

CLEAN AND OPEN ELECTIONS TASK FORCE REPORT

CITY OF SOMERVILLE, MASSACHUSETTS

OCTOBER 5, 2018

TASK FORCE MEMBERS

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Mr. Beckmann has worked extensively in the fields of education and civic engagement and is particularly interested in bringing technology to voter mobilization efforts. He is a long-time community organizer and has served on numerous committees in Somerville, Cambridge and Boston.

Nathanael Clauser

Mr. Clauser is an attorney whose professional work focuses on legal ethics, conflicts of interest, and regulatory compliance. He has experience working with state regulations and has volunteered for canvassing and voter turnout efforts.

Vishal Doshi

Mr. Doshi is a data scientist and technology policy expert who has worked in both the public and private sectors to leverage data and technology to drive better decisions. He currently builds models to understand consumer preferences. Previously, as a member of the Obama Administration, he worked on data transparency, broadband, and defense research and development policy.

Ariel Horowitz

Dr. Horowitz is Director of Technology Development at the Massachusetts Clean Energy Center. Prior to taking this position earlier in 2018, she was a Senior Associate at Synapse Energy Economics in Cambridge, and spent many years doing campaign work at the national and state levels in Pennsylvania. She has also previously volunteered with the City of Somerville as a member of the Bicycle Advisory Committee.

Sara Oaklander, Chair

Ms. Oaklander is a project manager with the Interaction Institute for Social Change, an organization that helps organizations and communities build capacity for more effective, equitable, and inclusive social change. As a former Belmont resident, she was active as a Town Meeting Member, a member of the town's Vision Implementation Committee and co-coordinator of an annual event called Meet Belmont.

Josh Rosmarin

Mr. Rosmarin works for the Analyst Institute, a consulting and research organization that conducts A/B experiments to find ways to increase voter turnout, particularly among underrepresented populations. As part of this work, he leads a team responsible for conducting a wide range of research, with a particular focus on voter registration.

Nicholas Salerno, Elections Commissioner

Mr. Salerno is the Chair of the Somerville Board of Election Commissioners. As head of the Elections Department, he manages and conducts all aspects of the voting process for municipal, state and federal elections. As the Elections Commissioner, Mr. Salerno also serves as a member of the Ethics Commission, which is tasked with identifying and reporting on any potential conflicts in the financial interests of City officials.

Jefferson Thomas (“J.T.”) Scott, Alderman

Alderman Scott is the Ward 2 Alderman for the City of Somerville. He is a longtime activist and community organizer and lives in the Union Square area with his family.

Andrew Levine, Support Staff

Mr. Levine works at MassDevelopment, as the Program and Project Manager for the Transformative Development Initiative (TDI). He is a recent graduate of the Harvard Kennedy School where he focused on innovations in municipal government, including civic technology, operational improvements, and partnerships with anchor institutions.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

If liberty and equality are chiefly to be found in democracy, they will be best attained when all persons alike share in government to the utmost.

- Aristotle

Elections and electoral politics are the lifeblood of American democracy. A vibrant and participatory electoral process is an essential component of our system of government and, in turn, one of the most sacred responsibilities of our governing bodies is to safeguard this process. Because change is constant, the government's role in encouraging a healthy electoral process must be an active and ongoing one, endeavoring to ensure that the mechanisms of our elections are responsive to modern concerns and robust to modern challenges.

In light of this responsibility, the Clean and Open Elections Task Force was convened by Mayor Curtatone in August of 2018, with a mandate to "look at root causes and take a systems approach to ensure fair, equitable, and open elections that inspire greater participation both by voters and candidates." The Task Force consists of six lay citizens as well as representatives from the Board of Alderman and the Elections Department, with staff support from the Mayor's Office.

We organized our work in support of that charge by identifying the most promising ways for the City to achieve the following goals:

1. Increase voter participation
2. Lower barriers to candidate participation
3. Increase the openness and transparency of the election process

We pursued a research-backed process to identify ways to achieve each of these goals. The majority of our recommendations are based on strong evidence in support of the efficacy of a proposal. The evidence was sourced from the literature, the experience of peer jurisdictions, or both. For other recommendations, we arrived at a decision to recommend based on a strong sense of shared values and a shared understanding of the primary mechanisms of democracy. All of our recommendations were subjected to debate and discussion, and most were ultimately recommended by consensus of the Task Force as a whole.

