

Miscellaneous Subcommittee

Second Report to the Charter Review Committee

March 18, 2024

Preamble

Current Text

- We the people of the City of Tacoma, a city of first class of the state of Washington, pursuant to the authority granted by the Constitution and Laws of the State of Washington, and in order to avail ourselves of all powers granted such cities and to obtain the benefits of local self-government, do hereby enact this charter.

Preamble

Objective and Rationale

- A preamble not only identifies the “source of authority” and an action to be taken...
- ...But can declare an intent, or an “expression of objectives, goals, purposes or values”
- Current Charter lacks an acknowledgement of the Puyallup Tribe
- This Charter Review allows us to propose a land acknowledgement as an act of allyship with the Puyallup people, and a recognition how their land stewardship, their forced removal, and their continued fight to live on their ancestral lands.

Preamble

Subcommittee Recommendation

- We the people of the City of Tacoma, a city of first class of the state of Washington, acknowledge that we are on the traditional homelands of the Puyallup Tribe and that the Puyallup people have lived on and stewarded these lands since the beginning of time, and continue to do so today, pursuant to the authority granted by the Constitution and Laws of the State of Washington, and in order to avail ourselves of all powers granted such cities and to obtain the benefits of local self-government, do hereby enact this charter.
- proposed insertion location links the land acknowledgement as coming from “we the people of the City of Tacoma”

Preamble

Alternative Language

- We the people of the City of Tacoma, a city of first class of the state of Washington, gratefully honor and acknowledge that we rest on the traditional lands of the Puyallup People where they make their home and speak the Twulshootseed language, pursuant to the authority granted by the Constitution and Laws of the State of Washington, and in order to avail ourselves of all powers granted such cities and to obtain the benefits of local self-government, do hereby enact this charter

Preamble

References

- <https://www.nationalcivicleague.org/model-city-charter-9th-edition-preamble>
- <https://www.puyalluptriballanguage.org/history/landacknowledgement.php>.

Employment Anti-Discrimination (6.7)

Current Text

- No applicant for employment and no appointed officer or employee shall be discriminated against in any personnel decision on the basis of religion, race, color, national origin or ancestry, political affiliation, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, familial status, honorably discharged veteran or military status, or the presence of any sensory, mental or physical handicap disability; provided, however, that affirmative action may be used to remedy prior discrimination in the employment and promotion of City appointed officers and employees.

Employment Anti-Discrimination (6.7)

Objective and Rationale

- Modernize reference: change “handicap” to “disability”
- Recommend regular updates to relevant code language

Employment Anti-Discrimination (6.7)

Subcommittee Recommendation

- No applicant for employment and no appointed officer or employee shall be discriminated against in any personnel decision on the basis of religion, race, color, national origin or ancestry, political affiliation, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, familial status, honorably discharged veteran or military status, or the presence of any sensory, mental or physical **handicap disability**; provided, however, that affirmative action may be used to remedy prior discrimination in the employment and promotion of City appointed officers and employees. The City Council shall periodically review, and amend as appropriate, the antidiscrimination ordinances applicable to City applicants and employees.

Employment Anti-Discrimination (6.7)

Alternative: Doesn't add the periodic review

- No applicant for employment and no appointed officer or employee shall be discriminated against in any personnel decision on the basis of religion, race, color, national origin or ancestry, political affiliation, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, familial status, honorably discharged veteran or military status, or the presence of any sensory, mental or physical **handicap disability**; provided, however, that affirmative action may be used to remedy prior discrimination in the employment and promotion of City appointed officers and employees.

Employment Anti-Discrimination (6.7)

Other Concerns and Recommendation

- Original intent was to consider adding “caste” as a protected class
 - Seattle successfully added caste protections to its municipal code, but legislation passed by both chambers of the California Legislature was vetoed by California’s Governor due to concerns raised by the Hindi community
 - Subcommittee couldn’t determine whether other local committees had proposed this to City Council already as a code amendment
 - Subcommittee recommends this needs to be explored further as a “non-charter” recommendation to Council
- Subcommittee also recommends a comprehensive review of the municipal code to eliminate inconsistencies in anti-discrimination language

WHY AMEND THE CHARTER FOR

RANKED- CHOICE VOTING





SPECIAL THANKS

- Lisa Ayrault- Executive Director, FairVote Washington
 - Nilu Jenks- Political Director, FairVote Washington
 - Kyle Haugh- Pierce County Elections Manager
 - Linda Farmer- Pierce County Auditor
- 

↓ OUR APPROACH ↓

1.

Democracy ensures
transparency and
accountability

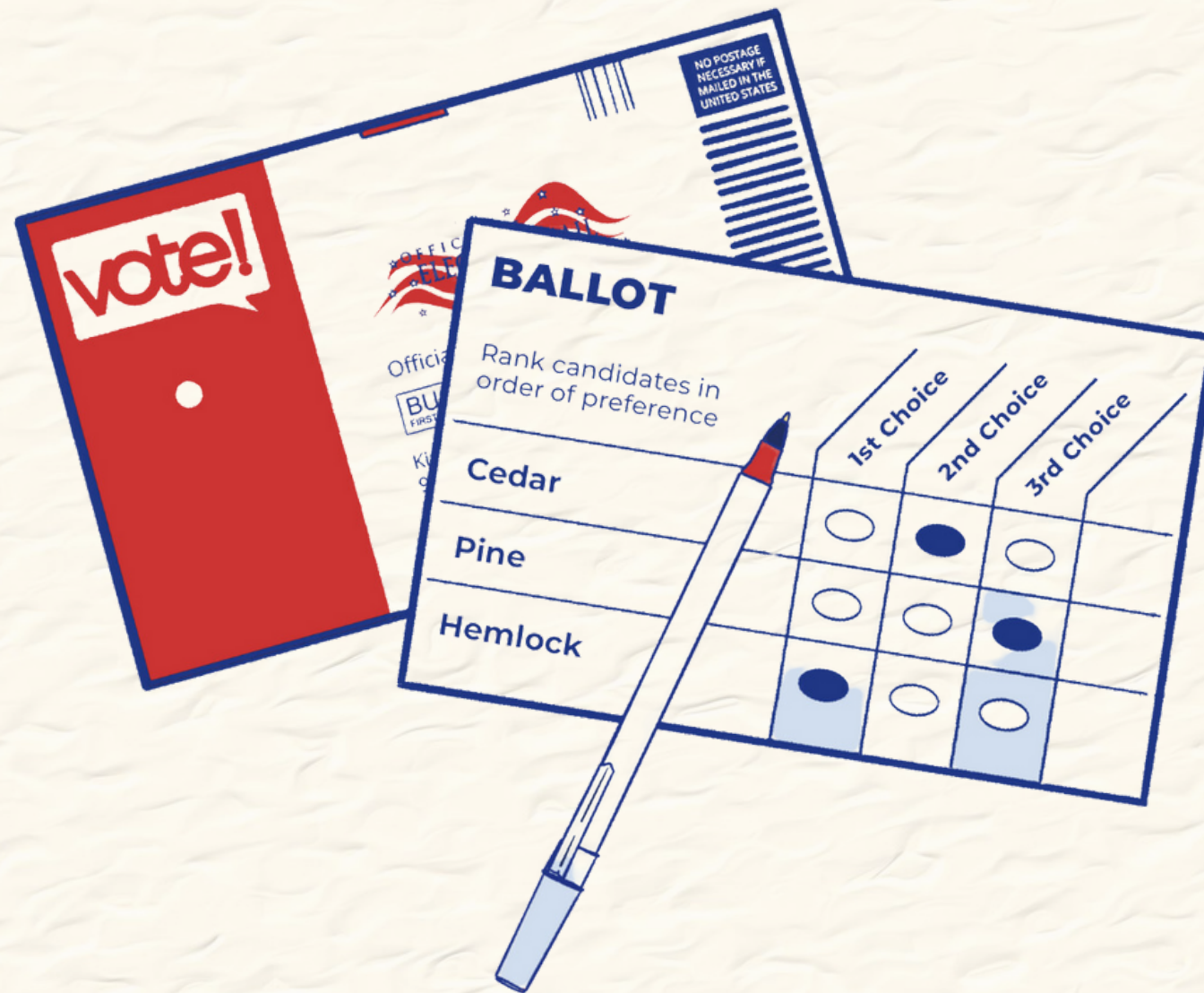
2.

