



Legislative Summary

O-35-25

Ranked-Choice Voting in the City of Annapolis

The City of Annapolis Office of Law created this summary for the use of Annapolis City Council members during their consideration of the legislation.

Bill Summary

O-35-25 requires Ranked-Choice Voting in Annapolis' city-wide elections *that are not part of state or federal elections*.

Background

History of Ranked-Choice Voting

Takoma Park is currently the only municipality in Maryland that uses ranked choice voting (RCV) for its local elections. This voting system was first adopted in 2006 and was used in the municipal elections of 2007.

For context, RCV was first implemented in the United States in 1915 in Ashtabula, Ohio, but voters repealed it in 1929. Cambridge, Massachusetts, adopted ranked choice voting in 1941 and continues to use it today. Maine became the first state to implement RCV for statewide elections in 2018.

In 2020, Virginia allowed cities and counties the option to adopt RCV for local governing bodies, with Arlington County being the first locality in the state to implement it.

Ranked-Choice Voting in Maryland

In Maryland, while legislation has been introduced allowing statewide use of ranked choice voting, including three proposals in the last legislative session, none have been successful.



The Annapolis Office of Law has determined that the Annotated Code of Maryland gives municipalities authority to run their local elections as determined by the municipality.

These elections cannot include county, state, or federal elections unless the state of Maryland authorizes the use of ranked choice voting.

Annapolis City Elections

Annapolis runs its city-wide elections separately from county, state, and federal elections. For example, the last Presidential election was in 2024, and the next will be in 2028. Statewide elections in Maryland will be at the same time as Congressional mid-term elections, November 2026.

The City election is this year, 2025.

Municipalities can enter into contracts with the state, through the county elections board, to conduct their elections. This is a common practice in Annapolis. Alternatively, municipalities have the option to manage their elections independently, without outside assistance.

How Ranked-Choice Voting Works

Voters rank candidates in order of preference. You can rank as many or as few candidates as you like.

Candidates for City Council <small>Mark one oval per column</small>	First Choice 1st	Second Choice 2nd	Third Choice 3rd
N. Cardinal	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
F. Dogwood	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
A. Foxhound	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>

Example provided by the Virginia Department of Elections

All first-choice votes are counted. If nobody wins a majority, the candidate with the fewest first-choice votes is eliminated.

After the first elimination round, voters who chose the eliminated candidate as their first choice will have their votes counted for the candidate they ranked second.

Candidates continue to be eliminated after each round until a candidate gets a majority of the votes.



Ordinance Details

Title 4 - ELECTIONS

Section 4.040.010 - Definitions

This section contains the definitions for Title 4 - Elections. Definitions for ranked-choice voting terms are added.

Chapter 4.22 - Ranked-Choice Voting

A new chapter has been added in the Elections Title for ranked-choice voting requirements.

Section 4.22.010 - Election by Ranked-Choice Voting

Subsection A - Authorization

- authorizes the use of ranked-choice voting in elections for mayor, council members, and political party central committee members
- States that this chapter applies only to elections using ranked-choice voting; this section prevails if there are conflicts with any other Title 4 section.

Subsection B - Responsibilities and Oversight

- The Board of Supervisors of Elections is responsible for implementing ranked-choice voting. The Board can make additional regulations, design the ballots, tabulate the ballots, conduct voter education before the election, and keep voters informed. This board does the unofficial ballot count immediately after the polls close.
- The Board of Canvassers (consisting of Board of Supervisors of Elections members) takes over once the election is done on Election Day. This board is responsible for election correctness. It checks the voting systems, ensures provisional and mail-in ballots have been counted, and releases official election results, which could be days after Election Day.



Section 4.22.020 - Ballots

Subsection A - Design and Instructions

- The Board of Supervisors of Elections will design the ballots, using the additional regulations of this section.
 - Ballots can have up to five ranking columns
 - Names of all qualified candidates must be on the ballot
 - Voters are allowed one write-in candidate
- Ballots must be designed so voting systems can catch mistakes and allow voters to correct their ballots.
- Ballot must include instructions in plain language

Subsection B - Candidate Ranking

- Up to five rankings are allowed on a ballot
- Voter then marks First Choice, Second Choice, etc.
- If there are fewer than five candidates on the ballot, fewer rankings are allowed

Subsection C - Marking the Ballot

- Voters can rank as many candidates as the ranking list allows, but only one candidate can be marked per ranking
- If voters make a mistake, they can request a replacement ballot.
- The Board of Supervisors of Elections may have additional requirements for marking ballots.

Subsection B - Mail-in Ballots

- Mail-in ballots will be handled the same, whether using ranked-choice voting or traditional voting methods.

Section 4.22.030 - Tabulation of Votes

Subsection A - Means of Tabulation

- Ballots can be counted using a ranked-choice voting system or by hand, if necessary.
- Mail-in voting procedures are unchanged.



Subsection B - Vote Count

- This subsection explains how votes are counted under ranked-choice voting
 - All first-choice votes are counted.
 - If nobody wins a majority, the candidate with the fewest first-choice votes is eliminated.
 - Second choice votes from voters whose preferred candidate was eliminated are transferred to those corresponding candidates.
 - If there's still no candidate with enough votes to win, the process is repeated until a candidate has a majority.
- Candidates, whose ranking when added up as a group is less than the top two candidates, can be eliminated at one time. That's called a batch elimination.