This process led to a set of sixteen recommendations as summarized in the table below. The report body follows the table and describes our methodology and approach in greater detail. The report then provides a full summary of each recommendation.

SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation	Area of Impact			Task Force Decision
	Increase Voter Participation	Increase Number and Diversity of Candidates	Increase Openness and Transparency of Elections	
Consolidate elections so that municipal elections take place at the same time as state elections (move from odd to even years).	X			Consensus
Election day festivals: Coordinate and/or encourage non-partisan election day festivities - including free food and drink, music, and more - at or nearby polling places.	X			Consensus
Election outreach: Design a mechanism for Somerville’s Election officials (chair and members of the Board of Election Commissioners) to reach out to voters to encourage participation in every election.	X			Consensus
Electronic voter books: Encourage the state to adopt electronic voter books, and subsequent implementation of voting centers and same day registration.	X			Consensus, with one abstention
Poll locations: Relocate polling places to sites that are more likely to ensure that all voters feel safe and welcome (i.e., avoid locations such as police stations and houses of worship).	X			Consensus
Right to vote: Pursue a home rule petition and/or state legislation that would extend the right to vote in municipal elections to otherwise-eligible residents who are at least 16 years of age.	X			Consensus
Right to vote: Pursue a home rule petition and/or state legislation that would extend the right to vote in municipal elections to otherwise-eligible residents who are not US citizens.	X			Majority: 6-1
Right to vote: Pursue a home rule petition and/or state legislation that would extend the right to vote in municipal elections to otherwise-eligible residents who are presently incarcerated for a felony conviction.	X			Majority: 6-1
Civic engagement: Develop ways to involve high school students in the civic life of the Somerville community.	X		X	Consensus

Election data: Make existing election-related data more readily available and easily accessible in more digestible formats, and develop and track election performance indicators.	X		X	Consensus
Voter guides: Publish and distribute comprehensive voter guides to ensure voters have access to complete, accurate, and unbiased election information.	X		X	Consensus
Transparency: Take strong action to increase the transparency of political ad purchasing online			X	Consensus
Ranked choice voting: Adopt ranked choice voting		X	X	Consensus
Campaign financing: Allow spending of campaign funds on child and elder care expenses incurred as a direct result of time spent on campaigning - Align to new federal guidelines		X		Consensus
Campaign financing: Create and implement a public financing model for municipal elections		X		Consensus
Election information: Increase the availability of information on the role of each elected position and on how to run for office		X		Consensus

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Recommendation: Align with new federal guidelines to allow spending of campaign funds on child and elder care expenses incurred as a direct result of time spent on campaigning. 32

Recommendation: Create and implement a public financing model for municipal elections. 33

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ELECTIONS IN SOMERVILLE: OVERVIEW, HISTORY, AND A VIEW TOWARDS THE FUTURE

Overview

The City of Somerville, like most Massachusetts cities, holds elections every year, with state and federal positions up for general election in even numbered years and city or municipal-level positions in odd numbered years. In addition, party primaries are held in advance of general elections for all partisan offices,¹ and preliminary elections are held as-needed for municipal elections when there are more than two candidates running for any office. All told, citizens of Somerville have an opportunity to interact with the electoral system on a regular basis, making electoral politics one of the most commonplace parts of any adult's civic life.