Tacoma's charter
should reflect
Tacoma's goals & values

3.

Tacoma adapts and
leads

WHAT IS RANKED CHOICE VOTING?



- Vote for your favorite, just like always
- Then rank your backups, if you want

MEET THE CANDIDATES



PIERCE COUNTY & RCV

- **Pierce County's Charter Commission submitted Charter Amendment No. 3 to the voters to adopt Rank Choice Voting**
 - **Approved by the voters of Pierce County in November 2006**
 - **52.93%**
 - **Eliminated the Pick-a-Party Primary for these offices**
- **Pierce County Auditor implemented instant runoff voting for certain county offices by July, 2008**
 - **Executive** - **Sheriff**
 - **Assessor-Treasurer** - **Auditor**
 - **County Council Members**
 - **Excludes Judges and Prosecuting Attorney**

PC- IMPLEMENTATION

- **Hired RCV staff and a consultant to study and develop a project plan**
- **An internal legal review was conducted of the newly passed amendments and the changes to the charter**
- **Consulted numerous times with our tabulation vendor**
 - **Product availability and timeline**
 - **Software parameters**
- **Blue Ribbon Review Panel**
 - **Provided feedback and input regarding new charter rules and implementation**
 - **Major topics included:**
 - **Filing for Office**
 - **Results Reporting**
 - **Voting Options**
 - **Voter Education**
 - **Presented 11 action items to the County Council**

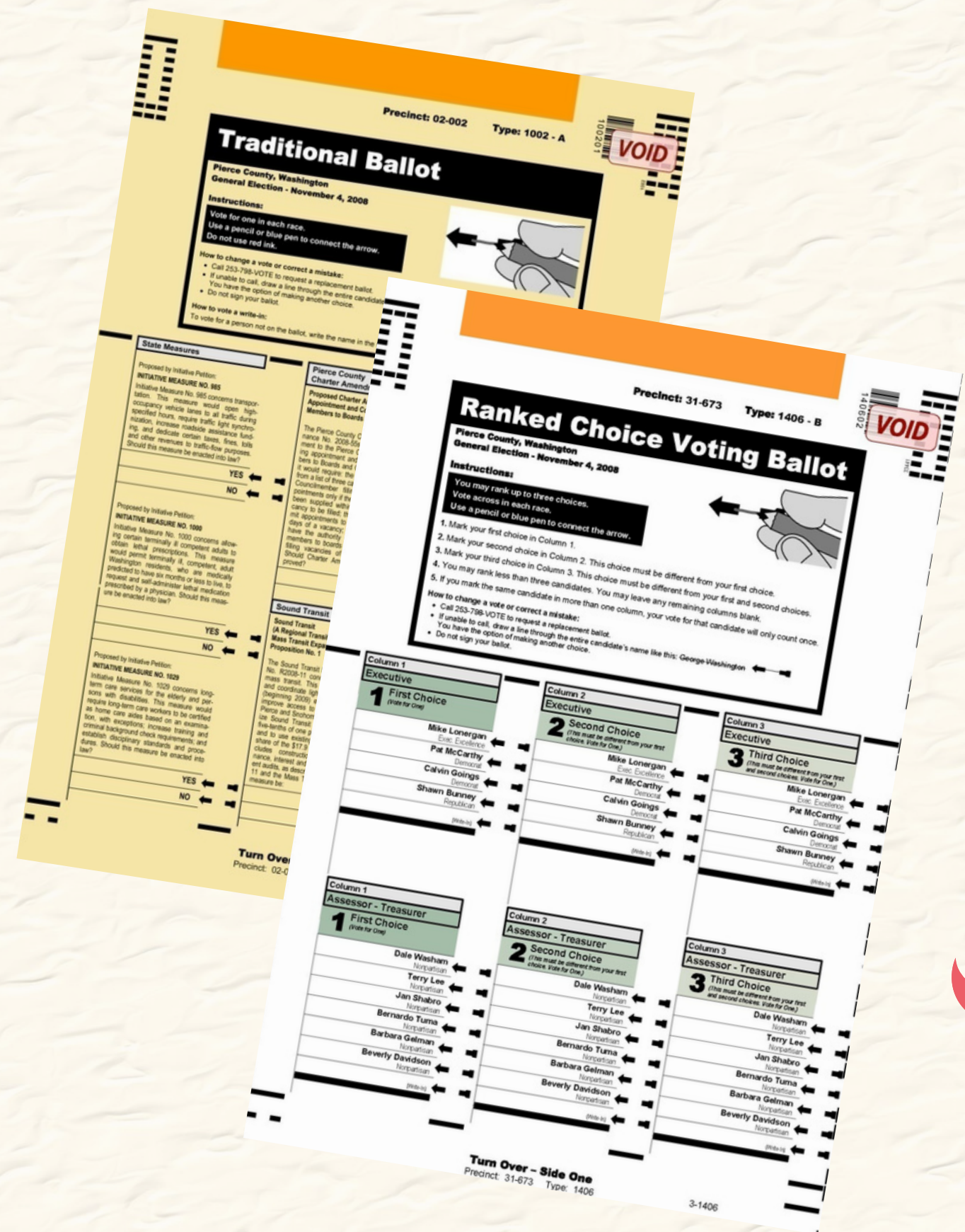
PC- THE BALLOT

- Pierce County Voters received two ballot cards

- Traditional Card
- RCV Card

- The Ranked Choice Voting Ballot card allowed voters to rank up to three candidates in each race.

- Executive
- Assessor – Treasurer
- Sheriff
- County Council



PIERCE COUNTY & RCV

15 years ago, the Pierce County Council passed a Charter Amendment to repeal RCV

Why?