Subsection C - Write-in Votes

- Voters can write-in one candidate who's not listed on the ballot, but they must meet the City Code requirements for a candidate, such as living in Annapolis.
- Unqualified write-in candidates will be automatically eliminated.
- When reporting vote totals, write-in candidates can be reported as a single group if there are not enough votes to make any write-ins a viable candidate.

Subsection D - Treatment of Ballots

- Skipped or repeated rankings will not disqualify a ballot
- If no candidates are ranked on a ballot, the ballot doesn't count.

Subsection E - Tie Votes

- Tie votes will be settled by lot
- The Board of Supervisors of Elections will decide what type of lot, and they must use the same type if another tie breaker is required.



Section 4.22.040 - Results Reporting

Subsection A - Preliminary Results

- The Board of Supervisors of Elections must ensure the release of unofficial tabulation results after the polls close. The start time for releasing data is up to the Board, but no later than midnight on Election Night and after each round of ballot tabulation. The release could also occur after a batch of ballots from a Ward is counted.

A "round" is after ballots are eliminated and votes are reallocated.

- Ballot-Level Ranking Data released after each round needs to include:
 - the number of counted and uncounted ballots at the time of the release
 - data on how every candidate fared in each round.

Subsection B - Final Release on Election Night

- A more comprehensive set of numbers is required for the Final unofficial release on election night, including:
 - Total number and percentage of votes for each candidate, including votes for eliminated candidates,
 - Total number of ballots that became inactive in each round;
 - Ballot-level ranking data on a per candidate basis.

Subsection C - Public Access

- Final election results must be published on the City's website
- Data must be web accessible, and in a format that's easy to download and searchable so that others can use the data.

Section 4.22.050 - Candidate Withdrawal, Disqualification, Dies

How to handle a candidate who withdraws, is disqualified, or dies *before Election Day* is explained in other sections of Title 4. This section deals only with Election Day and when the printed ballot contains the candidate's name.

- The Board of Supervisors of Elections must remove the candidate's name from the tabulation process.
- The Board must let voters know the candidate is no longer viable, and a mark for that candidate will not be counted.



Section 4.22.060 - Hand Counting

- O-35-25 lets the Board of Supervisors of Elections establish the rules for hand-counting ranked-choice voting ballots. The Board may use the paper ballot rules in Section 4.24.060 of the City Code.

Section 4.22.070 - Recount and Re-canvass

- Allows a recount if a recount is requested per Section 4.20.190 of the City Code.
- Requires the public to be present during a recount.

Section 4.22.090 - Violations

Any violations of the ranked-choice voting chapter are subject to penalties.

Changes to Existing City Code

Changes are needed to Title 4 in the City Code to remove conflicts between ranked-choice voting and traditional election processes that would continue to be used during county, state, and federal elections.

Chapter 4.08 - Board of Supervisors of Elections

- Corrects the names of the City and Anne Arundel County election boards to their official titles.

Chapter 4.20 - Nominations and Candidacy

- Rewrites section to allow the voter to write in a candidate on a ranked-choice voting ballot.



Section 4.20.160 Filling vacancies.

- Removes the following sentence: "Where the vacancy results from a tie vote, the nominee selected to fill the vacancy shall be one of the candidates receiving the tie vote."

Section 4.20.180 Canvass, certification, and declaration after declination, death, or disqualification.

- Adds subtitles and the following paragraph:
After Ballots Printed and Before Election Day. In a ranked-choice voting election, if a candidate withdraws, is disqualified for any reason, or passes away after the ballots have been printed but before Election Day, the Board of Supervisors of Elections shall remove that candidate from the tabulation process, pursuant to Chapter 2.22.

Section 4.24.060 Voting machines— Provision—Specifications

- A new subsection is added to accommodate ranked-choice voting systems. The section is renamed and formatted for easier reading.

Section 4.24.060 –Voting Systems and Paper Ballots.

A. Voting Systems.

1. Except for ranked-choice voting, the Board of Supervisors of Elections shall follow voting system procedures as adopted by the Anne Arundel County Board of Elections.
2. Ranked-choice voting systems shall be pursuant to Chapter 4.22.

Section 4.24.070 Ballots and ballot labels.

- This section is renamed to fit the style of similar sections and replaced with the following:

Section 4.24.070 Content—General Specifications.

- A. Except for ranked-choice voting, the Board of Supervisors of Elections shall follow ballot procedures as adopted by the Anne Arundel County Board of Elections.
- B. Ranked-choice voting ballots shall be pursuant to Chapter 4.22.



Section 4.24.090 - Ballots and ballot labels—Candidates

- This section is renamed to fit the style of similar sections, and the following subsection is added:
 - B. **Content and Arrangement of Ballots.** When creating the contents and arrangement of the ballots, the Board of Supervisors of Elections shall comply with Election Law Article §§ 9-201--9-217 of the Annotated Code of Maryland, COMAR § 33.01.06, the Anne Arundel County Board of Elections, and this chapter.

Section 4.32.030 Statements of votes cast.

- This section is struck in its entirety. Section 4.22.040 (Reporting Results) makes this section obsolete.

Enacting Clause

Section II

Section II at the bottom of the Ordinance is the enacting clause. It provides instructions on when and how the O-35-25 goes into effect.

1. The City Clerk shall create rules and regulations to implement ranked-choice voting in consultation with the Board of Supervisors of Elections.
2. This ordinance shall take effect upon adoption; and
3. Ranked-choice voting shall be implemented starting with the 2029 City Council election.