



**OFFICIAL MINUTES  
CHARTER COMMISSION  
PUBLIC LISTENING SESSION  
ST. LOUIS PARK, MINNESOTA  
March 6, 2018**

**6:00 p.m. – Council Chambers, City Hall**

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**1. Call to Order**

Chair Maaske called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**2. Roll Call and Attendance**

Members Present: Maren Anderson, Jim Brimeyer, Gary Carlson, Lynne Carper, Terry Dwyer, Ken Gothberg, Sara Maaske, Andrew Rose, Erin Smith, and Henry Solmer.

Members Absent: JC Beckstrand (absence excused), Jim de Lambert (absence excused), David Dyer (absence excused), Matthew Flory

Others Present: Nancy Deno (Deputy City Manager/HR Director), Soren Mattick (City Attorney), and Melissa Kennedy (City Clerk)

**3. Public Listening Session – Ranked Choice Voting**

Chair Maaske stated the purpose of the meeting was for the Charter Commission to listen to comments from the public on the topic of Ranked Choice Voting. She explained no other discussion would take place and the Commission would not be voting or making any formal decisions at this meeting. She added that the next meeting of the Charter Commission is scheduled for March 13, 2018 at 5:30 pm in the Council Chambers. The meeting will also be broadcast live on ParkTV Channel 17. She stated in order to ensure that everyone is afforded the same opportunity to address the Commission, comments would be limited to three (3) minutes per person and those wanting to speak would be allowed to do so one time. She stated anyone not wanting to address the Commission directly or anyone with additional comments could submit comments in writing to the City Clerk.

John Olson, 2829 Yosemite Ave. S., stated he has been a resident of St. Louis Park for 59 years and he hopes St. Louis Park makes history by adopting Ranked Choice Voting to promote diversity in government. He explained he would like to see more occupational diversity on the Council and he believes that if there were more names on the ballot at a General election voters would be more apt to take a chance on a woman, a minority, or someone who works with their hands. He stated he is an electrician and he would like to see more representation from people like himself.

Jeanne Massey, Executive Director of FairVote MN, read a letter submitted by Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey. A hard copy of the letter was also provided to the Commission members. Ms. Massey then introduced a video of voters' experiences in the 2017 election in the City of Minneapolis.

Dorothy Doyle, 3041 Maryland Ave. S., stated an election is a hiring decision made by a lot of people with diverse perspectives and interests. She added that Ranked Choice Voting is better than winner-take-all because it gleans the collective wisdom of all voters. She stated when voters are allowed to rank their choices it is similar to finding the average score among the voters for each candidate. She continued that Ranked Choice Voting encourages consideration of complexity and nuance because it acknowledges that there are more than two diametrically opposed potential solutions to a problem. She stated St. Louis Park has an opportunity to lead by example.

Andi Larsen, 2831 Huntington Ave. S., stated she is very supportive of Ranked Choice Voting for many of the reasons outlined by the speakers before her. Additionally, she believes we are at a time in our history when people are deeply concerned about government and are trying to become better citizens. She stated Ranked Choice Voting provides people with a way to be more committed to voting and thoughtful about candidates. She added that she believes candidates would be more prone to being thoughtful and eloquent about their positions. She stated citizens are looking for candidates that do not reflect the extreme positions of our time and they want leaders who can bridge the gap that keeps us from finding real solutions to serious problems.

Elizabeth Glidden, 4006 Blaisdell, Minneapolis, she stated she attended to share her experiences with Ranked Choice Voting as a resident of Minneapolis, as a candidate in two elections, and as a councilmember. She explained she was first attracted to Ranked Choice Voting because she was ashamed of the low turnout in Minneapolis Primary elections. She stated she is very proud of the election officials in Minneapolis and how they have handled the implementation and administration of Ranked Choice Voting. She explained they are seeing changes in Minneapolis in terms of who is voting and who is running for office. She noted in 2017 they experienced very high voter participation and saw more women and people of color as candidates than ever before. She stated surveys show that voters seem to understand Ranked Choice Voting and take advantage of their opportunity to rank candidates when they vote.

Judith Cook, 4010 Highwood Road, stated she believes Ranked Choice Voting is easy to use and every segment of the population in St. Louis Park will be able to understand the concept. She added people seem eager to make the change. She noted another factor is majority versus plurality and voters will be more accepting of majority winners. She stated in her opinion this question does not need to go to a referendum because citizens will start to demand a referendum on every issue in the city. She asked the Charter Commission to recommend that the City Council move forward with implementing Ranked Choice Voting without a referendum.