- 1. Top Two primaries eliminated the case for RCV: Voters passed RCV in large part to avoid pick-a-party primaries for county offices. But then the courts restored Top Two primaries, and the main reason for RCV was gone.**
- 2. Implementation was costly: The county had to write new rules, purchase new equipment, and print and count double the usual number of ballots.**
- 3. Partisans weren't happy: Political party players didn't like the change and jumped at the chance to repeal it.**
- 4. Unfortunate winner: The year that Pierce County used RCV was also the first year several county offices became nonpartisan, giving Dale Washam, a perennial candidate with strong name recognition, an advantage. He was the first place candidate in every round, meaning he most likely would have won anyway, but for many voters, his astonishing incompetence stigmatized RCV.**

TACOMA & RCV

How Tacoma will be different:

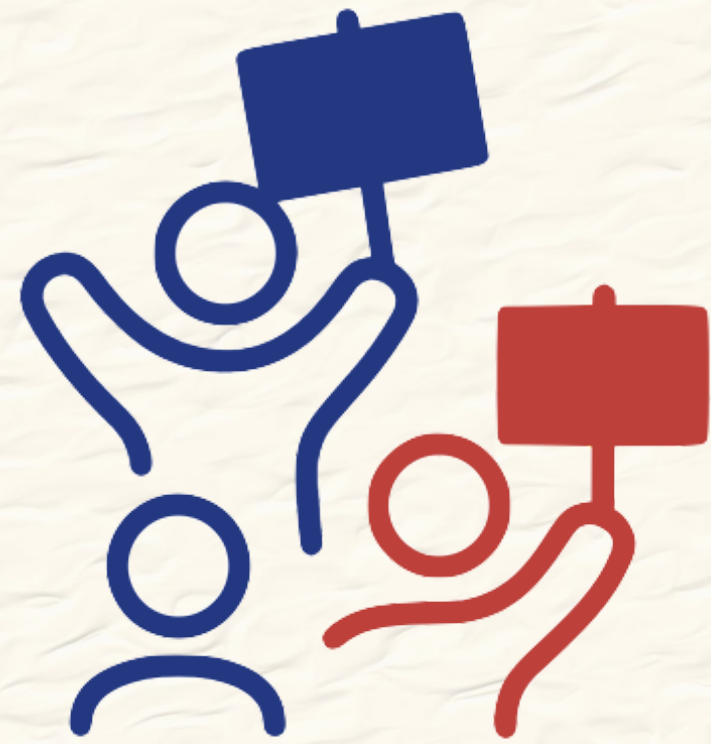
1. Cost-

- a. Use a single ballot with both RCV and other races, (like Burlington, Vermont).
- b. Utilize existing RCV resources for implementation
- c. Clear Ballot- the same vendor as King County and Portland (RCV cities)
- d. Future savings if the primary is eliminated

2. Tacoma encourages more competitive races from a diverse and inclusive candidate pool.

- a. Greater chance for a quality representative winner
- b. A challenge to incumbents, not an ousting

RCV EMPOWERS VOTERS



- Vote for who you really want, then rank your backup choices. No more pressure to vote for the lesser of two evils.

MORE POSITIVE CAMPAIGNS



- Vote for me first, them second
- Discourages Negative Campaigning



S Oakland Candidates Endorse Each Other With RCV

Share

WHY AMEND THE CHARTER FOR

RANKED-CHOICE VOTING

Watch on YouTube

A graphic showing three hands holding ballot papers with checkmarks. The text 'RANKED-CHOICE VOTING' is prominently displayed in blue and red. A 'Watch on YouTube' button is at the bottom.

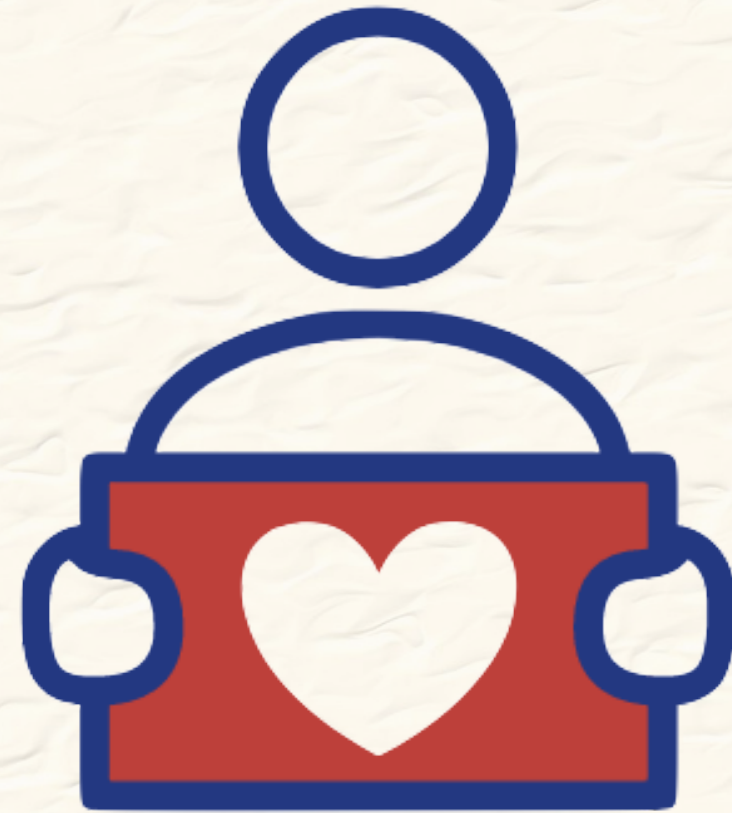
IMPROVES REPRESENTATION



 **The 31 Women of the 2022 NYC Council** 

With RCV more newcomers and non-traditional candidates run, so governments can better reflect their communities.