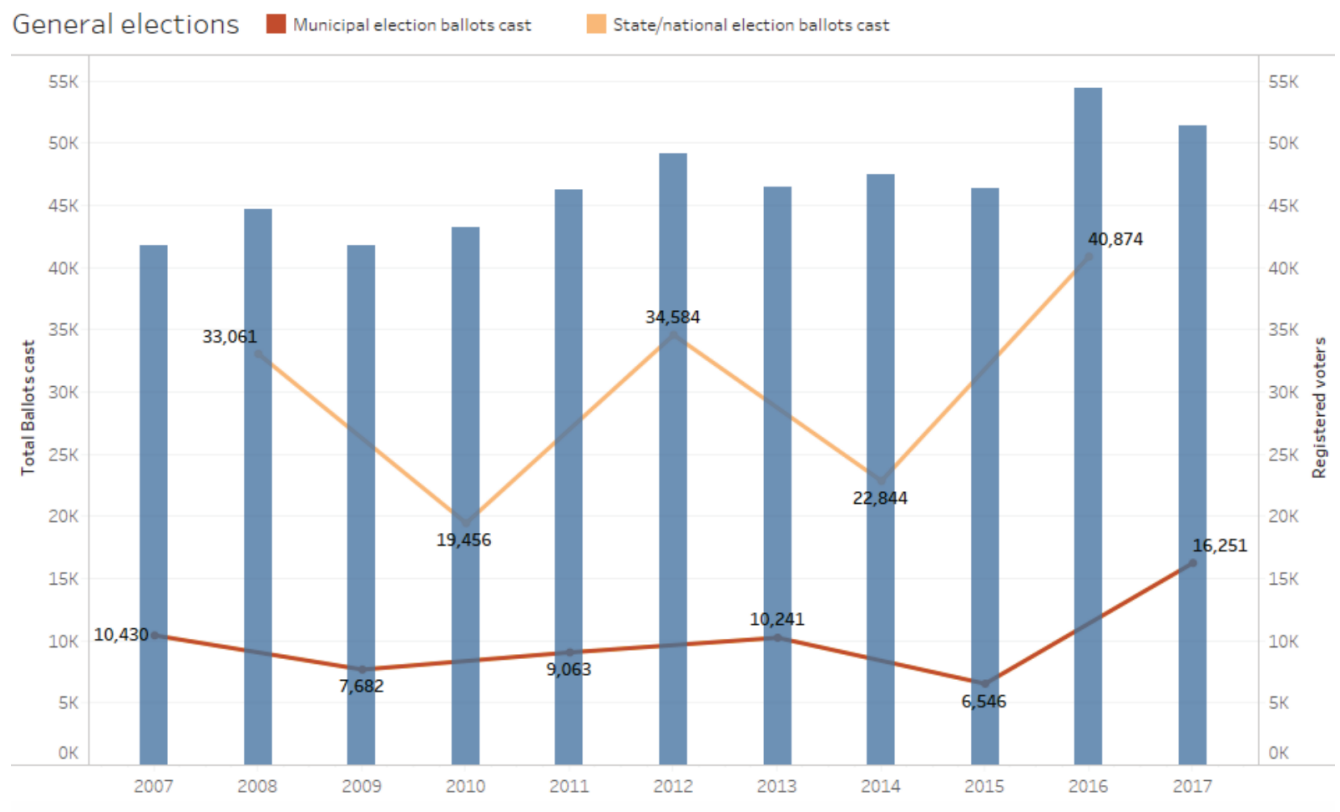
Yet participation in this system is irregular at best. As discussed in more detail below, voter turnout fluctuates dramatically depending on the contents of the ballot and the extent to which municipal and state-level posts are contested, which has historically been rather rare. The 2016 presidential election, however, appears to have caused a shift -- even if only a temporary one. Nationwide, we have seen increased voter turnout,² a greater number of candidates seeking office,³ and a variety of reforms and proposals aimed at increasing civic engagement in the electoral system. The proposed shifts are diverse, including modifications to federal campaign finance regulations to enable greater participation by women and parents,⁴ adoption of ranked choice voting and other alternative balloting systems,⁵ reform of electoral districts and districting procedures,⁶ and expansion of suffrage rights,⁷ among others. Our recommendations are informed by our observations of this shift and aim to both capitalize on and cement the nationwide sense of urgency associated with electoral politics.

History and Background

As might be expected, voter participation in Somerville has varied based on which offices are contested on that particular ballot. Like all American voters, Somerville's voters cast ballots for President every four years, for Senate every six years, and for Congressional Representative every other year. Members of the Massachusetts General Court, including both the State Senate and State House of Representatives, are elected every other year as well, and the Governor of Massachusetts serves for a four-year term (albeit one offset by two years from the presidential cycle). On the municipal level, mayoral terms are two years long; hence, in every city election, voters cast ballots for Mayor, the Board of Aldermen, and School Committee. The Board of Aldermen include one elected representative from each of the seven wards, and four at large members. The School Committee includes the Mayor, the President of the Board of Aldermen, and seven elected members, one elected from each of the city's wards. In even numbered years, the city also holds primary elections for party nominations to state and federal offices, which are determined by the state's calendar. In odd numbered years, the city holds preliminary elections for any non-at-large positions for which there are more than two candidates. Preliminary elections have been held since 1999 in every year with the exceptions of 2001 and 2009.

