

Proposition F: City of Oceanside Charter Amendment: Numbered Districts & Runoff Majority

SDCTA supports the City of Oceanside's proposed charter amendment to move from a plurality voting system to a numbered district runoff majority system. This system requires candidates to receive a majority of support from the City's electorate, but does not establish council districts for each councilmember. The advantages to the electorate in adopting this system outweigh the negative budgetary impacts of moving to this type of system.

- In June 2010, voters within the City of Oceanside (City) approved Proposition K, which established Oceanside as a Charter city.
- The adopted Charter did not change the current system for electing councilmembers within the City, which currently calls for voters to approve candidates for public office in a November run-off election, with the candidates receiving the highest amount of voters being elected to the position being sought.
- Under the current plurality election system, candidates can be elected to public office without receiving a majority of votes.
- Under a runoff majority system, the winner is guaranteed a majority of the support from the electorate.



Proposition F: City of Oceanside Charter Amendment: Numbered Districts & Runoff Majority

Board Action:

SUPPORT

Rationale:

SDCTA supports the City of Oceanside's proposed charter amendment to move from a plurality voting system to a numbered district runoff majority system. This system requires that candidates receive a majority of support from the City's electorate, while also not establishing council districts for each councilmember. The advantages to the electorate in adopting this system outweigh the negative budgetary impacts of moving to this type of system.

Background:

In June 2010, voters within the City of Oceanside (City) approved Proposition K, which established Oceanside as a Charter city. The adopted Charter did not change the current system for electing councilmembers within the City, which currently calls for voters to approve candidates for public office in a November election, with the candidates receiving the highest amount of votes being elected to the position being sought.

For example, if two (2) councilmembers are up for reelection, and four (4) candidates are vying for those positions, the top two candidates receiving the most citywide votes during a November election will be elected to represent those two seats. This same system applies to mayoral candidates. Currently all cities within San Diego County except the cities of San Diego and Chula Vista utilize this system for electing candidates.

The City of Chula Vista has established numbered seats, with candidates for each numbered seat and Mayor having an election in the June primary election. If no candidate receives a majority of votes in the June primary, the top two vote getters would face off in a November election, with the candidate receiving a majority of the votes being elected. The City of San Diego utilizes the same system as the City of Chula Vista, but council seats are numbered based off of council districts. Chula Vista does not have individual council districts.

Proposal:

On February 27, 2012, the Oceanside City Council approved a resolution to place a Charter amendment on the June ballot asking voters to amend the method by which councilmembers and the Mayor are elected. The question that will go before voters will read:

“Shall the proposed amendment to the Charter of the City of Oceanside, to establish numbered, elected at-large seats, effective upon passage; establish a June first-round election, and a November runoff election for any June election where no candidate receives 50%+1 for all elected offices, effective for the June 2014 election; establish a first-round election and runoff election

if no candidate receives 50%+1 for any special election to fill a vacancy or recall election, effective upon passage, be adopted?”

The amendment would add sections 800 and 801 to the City of Oceanside Charter. Language within section 800 outlines the application of state law governing the conduct of municipal elections.

Section 801, entitled “Municipal Elective Offices”, outlines the process by which elections for positions of Mayor, City Council, City Clerk and City Treasurer are conducted. Should voters approve the amendment, the City Clerk will number each seat, with candidates required to specify which number Council seat for which they seek election.

2012 Election (Section 801 (E))

For the 2012 municipal election, the current voting system will apply, but the seats that will be voted upon are numbers one (1) and two (2). The position of Mayor, City Clerk and City Treasurer will also be decided by the same system during the November 2012 election.

2014 Election (Section 801 (F))

The proposed amendment will become effective and take place during the 2014 election cycle.

Special or Recall Election (Section 801(G))

Candidates for any recall or special election to fill a vacancy in any seat must receive a majority of the votes. If no candidate at the recall or special election receives a majority of the votes, there shall be a special runoff election between the two candidates receiving the top two amount of votes on a date set by the Council no longer than five (5) months after the special election.

Policy Implications & Analysis:

City of Chula Vista

Voters within the City of Chula Vista passed Proposition A on April 9, 1974, which amended the City Charter by establishing numbered seats to each Council position.¹ It is unclear whether the San Diego County Taxpayers Association recommended a position on this measure.

Plurality vs. Runoff Majority Voting

Under the current plurality election system, candidates can be elected to public office without receiving a majority of votes. While this plurality system is the most common election system in San Diego County, one of the most common criticisms of this voting system pertains to wasted votes.

Votes for a candidate with weak support may spoil a win for the potentially stronger candidate. For example, in a three-candidate election, 10% of voters vote for Candidate A, 43% vote for Candidate B and 47% vote for Candidate C. Voters for A would prefer B over

¹ Yes votes totaled 5,047; No votes totaled 3,723.

C, but C wins with 47% of the vote even though a majority of the voters are not supporters. Plurality voting systems generally produce a high ratio of wasted votes when compared to a runoff majority system.²

The arguments for a plurality voting system rely on the preservation of the "one person, one vote" principle. Plurality voting systems elect the candidate who is preferred first by the largest number of voters, although this need not be an absolute majority. Because the system is so common, administrators feel comfortable with it, find it easy to use and vote counting is straightforward. Plurality-majority voting systems also have the advantage of being simple, easy to use and easy to understand – just mark the ballot for your preferred candidate.³

Under a runoff majority system, the winner is guaranteed a majority of the support from the electorate. In addition, runoff elections eliminate spoilers. A candidate's chances of winning will not be hurt due to votes for another candidate with less support but with similar positions. Lastly, there can be less negative campaigning during the first round of voting. Candidates do not want to alienate any voter who might vote for him/her in the runoff election.⁴

A drawback of this system is the cost of holding an additional election in which candidates are on the ballot. The staff report for placing this item on the City of Oceanside ballot did not include the potential costs of having candidate elections during the June primary, in addition to a November runoff should no candidate receive a 50%+1 majority. While cities may often hold a June election in order to consider ballot measures, they often don't include the costs of additional printing to include candidate information. The City of Chula Vista has identified the cost to hold two council elections on the upcoming June 5, 2012 ballot at \$158,000.

Past SDCTA Positions

The San Diego County Taxpayers Association (SDCTA) did not have a position on record for the City of Chula Vista's Proposition A in 1974. Therefore, it is unclear what SDCTA's past position has been on moving from a plurality voting system to a runoff majority system, if any at all.

² "City Council Election Methods". The Center for Voting and Democracy

³ League of Women Voters Voting Systems Study.

⁴ Ibid.