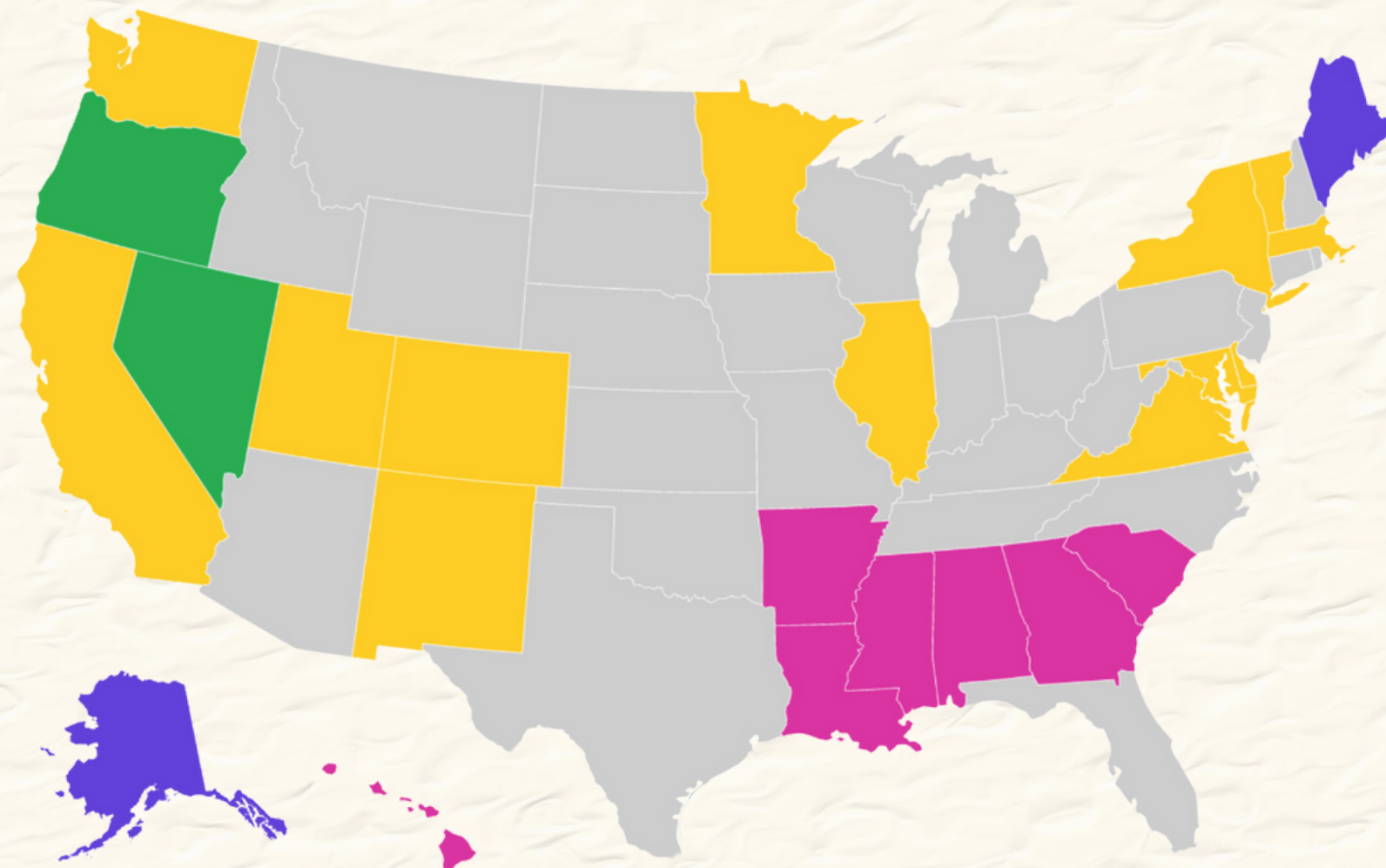
VOTE YOUR VALUES



- **RCV highlights the values and issues that are important to voters**

VOTERS LIKE RCV

■ ALL STATEWIDE OR FEDERAL ELECTIONS ■ SOME LOCAL ELECTIONS ■ SPECIFIC INSTANCES ■ NOT USED
■ ON THE BALLOT IN 2024



- RCV is the fastest-growing non-partisan voting reform in the U.S.
- The vast majority of voters who try RCV say it's simple and they want to keep using it.

RCV & THE CHARTER

Section 5.3 – ~~Before the general municipal election to be held in the year 1975, the Council shall divide~~ the city into five election districts so that each district shall comprise as nearly as possible one-fifth of the population of the City; provided, that the territory comprised in any voting precinct of such district shall remain compact and shall not be divided by the lines of said district. The Council shall change the lines of the election districts, in the time and manner as prescribed by state law. The City Clerk shall designate, by consecutive numbers commencing with number one and ending with number five, all positions on the Council to be nominated by district and shall further designate, by consecutive numbers commencing with number six and ending with number eight, all positions on the Council to be elected at large, and all of such designations shall thereafter be permanent and the positions so designated shall thereafter be considered as separate offices for election purposes.

The qualified electors of each election district, and they only, shall nominate from among their number candidates for the office of Council Member of such election district to be voted for at the following general election.

The qualified electors of the City shall nominate from among their number candidates for the office of Council Member at large to be voted for at the following general election.

~~The two candidates having the highest vote totals for each Council position shall be certified as having been nominated and shall run for that position in the general election.~~ Council Members nominated by district shall be elected by all of the qualified voters of the district, ~~and the person receiving the highest number of votes for the office of Council Member for the position for which they are a candidate shall be declared duly elected.~~

Council Members nominated at large shall be elected by all of the qualified voters of the City. ~~The person receiving the highest number of votes for the office of Council Member for the position for which they are a candidate shall be declared duly elected.~~ On expiration of the present term of office, Council positions nominated by Council district shall be elected by the qualified voters in that district.

In the event any Council Member nominated from a district shall, after election, move or reside outside the district from which the Council Member was nominated, the Council Member shall, by virtue thereof, be deemed to have forfeited their office, and their seat shall become vacant and shall be filled in the manner provided herein for the filling of vacancies.

RCV & THE CHARTER

Section 5.3 – **The Council divides** the city into five election districts so that each district shall comprise as nearly as possible one-fifth of the population of the City; provided, that the territory comprised in any voting precinct of such district shall remain compact and shall not be divided by the lines of said district. The Council shall change the lines of the election districts, in the time and manner as prescribed by state law.

The City Clerk shall designate, by consecutive numbers commencing with number one and ending with number five, all positions on the Council to be nominated by district and shall further designate, by consecutive numbers commencing with number six and ending with number eight, all positions on the Council to be elected at large, and all of such designations shall thereafter be permanent and the positions so designated shall thereafter be considered as separate offices for election purposes.

The qualified electors of each election district, and they only, shall nominate from among their number candidates for the office of Council Member of such election district to be voted for at the following general election.

The qualified electors of the City shall nominate from among their number candidates for the office of Council Member at large to be voted for at the following general election.


City Councilors, the Mayor are elected in the general election, except as otherwise provided in this Charter, using ranked choice voting. Ranked choice voting means an election method in which voters rank candidates for an office or offices in order of the voter's preference and ballots are counted in rounds. Council Members nominated by district shall be elected by all of the qualified voters of the district. Council Members nominated at large shall be elected by all of the qualified voters of the City.

On expiration of the present term of office, Council positions nominated by Council district shall be elected by the qualified voters in that district.

In the event any Council Member nominated from a district shall, after election, move or reside outside the district from which the Council Member was nominated, the Council Member shall, by virtue thereof, be deemed to have forfeited their office, and their seat shall become vacant and shall be filled in the manner provided herein for the filling of vacancies.

WHAT REALLY HAPPENED WITH INSTANT RUNOFF VOTING IN PIERCE COUNTY, WASHINGTON?

Plus, six lessons electoral reformers can learn from this Cascadian county.

 This article was written 6+ years ago



Author: **Kristin Eberhard**

(@KristinEberhard) on September 19, 2017 at 6:30 am

This article is part of the series [Archaic Election Methods Hurt Democracy](#)

Those few members of the public in Washington, and even Oregon, who know anything about ranked-choice voting (RCV) have often heard, vaguely, that it didn't work in Pierce County a decade ago. But they aren't really sure what happened, and may draw the wrong lessons. This article sets the story straight about what really happened and what lessons electoral reformers can learn.

In 2006, voters in Pierce County, which surrounds Tacoma, Washington, voted to use ranked ballots in county elections. But in 2009, after just two elections with the new ballots, they reversed themselves and voted to repeal RCV. What went wrong with this electoral reform experiment in the Pacific Northwest?

- 1) Top Two primaries eliminated the case for RCV:** Voters passed RCV in large part to avoid pick-a-party primaries for county offices. But then the courts restored Top Two primaries, and the main reason for RCV was gone.
- 2) Implementation was costly:** The county had to write new rules, purchase new equipment, and print and count double the usual number of ballots.
- 3) Partisans weren't happy:** Political party players didn't like the change and jumped at the chance to repeal it.

4) **Unfortunate winner:** The year that Pierce County used RCV was also the first year several county offices became nonpartisan, giving Dale Washam, a perennial candidate with strong name recognition, an advantage. He was the first place candidate in every round, meaning he most likely would have won anyway, but for many voters, his astonishing incompetence stigmatized RCV.

Read on to find more details about what happened in Pierce County, and six lessons reformers can learn.

What really happened #1: Pierce County voted for RCV to escape pick-a-party primaries, but then Top Two primaries got implemented statewide

From 1935 through 2003, Washington voters enjoyed the right to vote in every primary, regardless of party, through the “**blanket primary**.” In a **blanket primary**, voters can vote for any candidate regardless of party, and the top candidate from each party advances to the general election. The two major political parties brought legal challenges against blanket primaries in 1935, 1978, and were finally successful in 2003 when the Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals held that Washington’s blanket primary was unconstitutional because it violated political parties’ right to free association. That is, blanket primaries gave Democrats a voice in picking Republican general-election candidates and vice versa, something only party members should have. In 2004, the state legislature passed a “**pick-a-party primary**” bill requiring voters to choose one party and only vote for that party in partisan primaries.