Participation is highest in presidential and midterm election years, and lowest for years in which only municipal offices are at issue. The graph below shows this variation, with greater participation in presidential years, and less in midterm elections. Based on official city counts, voting in Somerville in the last ten years shows a slight, steady increase in the number of ballots cast in state and federal elections when accounting for this difference in presidential election participation, with a steeper uptick in the 2016 election. The number of registered voters has increased from 46,451 in 2013 to 52,400 in 2018.⁸ Voter participation in 2016 was just over 75% of registered voters in Somerville, compared to 68% in Massachusetts overall and 60% across the United States. Participation varies between presidential and midterm elections, with midterm participation in 2014 at 48%, compared to a state average of 44% and a US average of 36.7%.⁹

The graph also shows much lower participation in city elections, and more variation in participation. Participation was the highest in the 2017 city election, reaching 31.6% of registered voters casting ballots. With participation at 14% in 2015 and 22% in 2013, this shows a massive increase, with little changing about the nature of the elections besides the number of competitive positions on the ballot. Somerville’s municipal election participation is not dissimilar from that of neighboring municipalities. Cambridge’s participation is typically between 25% and 30%, with 34% participation in a more active election in 2017.¹⁰ Other Massachusetts municipalities report participation between 15% and 20% in municipal elections¹¹, making Somerville’s participation rate unsurprising in municipal elections.



There have been limited changes to Somerville’s voting procedures in the last ten years. Some polling locations have been changed, with the priority to relocate out of fire stations for logistical reasons and a preference for locating polling places in schools, when possible. New voting machines were installed in 2016, and Somerville now has the capability to wirelessly transmit its unofficial voting results when polls close. Somerville, like the rest of the state, offered early voting in 2016, and will again in 2018. This requires the use of electronic voter files, which were used for the general election, but not the primary elections.

Our Approach

Below, we discuss the approach taken by the Task Force in crafting its recommendations. We discuss our methodology as well as laying out the three overall goals of our work. The identification of these goals resulted from our interpretation of the mandate: to “look at root causes and take a systems approach to ensure **fair, equitable, and open elections** that inspire **greater participation both by voters and candidates.**” (Emphasis added.) As such, we organized our work in support of this charge by identifying the most promising ways for the City to achieve these three goals: increase voter participation; lower barriers to candidate participation; and increase openness and transparency.

METHODOLOGY

We came into this process knowing full well that the selection of possible electoral reforms is vast and that, without much effort, we could generate dozens of pie-in-the-sky recommendations. However, we know that in the world of municipal government, political capital is limited and windows for reform are short. Therefore, we sought to come up with a list of recommendations for which we could build a truly compelling case. We separated the possible recommendations into two types: (1) those that could be informed by empirical evidence and/or rigorous research and (2) those that were normatively positive and therefore we felt would not need to meet as high of an evidentiary standard in order to be recommended. For those recommendations in the former category, we drew on existing research and past data in order to make our case, and we cite arguments for and against each recommendation in the following pages. For those recommendations in the latter category, we sought to be selective and only include those recommendations that we felt clearly met the Task Force’s charge. We hope that this framework for reform both makes our immediate recommendations stronger and provides a model for future reforms in other jurisdictions.

We used this methodology to arrive at a set of sixteen distinct recommendations that speak to each of the three parts of our mandate: to increase voter participation; to increase candidate participation; and to increase the openness and transparency of elections. We discuss these three themes below. Each individual recommendation is discussed in more detail in its respective Recommendation Summary, found in the Recommendations section below.

INCREASING VOTER PARTICIPATION

While Somerville's voter participation rates in state and federal elections tend to outperform Massachusetts and national averages, they plummet precipitously from their peaks in odd years when municipal elections are held and many of the most important decisions facing city residents are voted upon. The graph on the preceding page tells a stark story, with turnout rates in municipal elections falling by over 50% compared to state and federal races.

Moreover, participation tends to be skewed to under-represent minority interests. People of color and young people are historically underrepresented at the polls nationwide¹², and we see no evidence that Somerville's voter demographics are any different. This results in elections that reflect the views of but a small, skewed minority of residents. The Somerville electorate tends to be older, whiter, and more stable than the population of the City broadly, yielding elections that reflect the views of but a small minority of residents.

