



STAFF REPORT ON PROPOSED LEGISLATION

To: Mayor Gavin Buckley
From: Victoria Buckland, Acting City Manager
Date: July 22, 2025
Subject: O-35-25: Ranked Choice Voting in Annapolis City Elections

Purpose of legislation

The purpose of this legislation is to elect the Mayor, City Council members, and party committee members by ranked choice voting during elections involving only City-wide candidates; and generally relating to municipal voting regulations.

Impact of legislation on operations

Implications for future decision-making

This legislation follows on the heels of several efforts the City has made to update its election procedures and code. The City recently updated all of the City Code sections related to elections based on recommendations from the Board of Supervisors of Elections (see O-17-24, O-18-24, O-19-24, and O-20-24). In addition, the Task Force on Elections has recommended synchronizing Annapolis municipal elections with the State election cycle. The Task Force also made recommendations regarding nonpartisan elections and open or blanket primaries. See Task Force report available here:

<https://www.annapolis.gov/2024/Task-Force-to-Study-the-City-Municipal-E.>

Ranked choice voting did not appear in any of the revisions to Code or recommendations from the Task Force. For the most part, the City does not see potential conflicts between these various recommendations and ranked choice voting. The one area that the City should understand going forward is whether the adoption of ranked choice voting will affect the City's ability to synchronize its municipal elections with the State election cycle, since the decision to synchronize ties the City to the State's procedures, machines, and capabilities. In past

discussions between the Annapolis Board of Supervisors of Elections and the Maryland State Board of Elections, the Maryland Board of Elections was noncommittal about whether or not they would run a ranked choice voting election in Annapolis. If that sentiment remains the same, the City would need to implement its elections without the support it has gotten in the past from the Anne Arundel County Board of Elections, which would increase costs and complexity for the City.

Initial impacts of the legislation

Implementing ranked choice voting will require education of election officials, candidates, and the general public. Ranked choice voting will need to be incorporated into general training materials for election officials as well as procedures for posting election outcomes. Candidates and the public will undoubtedly have questions both about the mechanics of ranked choice voting as well as why it is needed. This legislation will not apply to the current election cycle, so there will be time to do this education before the next cycle. It is also possible that there may be changes at the State or County level between now and then that may impact what kind of education the City needs to do and whether or not the City would have the support of the County or State in implementation.

Implementing ranked choice voting will also require validation of the City's technical capabilities. The City utilizes State voting machines under an agreement and in coordination with the Maryland State Board of Elections and the Anne Arundel County Board of Elections. It is the City's understanding from the sponsor that State voting equipment is capable of producing ranked ballots and scanning ballot data. The State's equipment cannot tabulate that data, however. The City would need to utilize other software to do the tabulation. While such software exists, we do not know what it would cost to implement and test.

Other comments about the legislation

The version of the legislation that the City reviewed was not the final version. There were still some typos and numbering issues that are common when anything is still in draft form. The City trusts that those issues will have been resolved prior to the final version. The Board of Supervisors of Elections should formally review this legislation to ensure that some of the other changes that were made do not adversely affect election procedures. For example, 4.20.160 removes references to a tie vote. While a tie vote is less likely in a ranked choice voting election, it is still technically possible, and the language in this section may need to remain. Section 4.24.070 was almost entirely removed, and again it would be helpful to have the Board's review to ensure all needed language remains.

Prepared by Victoria Buckland, Acting City Manager