Washington voters **resented the constraints** of pick-a-party primaries and swiftly rebelled. **In 2004**, voters passed **Initiative 872**, a measure that would replace pick-a-party primaries with Top Two primaries, a solution that allowed voters to ignore parties without violating the constitution in the way blanket primaries did. Top Two allows all voters to vote in a single primary and the top two vote-getters advance to the general ballot, no matter their party. But a federal court **struck it down before it could be used**, so voters were forced to use pick-a-party primaries in 2004.

Pierce County voters chafing under pick-a-party primaries saw an escape option in Ranked Choice Voting (RCV). In a single high-turnout election in November, voters could rank any candidates they wanted, regardless of party. Votes would be counted in rounds, candidates with the fewest votes would be eliminated (just as they would have been in a primary) and votes re-counted until one candidate won a majority of active ballots. In 2006, the charter review commission narrowly agreed to put RCV on the ballot. The

campaign told voters to vote yes on the amendment to get rid of pick-a-party primaries. Pierce County voters [embraced this message](#) and voted to [pass the charter amendment](#). The amendment eliminated the primary for county councilors, executive, sheriff, auditor, and assessor-treasurer. Starting with the November 2008 general election, parties could indicate the candidates they endorsed and voters could rank all candidates, regardless of party.

But Pierce County's escape from pick-a-party primaries was moot before it began. In 2008, the Supreme Court of the United States reversed the lower court and [upheld Washington's Top Two primaries initiative](#). The state implemented it in the 2008 primary, the same year that Pierce implemented Instant Runoff Voting. With pick-a-party primaries gone, Pierce voters didn't know why they needed RCV.

What really happened #2: Pierce County paid more because many RCV resources had not yet been developed

The county had to print two ballots

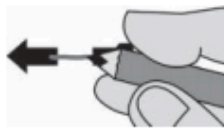
Instead of printing a single ballot with both RCV and other races, like [Burlington, Vermont, did in 2006](#), Pierce County's election machines vendor, Sequoia, claimed it had to print two separate ballots—one for the county's ranked elections and another for all other elections (sample below). This increased printing costs, mailing costs, and polling place costs. It also annoyed voters, who had to deal with two separate ballots, and had to wait in longer lines at polling places as poll workers processed double the necessary number of ballots.

Ranked Choice Voting Ballot

Pierce County, Washington
 General Election - November 4, 2008

Instructions:

You may rank up to three choices.
 Vote across in each race.
 Use a pencil or blue pen to connect the arrow.



1. Mark your first choice in Column 1.
2. Mark your second choice in Column 2. This choice must be different from your first choice.
3. Mark your third choice in Column 3. This choice must be different from your first and second choices.
4. You may rank less than three candidates. You may leave any remaining columns blank.
5. If you mark the same candidate in more than one column, your vote for that candidate will only count once.

How to change a vote or correct a mistake:

- Call 253-798-VOTE to request a replacement ballot.
- If unable to call, draw a line through the entire candidate's name like this: ~~George Washington~~ ←
- You have the option of making another choice.
- Do not sign your ballot.

<p>Column 1 Executive</p> <p>1 First Choice <small>(Vote for One)</small></p> <p>Mike Lonergan <small>Exec. Excellence</small></p> <p>Pat McCarthy <small>Democrat</small></p> <p>Calvin Golings <small>Democrat</small></p> <p>Shawn Bunney <small>Republican</small></p> <p><small>(Write-In)</small></p>	<p>Column 2 Executive</p> <p>2 Second Choice <small>(This must be different from your first choice. Vote for One.)</small></p> <p>Mike Lonergan <small>Exec. Excellence</small></p> <p>Pat McCarthy <small>Democrat</small></p> <p>Calvin Golings <small>Democrat</small></p> <p>Shawn Bunney <small>Republican</small></p> <p><small>(Write-In)</small></p>	<p>Column 3 Executive</p> <p>3 Third Choice <small>(This must be different from your first and second choices. Vote for One.)</small></p> <p>Mike Lonergan <small>Exec. Excellence</small></p> <p>Pat McCarthy <small>Democrat</small></p> <p>Calvin Golings <small>Democrat</small></p> <p>Shawn Bunney <small>Republican</small></p> <p><small>(Write-In)</small></p>
<p>Column 1 Assessor - Treasurer</p> <p>1 First Choice <small>(Vote for One)</small></p> <p>Dale Washam <small>Nonpartisan</small></p> <p>Terry Lee <small>Nonpartisan</small></p> <p>Jan Shabro <small>Nonpartisan</small></p> <p>Bernardo Tuma <small>Nonpartisan</small></p> <p>Barbara Gelman <small>Nonpartisan</small></p> <p>Beverly Davidson <small>Nonpartisan</small></p> <p><small>(Write-In)</small></p>	<p>Column 2 Assessor - Treasurer</p> <p>2 Second Choice <small>(This must be different from your first choice. Vote for One.)</small></p> <p>Dale Washam <small>Nonpartisan</small></p> <p>Terry Lee <small>Nonpartisan</small></p> <p>Jan Shabro <small>Nonpartisan</small></p> <p>Bernardo Tuma <small>Nonpartisan</small></p> <p>Barbara Gelman <small>Nonpartisan</small></p> <p>Beverly Davidson <small>Nonpartisan</small></p> <p><small>(Write-In)</small></p>	<p>Column 3 Assessor - Treasurer</p> <p>3 Third Choice <small>(This must be different from your first and second choices. Vote for One.)</small></p> <p>Dale Washam <small>Nonpartisan</small></p> <p>Terry Lee <small>Nonpartisan</small></p> <p>Jan Shabro <small>Nonpartisan</small></p> <p>Bernardo Tuma <small>Nonpartisan</small></p> <p>Barbara Gelman <small>Nonpartisan</small></p> <p>Beverly Davidson <small>Nonpartisan</small></p> <p><small>(Write-In)</small></p>

Ranked choice voting ballot by Pierce County Elections (license)

The Auditor had to pay for things she would not have to do today

To figure out how to implement RCV, the Auditor's office hired two new staff, paid an election consultant, conducted an internal legal review, formed a blue ribbon panel, presented 11 actions to the County Council and four charter amendments to voters. Thankfully, all that would be easier for a jurisdiction implementing RCV today. Today's Auditor could just look at the Ranked Choice Voting Resource Center's resources on [how to conduct an RCV election](#), including how to [write the statute](#), how to [negotiate with the vendor](#), and [best practices](#) for designing the ballot and educating poll workers and voters.

The Auditor also hired 114 people to transport the 52,000 ballots that were cast at polling places in 2008. Today, all Oregon and Washington voters mail

their ballots to the county so there would be no need to transport ballots in a city or county election.

Finally, the Auditor had to pay for new equipment and for the county's equipment vendor to write a new software module to count ranked ballots. Today, Washington state has certified **four systems that are RCV-ready (can already count an RCV ballot) or RCV-capable (can count an RCV ballot with a software module)**. Nine of Washington's 39 counties use RCV-ready or -capable equipment, or hardware that could use certified RCV-ready software. Although costs will vary by county and system, RCV software modules now cost on the order of \$25,000 and a new software system costs on the order of \$200,000. Another 26 Washington counties have outdated equipment that may need to be replaced soon. When they are spending money on new equipment, those counties could simply choose certified RCV-ready equipment.