Scott Petersen, 3716 Colorado Ave. S., stated he supports Ranked Choice Voting because he likes the idea of being able to vote for the candidate he most believes in, not necessarily the candidate that is most likely to win. He added he would like to use Ranked Choice Voting for all elections, including state and federal offices. He believes that adopting Ranked Choice Voting in St. Louis Park will spur a similar change in other cities and at the state and national levels.

Elaine Savick, 7708 W. 13 ½ St., stated she is very excited about the possibility of adopting Ranked Choice Voting and hopes it will inspire more people to vote. She explained she attended the Expert Q&A Panel and was very impressed with the information that was shared. She referenced comments made by Professor Schultz, and stated that increasing voter turnout should be a goal for anyone who cares about representative democracy. She stated eliminating Primary elections was a good idea and implementing Ranked Choice Voting is the next logical step because it promotes electing candidates with majority support and allows people to vote their conscience.

Zaylore Stout, 4942 N. 6<sup>th</sup> St., Minneapolis, stated he is a former resident, city council candidate, and member of the HRC in St. Louis Park. He explained the phrase “one man, one vote” was used by people advocating for political equality throughout various election reforms such as universal suffrage, proportional representation, elimination of plurality voting, and gerrymandering. In 1960 the phrase “one person, one vote” was used in a series of legal cases related to equal representation in state congressional districts and he would like to invoke the same for equality in St. Louis Park. He stated the electoral process has evolved over time and will continue to evolve in the future. African Americans were not eligible to vote in the United States until 1870, and women weren’t

eligible to vote until 1919. He added the right to vote means nothing without an equal access to vote, without a diverse array of candidates to vote for, or without the integrity of our electoral system. He stated even though his campaign for city council was unsuccessful he hopes his candidacy is able to inspire other diverse candidates to run for office in the future. He stated it is important to understand how St. Louis Park came to be the way it is demographically and the question of why Ranked Choice Voting is needed is a question of values. He added it is his belief that Ranked Choice Voting will counteract systemic inequalities in the voting system that frequently disenfranchises or discourages minorities from participating in the electoral process either as candidates or as voters. He stated the city's representation needs to be reflective of the population it serves.

Sue Sanger, 4717 W. 28<sup>th</sup> St., stated she initiated the city council discussion on Ranked Choice Voting several years ago because she was impressed that it incents candidates to connect with more voters. In a traditional voting system, a candidate typically identifies his or her base of supporters and then works hard to get them to show up to vote. She explained with Ranked Choice Voting candidates have to reach out to a wider range of voters to try to get those voters to select them as their second choice, if not their first choice, candidate. This means that more voters have greater contact and more opportunities to interact with the candidates to better understand who they are, ask questions, and provide feedback. This leads to voters being able to make more informed decisions at the polls. She stated from the candidate perspective, it also allows them to hear a wider variety of opinions that will hopefully shape their positions and policies. She noted this would also require candidates to spend more time reaching out to more potential voters. She added using a traditional, winner-take-all election will mean that a winner in a multi-candidate election will not necessarily receive 50% of the vote. Using Ranked Choice Voting would mean that the winner will have majority support and thus more buy-in from a greater segment of residents. She encouraged the Charter Commission to recommend that the city council adopt Ranked Choice Voting this year.

Shelley Colvin, 2811 Aquila Ave. S., stated she supports Ranked Choice Voting for many of the same reasons as those that spoke before her. She added that using this method would allow decisions to be made by a larger group of voters and would not encourage one-issue candidates.

Roger Cruze, 3953 Xenwood Ave. S., stated he is not in favor of Ranked Choice Voting and feels it is a bad idea because it does not promote diversity of thought and instead promotes the current general consensus of thought. He explained someone with a diverse thinking process ends up being at the bottom of the choices and are the first candidates eliminated. They rarely ever get to the top or a position where Ranked Choice Voting could help them. He stated it is more expensive to use a Ranked Choice Voting process than what we have. He added votes cannot be counted at the precinct level and the counting process takes longer and is more prone to fraud. He stated the counting process is so complicated it has to be done by a computer and he does not trust the security of the process.

Susan Niz, 2800 Alabama Ave. S., stated she supports Ranked Choice Voting because it can foster diverse candidates and diverse winners, encourages non-traditional candidates to run and creates more opportunities for them to win, and it also promotes voter engagement. She added that inclusion, diversity, and engagement will not be realized without putting systems in place that promote those values.

