters from a top-tier candidate closer to their values, lesser-known candidates end up increasing the chance of
- 12 victory for a top tier candidate who is even further away from them ideologically; and
- 13 WHEREAS, a ranked choice voting system discourages negative campaigning and instead encourages
- 14 candidates to focus on their positive vision for voters, because there is an incentive to seek the second or third
- 15 round votes of another candidate's voters, and attacking that candidate would undermine that effort; and
- 16 WHEREAS, a ranked choice voting system eliminates the need for separate runoff elections, which are
- 17 very costly to the taxpayer and typically have lower voter turnout; and
- 18 WHEREAS, *Robert’s Rules of Order*, under which the Burlington City Council conducts its meetings,
- 19 recommends ranked choice voting as superior to our current “plurality” voting system; and
- 20 WHEREAS, ranked choice voting is being used by a growing number of jurisdictions, including but
- 21 not limited to Cambridge, MA, Berkeley and Oakland, CA, Minneapolis and St. Paul, MN, and Portland and
- 22 the state of Maine; and
- 23 WHEREAS, Amherst and Easthampton, MA, Benton County, OR, and New York City recently
- 24 adopted ranked choice voting, with New York City voters adopting the method by 73% this past November;
- 25 and

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26 WHEREAS, there is currently a bill in the Vermont House of Representatives, H.444, which would
27 implement ranked-choice voting in Statewide elections; and

28 WHEREAS, Burlington voters have deliberated twice on the ranked choice voting system, also known
29 as “instant runoff voting,” passing it with 64% support in 2005 and repealing it by 52% in 2010, and have not
30 had an opportunity to consider the issue again since 2010; and

31 WHEREAS, the 2010 vote to eliminate ranked choice voting was extremely close, a 303 vote margin
32 out of 7641 votes and with voters in 5 out of the 7 wards opposed to eliminating ranked choice voting in 2010;

33 NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that, for the purpose of placing a charter change question on
34 the March 3, 2020 Annual City Meeting election ballot, the City Council hereby refers the following question
35 amending City Charter § 5 to its Charter Change Committee for review and recommendation to the full City
36 Council by its December 16, 2019 meeting, in order to reintroduce ranked choice voting for the election of the
37 City’s mayor, city councilors, and school commissioners:

38 **§ 5 Election to be by ballot; method of election; runoff elections.**

39 ~~The election of the mayor, all city councilors and school commissioners shall be by ballot, and the person or~~
40 ~~persons receiving a plurality of all votes cast for any office aforesaid shall, except as hereinafter provided, be~~
41 ~~declared elected thereto. However, if no person receives at least 40 percent of all votes cast for any office~~
42 ~~aforesaid, no one shall be declared elected and a runoff election shall be held. The only candidates in the~~
43 ~~runoff election shall be the two persons receiving the greater number of votes or, in case of a tie, the persons~~
44 ~~receiving the greatest number of votes or the persons receiving the second greatest number of votes. The chief~~
45 ~~administrative officer shall within seven days warn a runoff election to be held not less than 12 days nor more~~
46 ~~than 20 days after the date of the warning. The warning shall be published in a newspaper of general~~
47 ~~circulation in the city and posted in a public place. The person or persons receiving a plurality of all the votes~~
48 ~~case in a runoff election shall be declared elected.~~

49 All elections of mayor, city councilors and school commissioners shall be by ballot, using a system of
50 ranked choice voting without a separate runoff election. The chief administrative officer shall implement a
51 ranked choice voting protocol according to these guidelines:

- 52 (1) The ballot shall give voters the option of ranking candidates in order of preference.
- 53 (2) If a candidate receives a majority (over 50 percent) of first preferences, that candidate is elected.
- 54 (3) If no candidate receives a majority of first preferences, an instant runoff re-tabulation shall be
55 performed by the presiding election officer. The instant runoff re-tabulation shall be conducted in rounds. In
56 each round, each voter’s ballot shall count as a single vote for whichever continuing candidate the voter has

57 ranked highest. The candidate with the fewest votes after each round shall be eliminated until only two
58 candidates remain, with the candidate then receiving the greatest number of votes being elected.

59 (4) The city council may adopt additional regulations consistent with this subsection to implement these
60 standards.

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63 lb/EBlackwood/Resolutions 2019/City Council – Charter Change re Ranked Choice (Instant Runoff) Voting for Mayor, City Councilors & School
64 Commissioners

65 11/25/19