However, she probably overspent

Auditor Pat McCarthy, who **opposed RCV** during the 2006 campaign, spent an eye-popping \$1.6 million to implement RCV in 2008. She did not detail how much she spent on new equipment, the RCV software module, and voter education, but those three costs together added up to **\$857,025**. Comparing to recent **estimated costs** for RCV implementation in the **State of Maine**, new equipment would cost **\$75,000, an RCV module \$25,000, and voter outreach \$50,000** for a grand total of \$150,000. As another point of comparison, the city of Cary, North Carolina spent just **\$10,000** to successfully educate its 110,000 residents about RCV. McCarthy's ongoing costs of **\$769,773** for printing and mailing the additional ballots, and hiring and training staff also seem very high. Maine, with twice as many voters as Pierce County, estimates printing costs of \$230,000 for an additional RCV ballot.

In the 2008 RCV election, McCarthy was elected to County Executive. In 2009, a committee appointed Republican Jan Shabro, who was **promising to repeal RCV**, to fill the post. Shabro implemented the 2009 RCV election, and appears to have incurred similarly high costs.

She didn't count the savings

Neither Pat McCarthy nor Jan Shabro counted any savings from eliminating unnecessary primary races. It costs money to run a primary race, even if the costs are not a budget line for the county. Cities and Ports reimburse counties for each item on the ballot, and if their reimbursements are a reasonable facsimile of the additional cost to the county for each ballot item, we can estimate that **each primary race cost Pierce County more than \$300,000**, so eliminating four primary races saved the county more than \$1.2 million in 2008. That's almost enough to offset their bloated RCV

budget, and enough to *save* the county hundreds of thousands of dollars in every subsequent RCV election after the one-time costs were paid.

She didn't tell voters why they were using RCV

Because they were seeing two new voting systems at once (RCV and Top Two primaries) voters

needed context on the reasons for using them. The voter's pamphlet could have explained that RCV eliminated unnecessary primaries while still giving voters a chance to voice their opinion about more than one candidate.

Instead, the explanation was **mechanical and confusing**.

Eliminating four primary races saved the county more than \$1.2 million in 2008.



Voters didn't like the double ballots nor the costs

Perhaps due to the confusion of starting two new systems—Top Two primaries and RCV—at the same time, or because of the cumbersome second ballot, or because they had heard about the exorbitant costs, voters did not like RCV. The Auditor sent a survey to 440,000 voters and received nearly 91,000 back, with 66 percent saying they did not like the new Ranked Choice Voting system, and just 34 percent saying they did like it. This was an unusual result—**every other poll of RCV voters** shows a majority support the system. Some of the negative comments were:

- “Don't waste paper.”
- “A useless endeavor and a waste of money.”
- “Too complicated.”
- “Keep the voting simple. Stop trying to fix what isn't broken.”

What really happened #3: RCV worked

It attracted more candidates and eliminated the wasteful primary

All eight of the ranked races in **2008** and 2009 attracted at least two candidates, and five attracted three or more. In the races with more than two candidates, the ranked ballots did their job. For example, in the **2009 race for County Auditor**, Independent Julie Anderson had 49.9 percent of first-rankings and Republican Jan Shabro had 41 percent. Once Will Baker was eliminated, Anderson won with a clear majority—56 percent. Ranked voting efficiently found a majority winner in a single high-turnout election.

OUR WORK IS MADE POSSIBLE BY THE GENEROSITY OF PEOPLE LIKE YOU!

Thanks to **Mary Vogel** for supporting a sustainable Northwest.

[Donate Today](#)

This was an improvement on previous Pierce County elections. In 2004 and 2006, only one of the ten county elections attracted more than two candidates, four of them had only one candidate, and another had only Democrats in the primary, so general election voters saw only one option. The county paid to run unnecessary primary elections when only one or two candidates were on the ballot to begin with, and voters often had no choices.

It allowed candidates with less money to win

In 2004, in five of six county races the candidate who outspent their opponent won. In the 2008 RCV elections, only three of the six biggest spenders won.

But partisans weren't happy

The 2008 RCV race elected Democrat Pat McCarthy to become Washington's first female County Executive. In the four-candidate race, Republican Shawn Bunney had 35 percent of first-ranked votes and Democrat Pat McCarthy had 26 percent, but when the two less popular candidates were eliminated and the votes (instantly) recounted, McCarthy won with a majority of active ballots. Republicans weren't happy that their candidate, after initially being in the lead, lost. Some Democrats may have been disappointed that Calvin Goings, the Democrat with stronger party support, lost.

Dale Washam, after building name recognition for years, won in a newly nonpartisan race

Dale Washam, a nightmare for Pierce County, won the Assessor-Treasurer position in 2008. The position was listed as nonpartisan for the first time, creating an advantage for the candidate with the most personal name recognition since voters had no party information to guide them. Washam built name recognition for more than a decade by regularly running for office and maintaining permanent highway signs with his name. He ran in 1994 and 1996, and in 2000, 2002, and 2004 he came close to winning, getting more than 40 percent of the vote for Assessor-Treasurer or Auditor. Washam was listed first of six candidates for Assessor-Treasurer, none of whom did much campaigning.

RCV wasn't the reason Washam won—he was in first place in every round of counting, so he definitely would have won under plurality voting and most

likely would have won with a Top Two primary (unless his opponent stepped up and ran an effective campaign to discredit Washam between the primary and general).

Nonetheless, some voters blamed ranked choice voting for Washam's win.

What really happened #4: power players pushed for repeal

In 2009, a majority of County Council (all members of the two major political parties) placed an RCV repeal initiative on the ballot. Voters, fed up with the double ballots and added expense and hearing a stream of criticism from political leaders, overwhelmingly voted to repeal RCV and use the newly-instated Top Two primaries to elect county officers.

The real lessons from Pierce County

Now that we've got the facts straight, Pacific Northwesterners looking for a better democracy can think clearly about the real lessons learned, and how the Pierce County experiment can inform future campaigns.

Lesson 1: Reform needs to provide big, lasting benefits that voters care about

Voters cared about getting rid of pick-a-party primaries. But once the courts reinstated Top Two primaries, voters didn't know why they should support RCV.

Future reformers should first identify the big problems reforms will solve for years to come. Then, make sure the campaign has the allies and resources to keep letting voters know about those benefits, year after year.

Lesson 2: Work with the Auditor and the major parties in advance

The two major parties often oppose RCV, seeing it as a threat to their domination of American politics. They can then wield power to kill reforms, as both Democrats and Republicans in the Auditor's office and the County Council did in Pierce County. Even if she isn't motivated by party affiliations, if the Auditor feels she doesn't have the resources she needs to write the rules and implement the system well, she may oppose it.

Electoral reform advocates might be able to avoid another Pierce County experience by reaching out to local major party players in advance to find allies who will support reforms, or neutralize opposition. Reformers should also reach out to auditors to familiarize them with the resources available to help smoothly implement RCV without re-creating the wheel.

Lesson 3: Use best practices when implementing RCV

The RCV Resource Center offers [best practices](#) advice on statutory language, ballot design, voter outreach, and more. Other Pacific Northwest jurisdictions can avoid unnecessary double ballots and wasted implementation costs by using these resources.

Lesson 4: Avoid big costs

Reformers in jurisdictions with outdated equipment may want to avoid forcing equipment upgrades solely for RCV elections. Instead, they could require that any new equipment be RCV-ready. That way the costs of RCV-readiness are built into necessary updates, instead of being an extra cost that can be pinned on RCV alone. A county without the necessary equipment could contract with a nearby equipped county to count RCV ballots until the county upgrades its own equipment.

Lesson 5: Count the savings

When implementing reform in cities and ports, advocates should point to the clear savings for taxpayers from eliminating primary elections. Because counties don't have a budget line item for primary election costs, the way cities and ports do, it will be important for advocates to calculate and advertise the county's savings from eliminating a primary election.