In order to address this serious problem, we recommend a series of reforms—both at the municipal and state levels—that aim to broadly increase turnout and ensure that our elections are as representative as possible. Our recommendations run the gamut. Several seek to change how voters interact with Election Day—encouraging City election officials to reach out to individual residents about the voting process and holding Election Day festivals to cultivate a culture of voting at polling places—while others seek to make voting more inclusive—moving polling places to sites where all voters would feel comfortable and granting the franchise to young people 16- and 17-years of age, non-citizens, and incarcerated individuals. We also strongly suggest consolidating elections so that municipal elections fall on the same timeline as state and federal races and encourage the state to adopt electronic poll books (a prerequisite to voting centers and same day registration). With these reforms, we seek to increase turnout, ensure that historically underrepresented people have a say at the polls, and make the City of Somerville a national leader in electoral reforms.

LOWERING BARRIERS TO CANDIDATE PARTICIPATION

Running for office is challenging. To campaign as a serious candidate requires taking a leave from employment, time away from family, and the willingness to put in resources—often, both monetary and emotional.

Those barriers are very likely to leave segments of the population under-represented in the candidate pool. Many people cannot afford to run for office because they cannot take time away from work. Others may not be able to afford the necessary childcare costs. Still others may simply not feel that they have a strong enough understanding of what being an elected official entails or may not conceptualize themselves as candidates. Yet, a vibrant and representative pool of candidates for any office is crucial to building a responsive and representative government. Contested elections are also one of the best ways to maintain civic engagement among the voting populace, as voting itself is a primary building block of engagement.

In light of this, we recommend four strategies that, if implemented, may lower barriers towards candidate participation. We recommend making information on how to run for office more available, as this by itself can encourage greater participation. We recommend adopting ranked choice voting, which would open avenues for a wider diversity of candidates to attract some measure of support, increasing the incentive to run. We also recommend two changes to campaign finance regulations and laws, including instituting a modest public campaign finance system. These recommended shifts would go some way to leveling the playing field for candidates in different economic circumstances.

INCREASING OPENNESS AND TRANSPARENCY OF THE ELECTION PROCESS

The ability to conduct free and fair elections is fundamental to the healthy functioning of a democracy. At its core, a free and fair election requires trust: trust in one another and trust in the institutions we have built to govern our society. Our current moment is one of increasing digitization and reliance on data, which can work in favor of transparency and accountability. At the same time, we are also experiencing increasing polarization and a growing understanding that our electoral systems are not immune to manipulation. In such a climate, openness and transparency are more crucial than ever to preserving trust in our democratic institutions. It must be clear to voters where candidates stand on the issues; how candidates are chosen for office; and who is participating in each aspect of our electoral system.

We recommend several strategies to promote a proactively transparent electoral system, one in which a bright light is shone on the workings of our electoral machine. Our recommendation of ranked choice voting speaks to the need for transparency in election results by better aligning the results with the preferences of voters. We also recommend that the City take strong actions related to electoral data: that the City require that important campaign finance data be collected, including from online advertising platforms; that the City ensure that voters and potential candidates have access to election-related datasets; and that the City incorporate measures of electoral health into the Key System Indicators it uses to assess its own performance. Finally, we recommend that the City take proactive steps to increase civic engagement in its schools and voting base, to enable the City's residents to fully engage with the democratic system and ensure that all parts of that system are free and fair.

RECOMMENDATION SUMMARIES

Recommendation: Consolidate elections so that municipal elections are held at the same time as state elections.

BACKGROUND

Somerville's municipal elections are currently held in odd-numbered years while state elections are held in even-numbered years. Moving Somerville's elections from odd to even years to coincide with state elections would increase turnout by drawing in the many voters who turn out for state elections but don't come to the polls for municipal elections, and increasing turnout would yield a more representative electorate.

EVIDENCE OF EFFICACY

Consensus in both academic¹³ and lay¹⁴ research is that consolidating elections dramatically increases turnout by as much as two-fold. The evidence in this regard is essentially unanimous.

This change has been implemented in Michigan¹⁵ (2015), New Mexico¹⁶ (2018), and several cities in California¹⁷ (over the past decade). Turnout in California cities has increased;¹⁸ research from other states is not immediately available

Examining turnout trends in recent Somerville elections, even year turnout has always been at least twice as high as the previous year's odd-year turnout.

The most prominent counterargument is that unconsolidated elections allow voters to focus on the specific issues at hand in local elections. While it's undoubtedly true that voters who turn out to vote in municipal elections are solely voting on those candidates/issues, it's hard to argue that any potential increased "focus" outweighs the downside of the large number of voters who are currently not voting, and any potential decreased "focus" has never been quantified.

