



Takoma Park City Council Meeting – September 18, 2019 Agenda Item 4

Work Session

Continued Discussion of Board of Elections' Recommendations for Changes to the City Charter and Election Code

Recommended Council Action

Review and discuss the Board's responses to comments and questions received at and since the June 5 presentation of recommended Charter and Code changes. Provide any additional direction for preparation of the Charter Amendment and amendments to the Code. There is a Charter Amendment public hearing scheduled for October 16.

Context with Key Issues

The Board of Elections has recommended revisions to the City Charter and Elections Code. The Council heard the Board's recommendations and discussed them at a meeting on June 5, 2019. Since the meeting, the Board reviewed comments, questions, and suggestions and has prepared responses.

Summary of Substantive Recommendations:

- Elimination of the 21-day residency requirement for voting in City elections;
- Expansion of the supplemental voter roll for Takoma Park elections to include U.S. citizen residents who do not wish to register to vote in elections other than those conducted by the City of Takoma Park;
- Elimination of the need to hold a runoff election in the unlikely event of a tie after all rounds of counting are completed through ranked choice voting – such ties would be resolved by lot;
- Authorization for the Board of Elections to appoint election workers (formerly called election judges) without the requirement that the City Council approve the appointments;
- Setting a limit on the period of the time during which recall petitions can be circulated;
- Setting a specific point of reference for calculating the number of registered voters required to meet various thresholds for petitions for recall and referendum, to enable petitioners to know their goal in advance.
- Setting new limits on campaign contributions and adding a requirement that campaigns report on expenditures as well as contributions;
- Payment of return postage by the City for absentee ballots; and
- Allowing for early processing (not counting) of absentee ballots.

Changes to the City Charter are accomplished through the Charter Amendment process, which requires public notice, a public hearing, two readings of a Charter Amendment Resolution, and a period of time before the Charter Amendment becomes final in order to allow residents the opportunity to petition the amendment to referendum. Amendments to the City Code require two readings of an ordinance.

Council Priority

Engaged, Responsive and Service-Oriented Government

Environmental Considerations

Staff does not believe that there are environmental impacts that would result from adoption of the Board's recommendations.

Fiscal Considerations

If the Council endorses the payment of return postage for absentee ballots, the increase in cost for postage would be less than \$100 given the current level of ballots cast by mail. As the number increases, associated costs would increase. Other election costs would not be directly impacted by the proposed amendments.

Racial Equity Considerations

The Board of Elections' recommendations continue the process of expanding opportunities to vote in City elections and eliminating barriers to voting. In preparing for 2020, staff and the Board will be focused on outreach, education, and preparation for residents to vote. For candidates running for office, there would be a new requirement to report expenditures; however, the Board is committed to ensuring that the requirement is not overly burdensome for candidates.

Attachments and Links

- Board of Elections Responses to Questions and Comments on Proposed Code and Charter Amendments
- Sections of the City Charter and Code showing recommended amendments