



Office of the Common Council

Aldersperson Austin King, District 8

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Memorandum

FROM: Ald. Austin King

TO: All Common Council Members

RE: Instant runoff voting for Council leadership, item #54 on 3/15 agenda

DATE: March 15, 2005

As you may have noticed, tonight's agenda features an ordinance amendment sponsored by myself and outgoing Council President Ald. Konkell that will streamline the process for selecting future Council leadership through the use of instant runoff voting. There appears to have been some confusion over this ordinance at CCOC, so I am writing this memo in an attempt to clarify the function of the ordinance.

Instant runoff voting is very much like multiple election runoffs, except done on a single ballot. In this system, the voters (Council members) rank candidates from their most preferred to their least preferred. The number of first-place ballots is then determined. If one candidate gets more than 50% of first-place votes, then that candidate is declared the winner. If nobody receives a majority, then the last placed candidate is eliminated. The people that voted for the eliminated candidate have their votes redistributed to their highest remaining choice. The process is repeated until someone gets a true majority.

The chief issue is efficiency. If three or more candidates are running for city council president it can take an unlimited number of rounds of voting if no candidate steps down and no alders change their votes. And everyone knows how stubborn we can be. Except in the case of a 10-10 tie, instant runoff voting would limit the number of rounds to one ballot. It also eliminates the chance of someone changing their vote in exchange for a favor on the floor, decreasing the possibility of actual or perceived log rolling or other unethical practices. There are numerous past examples in our legislative body and others where electing leadership through an instant runoff process would have saved hours of time and lots of later headaches.

Briefly, instant runoff voting as a tool is supported by a broad swath of the political spectrum. Its prominent backers include Senator John McCain, former Governor Howard Dean, and it is currently used by the Academy Awards, the Heisman Trophy voters, the Utah Republican Party, and a growing number of cities, including Ferndale, MI and San Francisco, CA.

In general, it does not make sense to oppose instant runoff voting if you support multiple election runoffs, the current process. The same results and protection of majority rule can be achieved in a single election with instant runoff voting, but for only half the operating cost! If you wish to streamline how local government works, then please support my proposed ordinance. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me, or get a primer on Instant Runoff Voting at www.fairvote.org.

Thank you for your support of this common-sense, efficient reform.