Lesson 6: Keep working even after reform passes

Just like we learned from [Burlington, Vermont](#), Pierce County teaches reformers that it's not over when the ballot initiative passes. Pierce County had some remarkably dedicated backers, like Kelly Haughton who wrote a [regular blog](#) about RCV, but the reform needed a bigger groundswell of support. Reformers need to keep working with the Auditor and the two major parties to head off sabotage, and keep working with voters to remind them [why they passed RCV in the first place](#), what [problems it solves](#), and how it is working.

LIKE WHAT YOU'RE READING? GET OUR LATEST DEMOCRACY RESEARCH RIGHT TO YOUR INBOX.

Previous article in series:

« [Multi-Winner Districts Could Make It Easier to Run for Office in Portland](#)

Next article in series:

[How to End Gerrymandering for Good](#)
»



Kristin Eberhard

Fellow

RECOMMENDED READING



On Even-Year Elections, Trust Voters—and Evidence

February 26, 2024



Lawmakers Across the Political Spectrum Should Help More Alaskans Vote

February 19, 2024



Washingtonians May Get a Democracy Upgrade in 2024

January 16, 2024



Sightline Online

Q&A:

Debriefing the WA Legislative Session

Wednesday,
March 27, 2024
at 4pm PT



With Ranked Choice Voting Coming to Washington State, It's Time to Coordinate Rollout

January 9, 2024



One Year In and One Year Out: An Update on Portland Charter Reform

December 19, 2023

For press inquiries and interview requests, please contact [Serena Larkin](#)

Sightline Institute is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization and does not support, endorse, or oppose any candidate or political party.

*You can power us forward on sustainable solutions. **Make a donation to Sightline now.***

Tagged in: [Democracy Reform](#), [Instant Runoff Voting](#), [Pierce County](#), [RCV](#), [What is ranked choice voting?](#)


© 2024 Sightline Institute. All Rights Reserved.

A Strong Council through Ranked Choice Voting


During our committee meetings, we have repeatedly heard that while the form of government is important, it is equally important to ensure the people fulfilling the roles in any form of government are qualified to perform their duties and have the will to listen and address residents' concerns. Reforming our elections and voting process to encourage voter turnout and an increased candidate pool by including ranked choice voting in the charter is necessary to achieve this goal.

What is Ranked Choice Voting (RCV)?

RCV is straightforward: Voters have the option to rank candidates in order of preference: first, second, third and so forth. Ballots that do not help voters' top choices win count for their next choice.

It works in all types of elections and supports more representative outcomes. RCV means better choices, better campaigns, and better representation. That's why it's the fastest-growing nonpartisan voting reform in the nation.- fairvote.org  [Ranked Choice Voting Facts](#)

Broadly speaking, the ranked-choice voting process unfolds as follows for single-winner elections:

1. Voters rank the candidates for a given office by preference on their ballots.
2. If a candidate wins an outright majority of first-preference votes (i.e., 50 percent plus one), he or she will be declared the winner.
3. If, on the other hand, no candidates win an outright majority of first-preference votes, the candidate with the fewest first-preference votes is eliminated.
4. All first-preference votes for the failed candidate are eliminated, and second-preference choices on these ballots are then counted as first-preference.
5. A new tally is conducted to determine whether any candidate has won an outright majority of the ballots.
6. The process is repeated until a candidate wins a majority of votes cast.- [Ballotpedia.com](https://ballotpedia.com)
 [Beyond the Headlines: What is ranked-choice voting?](#)

RCV empowers Tacoma residents to elect a council that truly serves them.

Benefits of RCV

1. Increases Voter Participation - When voters are able to fully express their preferences, voter turnout also tends to increase. A study has shown that turnout in elections using RCV increased by ten percent, even after accounting for other factors.
2. Saves Time and Money -RCV saves time and money for jurisdictions by eliminating the need for costly runoff elections. Runoff elections are not only costly but also less representative. Runoff elections tend to have low and unbalanced turnout resulting in the selection of candidates who may not actually reflect voter preferences.
3. Avoids the Spoiler Effect - With RCV, voters do not have to worry about strategically voting for candidates that they do not like in order to avoid "throwing away" or splitting their vote. If

candidate B is the voter's favorite choice, she can vote for B without fear that her vote will be "wasted."

One [study](#) found that RCV is superior to plurality voting with respect to the spoiler effect— voting with the fear of wasting or throwing away your vote.

4. Reduces Negative Campaign Tactics- RCV forces candidates to abandon negative campaign tactics because candidates not only need the first choice votes of their supporters, but also the second and third choice votes from voters who prefer other candidates. A study has shown that jurisdictions with RCV have experienced friendlier campaigns and majority support in the cities using it.
5. Equitable Representation- Multi-winner RCV elections allow a larger spectrum of voters to elect their candidates of choice. In multi-winner RCV elections, minority communities and communities with a diversity of backgrounds can elect candidates of choice. This in turn can lead to a more diverse array of candidates.— [campaignlegal.org](#)
One [study](#) found a "strong correlation between the adoption of ranked-choice voting at the local level and outcomes for women and minorities."

Are there any negatives?

Some assume that RCV ballots may be difficult for voters to complete, with potential demographic disparities linked to age, gender, or racial or ethnic identity. Further, these difficulties have been assumed to cause individuals to fill out RCV ballots improperly.

However, a recent [study](#) found that while older voters perceive the ballots as more difficult, this did not affect their ability to use RCV in casting their votes. Also, "no other demographic groups consistently experienced systematic differences in ranking difficulty or under-voting... These findings...challenge research assuming difficulty leads to under-voting, and that RCV disadvantages racial and ethnic groups."

Examples of RCV and Instant Runoff Voting in City Charters

[Seattle](#) Section 2.18.020 - Ranked choice voting

[Vancouver](#) Section 9.03- authorizes Instant Runoff Voting

[Portland](#)- Section 3-102 Ranked Choice Voting

Please consider supporting including ranked choice voting in Tacoma's city charter for a stronger elected city council.



Tacoma Charter Review Committee

Administrative Subcommittee

Recommendations

- Section 3.5 City Attorney Accountability and Independence
- Section 3.8 Amending the City Planning Commission
- Section 3.X Adding a ‘Climate Commission’



A vertical strip on the left side of the page features a detailed, grayscale image of wood grain, showing concentric, wavy patterns of varying shades of gray.

Section 3.5

City Attorney Accountability and
Independence

Current Charter Language

City Attorney

Section 3.5 – The City Manager shall appoint a City Attorney, who shall be an attorney admitted and qualified to practice in the Supreme Court of the State of Washington and who shall have practiced the profession within the State of Washington for not less than five years next preceding the appointment. The City Attorney shall have power to appoint and remove, subject to the approval of the Manager, professional assistants who shall also be attorneys admitted and qualified to practice in the Supreme Court of the State of Washington.

Amendment Recommendation Section 3.5

City Attorney

Section 3.5 – The City Manager shall appoint a City Attorney **only after a Council review of candidates, and subject to the Council’s approval of the final candidate. The City Attorney.**, ~~who~~ **The City Attorney** shall be an attorney admitted and qualified to practice in the Supreme Court of the State of Washington and who shall have practiced the profession within the State of Washington for not less than five years next preceding the appointment. The City Attorney shall have power to appoint and remove, subject to the approval of the Manager, professional assistants who shall also be attorneys admitted and qualified to practice in the Supreme Court of the State of Washington. **The City Manager shall have the power to remove the City Attorney only upon the approval of the Council.**

Why?