PATH TO IMPLEMENTATION

To make this change, the City would need to submit a home rule petition to the state for approval. On net, there would likely not be any increase in cost; rather, this change could save money by cutting down on the expense associated with holding more frequent elections.¹⁹

Recommendation: Coordinate and/or encourage non-partisan election day festivities—including free food and drink, music, and more—at or nearby polling places.

BACKGROUND

Polling place festivals have shown to be an effective way to increase voter turnout and increasing turnout yields a more representative electorate. Polling places are typically staid affairs, with occasional sign-holders but no other excitement/celebration. The introduction of polling place festivals would generate excitement around Election Day, drawing voters to the polls and turning Election Day into more of a communal event

EVIDENCE OF EFFICACY

There are two published studies on the topic, each of which has shown moderate effects on turnout (in the range of 2 to 7 percentage point increases).²⁰ The two studies were randomized controlled trials, the gold standard for research. This is almost completely unheard of in the US, with the exception of Puerto Rico, which has a robust culture of Election Day festivals.²¹ It's challenging to draw a direct causal link, but Puerto Rico's turnout is dramatically higher than in the rest of the United States.²²

PATH TO IMPLEMENTATION

Making this change is completely within the city's jurisdiction. Budget and resource requirements would depend on the approach taken. The City could opt to fund the festivals itself or it could solicit donations from local businesses; it could coordinate the festivals with City staff or it could identify community or civic groups to coordinate the activities. It can look to projects such as Civic Nation's #VoteTogether²³ as a model for this work.

Recommendation: Design a mechanism for Somerville’s election officials (chair and members of the Board of Election Commissioners) to reach out to voters to encourage participation in every election.

BACKGROUND

Individual-level outreach from election officials has been shown to increase turnout and increasing turnout yields a more representative electorate. The current election outreach practice is limited to the use of sandwich boards to advertise upcoming elections and election email notifications are sent out in weekly Somerville emails.

EVIDENCE OF EFFICACY

One study found that emails from official sources can be an effective way of providing a small (0.6 percentage point) boost in turnout.²⁴ There is only one study on the topic, but it used a randomized controlled trial, the gold standard for research.

There is no immediately obvious evidence that this is used in other jurisdictions, although many jurisdictions (including Massachusetts) send ballot guides to give voters information about what will be on the ballot²⁵.

PATH TO IMPLEMENTATION

Making this change is completely within the city’s jurisdiction. Budget and resource requirements would depend on the approach taken; however, the City has already made a significant commitment to robust communication directly with residents. Existing communications capacity within the city could likely be allocated toward these activities.

Somerville election officials could send emails and letters and make phone calls to Somerville households encouraging voters to turn out in upcoming elections. Outreach should specifically identify the election officials as the sender, rather than the city of Somerville or any other organization.

Every voter in Somerville could receive official communication from Somerville election officials, likely leading to a moderate increase in turnout

Recommendation: Encourage the state to adopt electronic poll books allowing subsequent implementation of voting centers and same day registration.

BACKGROUND

Electronic poll books would enable many improvements in the administration of elections, including improvements in voter participation. They would also introduce several cybersecurity risks.²⁶ In particular, we do not recommend increased adoption of electronic poll books absent a plan to mitigate those risks.

Electronic poll books enable the use of voting centers and same-day voter registration. Voting centers are a set of voting locations at which any resident of Somerville would be allowed to vote. Currently, Somerville administers early voting with a single voting center at City Hall. Multiple voting centers across the city would require electronic poll books to ensure voters vote only at one location.

EVIDENCE OF EFFICACY

The use of voting centers has been shown to increase turnout by 1.4 to 4.0 percentage points across three studies using difference-in-difference designs.²⁷ Effects are bigger for infrequent voters in low salience elections. They're currently allowed by 13 states.

Same-day voter registration has been shown to increase turnout by 3.0 percentage points and is allowed in 15 states.²⁸

PATH TO IMPLEMENTATION

Massachusetts law allows municipalities to elect to use electronic poll books in their administration of elections, though the Secretary of State has not yet promulgated relevant regulations beyond early voting.²⁹ Using electronic poll books would require clear guidance from the Secretary on standards and security for use in all elections. In addition, the City would have to invest in the necessary information technology infrastructure and equipment to support the use of electronic poll books.