Suzann Willhite, 3905 Glenhurst Ave. S., stated she supports Ranked Choice Voting in St. Louis Park and for state and national elections because it engages citizenry and makes people feel like their vote matters.

Eilseen Knisely, 8725 W. 35<sup>th</sup> St., stated she is committed to making democracy work better. She stated she believes Ranked Choice Voting is good for voters and good for democracy. Local, national, and international surveys of democratic countries show that people are becoming increasingly cynical and less engaged in the democratic process. She stated Ranked Choice Voting will give voters more choice and a more equal voice, will promote increased diversity in representation, and provide more opportunities for underrepresented communities.

Bruce Fisher, 4359 Browndale Ave., stated he is in favor of Ranked Choice Voting for many of the reasons previously stated by others. He added eliminating the Primary election creates a potential problem in a winner-take-all General election because a candidate could be elected without a majority of the vote. He stated if Ranked Choice Voting is implemented, voters will probably find that their relationships with candidates will be much different than they are now under a traditional system.

Rod Harris, 2205 Quebec Ave. S., stated St. Louis Park has an engaged citizenry and he is in favor of making the change and seeing how it works.

Olaf Jorgenson, 2737 Alabama Ave. S., stated he supports Ranked Choice Voting because he believes it encourages quality candidates to run for office and provides more of a chance for non-traditional candidates to be elected.

Catherine Gray, 2700 France Ave. S., stated she believes Ranked Choice Voting is a big reason why Minneapolis is experiencing larger voter turnout across the city. She asked the Commission to move the policy forward to the city council without delay.

Phillipe Cunningham, Minneapolis Ward 4 Councilmember, stated Ranked Choice Voting fosters diversity in candidates. He noted in 2017, 18 of the 22 competitive races had candidates that were either women or people of color and 12 of those candidates were elected. He stated he is the first person of color elected to represent the 4<sup>th</sup> Ward in Minneapolis. He added there was a 25% increase in turnout in the 4<sup>th</sup> Ward which shows that low income, people of color, and young people can be engaged in voting. He explained as a candidate he was able to build positive relationships with voters across many bases. He stated Ranked Choice Voting is an opportunity to shift the city's local political discourse and paradigm away from divisive rhetoric being seen at the national level to a more local, community-building, collaborative culture.

Julia Davis, 2810 Xenwood, stated she wrote a letter to the Commission in support of Ranked Choice Voting and she was impressed by the questions and the answers at the Q&A Panel event, and by the attention given to how to fund the change and implement Ranked Choice Voting in St. Louis Park. She stated she understands the increased administrative needs and urged the Commission to consider the potential future benefits of making the change because it will demonstrate the city's values.

Karl Gamradt, 3347 Virginia Ave. S., stated the topic of Ranked Choice Voting is important to the people of St. Louis Park. He stated the city already eliminated Primary elections to give people more choices on the ballot, but if we don't give people more ability to choose, the extra number

of people on the ballot doesn't do any good. He added ranking multiple choices will not be difficult for people to understand.

Jim Leuthner, 3128 Florida Ave. S., stated was a candidate in Ward 3 in 2017 and he found that Ranked Choice Voting was widely supported in the community. He added he believes that more democracy is always better than less democracy and he does not want to see a candidate potentially elected with less than a majority of the vote. He stated he believes it will increase positivity and turnout in elections.

Diane Steen-Hinderlie, 2829 Yosemite Ave., stated Ranked Choice Voting is better for determining a consensus winner and measuring the overall will of the people. She added that government needs to have mechanisms in place to counteract discord and voter apathy. She stated Ranked Choice Voting would be a positive step forward for St. Louis Park.

Gail Dorfman, 4200 Forest Road, stated she strongly supports Ranked Choice Voting. She explained that St. Louis Park is a city of innovation and good government. She stated St. Louis Park is a leader in the region and Ranked Choice Voting seems like a good fit for all of the reasons outlined by those who spoke before her.

Deb Brinkman, 4327 Alabama Ave. S., thanked the Charter Commission for their time and effort in studying Ranked Choice Voting. She requested that the Commission forward a favorable recommendation to the city council. She added that St. Louis Park has the opportunity to drive positive change and ensure that winning candidates have the majority support of the voters.

#### **4. Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted by: Melissa Kennedy, City Clerk