Effect

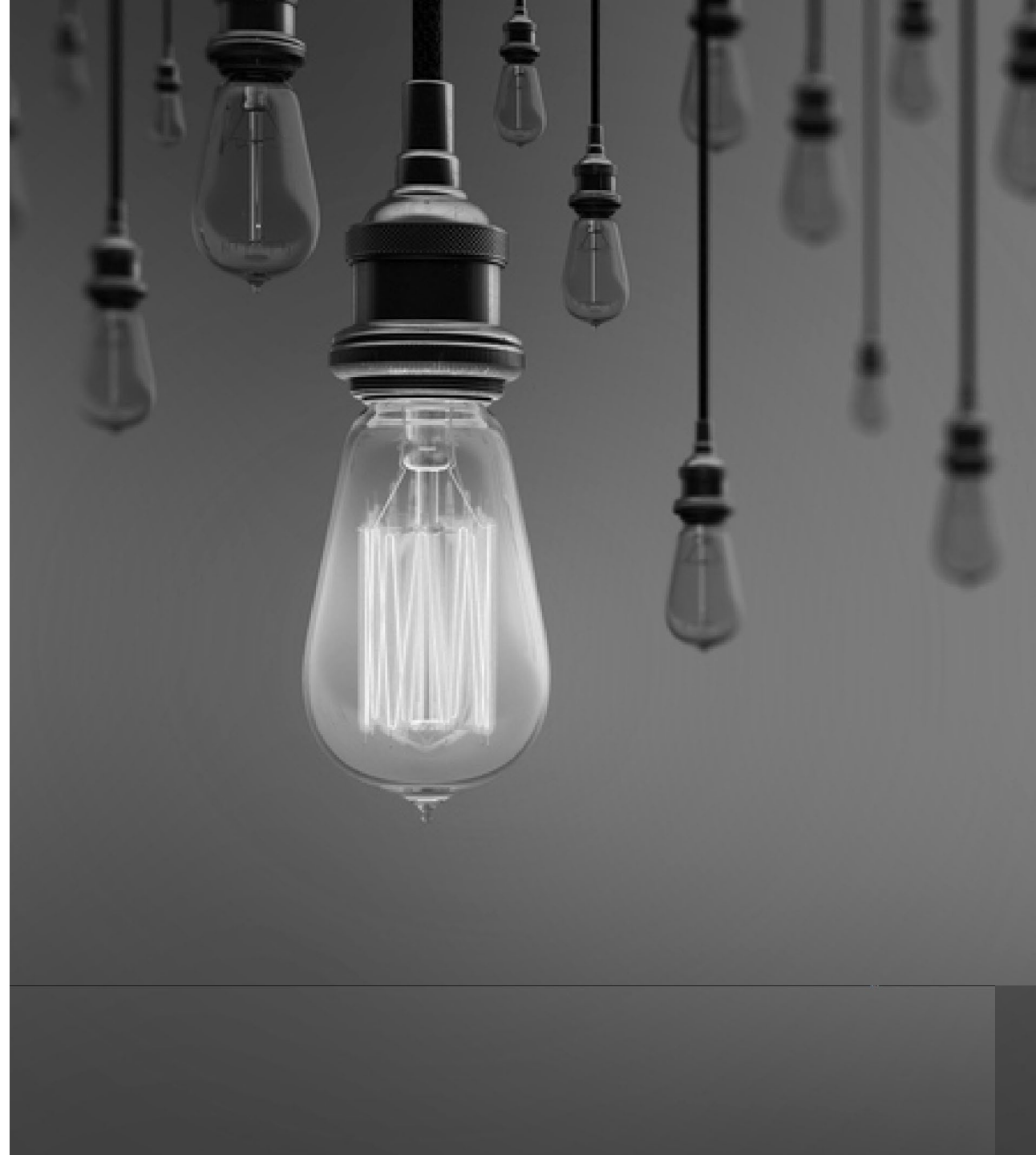
Ensure hiring of the City Attorney is subject to the consultation and approval of the Council and to ensure that termination the City Attorney is not under the sole discretion of the Manager

Purpose

Provide more independence to the City Attorney, currently the City Manager is the only person with effective oversight and termination power

Sections 3.8

Amending the City Planning Commission



Current Charter Language

City Planning Commission

Section 3.8 – There shall be a Planning Commission, composed of nine (9) members, with such powers and duties as are provided by ordinance. The nine members shall be residents of the City of Tacoma and be appointed and confirmed by the City Council for terms of three (3) years each. One member shall be appointed by the City Council for each of the five council districts. The Council shall appoint to the four remaining positions an individual from each of the following:

- (a) the development community;
- (b) the environmental community;
- (c) public transportation, and
- (d) a designee with background of involvement in architecture, historic preservation, and/or urban design.

A majority of the voting members of such Commission shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. The Commission shall be authorized to adopt rules for the transaction of business not inconsistent with this charter or ordinances of the City of Tacoma. Said Planning Commission members shall serve without pay.

Amendment Recommendation Section 3.8

City Planning Commission

Section 3.8 – There shall be a Planning Commission, composed of ~~nine~~ **eleven (911)** members, with such powers and duties as are provided by ordinance. The ~~nine~~ **eleven** members shall be residents of the City of Tacoma and be appointed and confirmed by the City Council for terms of three (3) years each. One member shall be appointed by the City Council for each of the five council districts. The Council shall **strive to** appoint to the ~~four~~ **six** remaining positions **individuals of diverse backgrounds with experience and expertise in environmental sustainability, affordable housing, public transportation, public health, architecture/urban design, and business or development fields. The positions shall not be limited to such fields and other experience or expertise that may be relevant to the needs of the city as provided by ordinance may be considered.**~~an individual from each of the following:~~

- (a) the development community;
- (b) the environmental community;
- (c) public transportation, and
- (f) a designee with background of involvement in architecture, historic preservation, and/or urban design.

A majority of the voting members of such Commission shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. The Commission shall be authorized to adopt rules for the transaction of business not inconsistent with this charter or ordinances of the City of Tacoma. ~~Said Planning Commission members shall serve without pay.~~

Why?



Effect

Provides additional membership capacity and flexibility in experience and membership without being overly proscriptive in the charter language; eliminates the prohibition on pay in the charter

Purpose

Options were requested to consider expanding the diversification and capacity of the Planning Commission's membership



Section 3.X

Adding a 'Climate Commission'

Current Charter Language

NONE



Amendment Addition Section 3.X

'Climate Commission' (name to be determined)

Section 3.X – There shall be a 'Climate Commission', composed of nine (9) members, with such duties and powers as are provided by ordinance. The nine members shall be residents of the City of Tacoma, and five (5) shall be appointed and confirmed by the City Council from each of the five districts for terms of three (3) years each. The remaining four (4) positions shall be filled with appointed residents of Tacoma as at-large representatives to four (4) year terms.

The Council shall strive to include in their appointments to these positions individuals of diverse backgrounds with experience and expertise in environmental justice, climate science, and overburdened communities – including individuals with professional or lived experience, and a focus on youth membership. The positions shall not be limited to such fields, and other experience or expertise that may be relevant to the needs of the city as provided by ordinance may be considered.

A majority of the voting members of such Commission shall constitute a quorum for the transaction of business. The Commission shall be authorized to adopt rules for the transaction of business not inconsistent with this charter or ordinances of the City of Tacoma.

Why?



Effect

Adds a new 'Climate Commission' to the charter, with designated powers as is determined by Council

Purpose

The city is lacking a resident body to effectively track and hold accountable the city's commitments to sustainability and climate goals; this new chartered commission would combine the work of Sustainable Tacoma and newly developed climate accountability provisions into one body