In addition to the adoption of electronic poll books, increasing the use of voting centers (outside of early voting) would require identifying and administering a set of voting centers. We suggest that the legislature adopt laws to clarify that voting centers are allowed. These voting centers would be fewer in number than the number of current polling places, but better centered around registered voters. As there would be fewer centers than current polling places, there is potential for reduced overall administrative burden in administering elections this way.

Same day registration would incur an additional administrative burden. Additionally, same-day voter registration would require a change in state law.

Recommendation: Relocate polling places to sites that are more likely to ensure that all voters feel safe and welcome (i.e., avoid locations such as police stations and houses of worship).

BACKGROUND

Our mandate is to “ensure fair, equitable, and open elections that inspire greater participation...by voters...” The location of a polling place may affect whether certain populations feel comfortable voting. Voting that occurs in a public building, such as a library or administrative building, poses little risk, while asking residents to vote in a police station or religious building is potentially more complicated.

Police stations, in particular, pose specific risks to those who have traditionally been profiled or subject to additional scrutiny by the criminal justice system, including many immigrant or minority populations. Using religious buildings for a civic purpose may also exclude those who do not ascribe to the beliefs of those who frequent the building, and may not feel welcome there. It is on this basis that we recommend that the City prioritize sites other than police stations and houses of worship for voting, with a priority on moving all voting out of police stations.

Currently, the City does have polling places in a police station (Ward 2 Precinct 2) and two churches (Ward 6 Precincts 2 and 3). The City is limited by other factors in determining where polling places should be, including geography and accessibility.

EVIDENCE OF EFFICACY

Although it is a commonly held belief that voter participation would increase by eliminating poll location as a barrier to voting, the idea is not strongly supported by the literature. Instead, it is a measure based more on principle than on evidence-based practice. We believe that the principles inspiring this change are persuasive enough to merit enacting this measure.

Evidence does not exist to support an estimate of what the increase would be in voter participation. The critical point here is that making these changes could potentially promote inclusion and turnout on the part of voters who are members of minority groups who might otherwise not participate due to the concerns posed by religious or police stations.

In other states,³⁰ different non-profit advocacy groups such as the Advancement Project and the NAACP have pushed for polling places to be moved out of police stations on civil rights grounds. There is limited evidence that this impacted voting, and these examples show that these moves need to take place far in advance of voting and be well-publicized.

The greatest argument against this policy is feasibility. There may be too much of a limit of possible spaces to accommodate all potential sensibilities. In this case, we would suggest moving polling places from police stations first before considering relocating those in religious spaces. An additional potential

drawback of this policy is inconveniencing voters who are used to the same voting locations. There is a risk that this change could keep people from voting, although with ample advanced notification of such a change, this risk can be sufficiently mitigated.

PATH TO IMPLEMENTATION

The choice where to locate polling places is within the City's own jurisdiction. The challenges related to this change may be the identification of appropriate new polling locations and the resources required to establish polling routines in new locations and educate the affected voting population of the changes.

Recommendation: Expand suffrage rights via home rule petition and/or state legislation as necessary.

We are addressing otherwise-eligible Somerville residents who: (1) are not U.S. citizens; (2) are at least 16 years of age; and/or (3) are presently incarcerated for a felony conviction.

BACKGROUND

Many Somerville residents cannot fully participate in the civic life of our city because we deny them the right to vote in municipal elections.

Voting Rights for Non-Citizens

For much of the history of the United States, non-citizens had the right to vote in elections.³¹ That right was steadily eroded and ultimately eliminated all across the country amidst a surge of xenophobic nationalism and anti-immigrant sentiment in the first quarter of the 20th Century.³²

Some communities have finally begun to reverse that shameful historical trend. For instance, Takoma Park, Maryland has, since 1992, permitted all non-citizen residents to vote in its municipal elections.³³ Massachusetts municipalities like Cambridge³⁴, Brookline³⁵, Amherst³⁶, Newton³⁷, Wayland³⁸, and, very recently, Boston³⁹⁴⁰ have considered extending municipal voting rights to *some* non-citizen residents, and a few of these communities have submitted home rule petitions requesting that they be allowed to do so. Similar state-level enabling legislation has also been previously proposed.⁴¹ Somerville should go further than these past Massachusetts efforts and pursue voting rights for *all* of our otherwise-eligible non-citizen residents.

Voting Rights for 16- and 17-year-olds

Other countries set 16 as the minimum voting age.⁴²⁴³ And, here in the United States, Takoma Park⁴⁴ and Hyattsville⁴⁵, Maryland already do the same. In Massachusetts, although 16-year-olds may pre-register to vote,⁴⁶ state law dictates that one must be 18-years-old to cast a ballot.⁴⁷ In an era of increasing activism among high school students, Somerville should lead the way by extending the right to vote in municipal elections to all otherwise-eligible residents who are at least 16 years of age, thereby helping to foster a lifelong commitment to civic engagement and participation.

Voting Rights for those Incarcerated for Felonies

Many countries around the world allow incarcerated people to vote.⁴⁸ Maine⁴⁹ and Vermont⁵⁰ are the only two states in the United States that presently permit people to vote while they are incarcerated for felonies. Until 2000, Massachusetts also allowed incarcerated felons to vote.⁵¹ Somerville should lead the way in pursuing the restoration of this fundamental right by extending the right to vote in municipal elections to all otherwise-eligible Somerville residents who are presently incarcerated for a felony conviction.

EVIDENCE OF EFFICACY

These suffrage rights expansions would advance basic justice in our city by substantially increasing the number of Somervillians who could participate in municipal elections. Extending voting rights to non-citizens would mean that the 15% of Somerville's adult residents who are not United States citizens would gain a formal voice in our community's governance.⁵² Giving 16- and 17-year-old residents the right to vote would add more than a thousand voters to our municipal election rolls.⁵³ And, the hundreds of Somerville residents who are incarcerated (almost exclusively outside of Somerville) for felony convictions would no longer be electorally disappeared while imprisoned.⁵⁴

PATH TO IMPLEMENTATION

Massachusetts General Laws ch. 51, section 1 confers the right to vote on "[e]very citizen eighteen years of age or older, not being a person under guardianship or incarcerated in a correctional facility due to a felony conviction."⁵⁵ And, the Massachusetts Constitution, Amendments Article II gives the state government the responsibility to regulate municipal elections.⁵⁶ For this reason, a home rule petition or state legislation would be required to extend municipal voting rights to non-citizens, minors, and/or those incarcerated for felonies.

Recommendation: Increase the City’s commitment to the civic education of young people by adopting a robust civics education curriculum and developing ways to involve high school age students in the civic life of the community.

BACKGROUND

Greater participation in the electoral process in the City—by voters and candidates alike—requires a well-informed and engaged electorate. The belief is that if young people are more well-informed and educated regarding the political process both locally and beyond, and if they are provided opportunities to directly engage with the political process and to understand the workings of local government, including how it impacts their lives and the lives of their families and others in their communities and the role an active electorate plays in local outcomes, they are more likely to be active participants into adulthood.

At Somerville High School, the Social Studies department weaves civics into the US history courses for 9th and 10th graders. In addition, 12th graders are offered an elective in US government that includes more civics material. In the 2018-2019 school year, the Social Studies department will offer a joint course with the Science department on Environmental History which will have an emphasis on civics, as well. Just this year, the Massachusetts legislature advanced new legislation to enhance civics education in public schools, with a proposed effective date of the 2020-21 school year.⁵⁷ After the bill’s passage, Governor Baker added certain amendments and the legislation is under reconsideration with the state Senate as of this writing.⁵⁸

Under the bill, schools would be required to teach U.S. history and social science, including civics, "to promote civic service and a greater knowledge thereof and to prepare students, morally and intellectually, for the duties of citizenship." Students would also have to complete a hands-on civics project. Further details of the bill are available and may be in flux as part of the reconsideration process.

It is our recommendation that the City fully familiarize itself with the details of this legislation and initiate planning now to develop and implement these new requirements at the earliest possible date, rather than waiting for passage of the bill or the requirement that the change take place in the 2020-21 school year.

EVIDENCE OF EFFICACY

This is one of the recommendations our task force is advancing that comes with mixed evidentiary support. In fact, one study that undertook a systematic review of the literature to address the question, “Does civic education for young people increase political participation?” found little evidence for civic education having a discernible or direct effect on voting or voter registration/enrolment, with some support found for civic education increasing activities of political expression (e.g. signing a petition).⁵⁹

Two other studies, however, did substantiate the claim. In one study of 4,057 students from 52 high schools in Chicago, it was found that a set of specific kinds of civic learning opportunities fosters notable improvements in students' commitments to civic participation. The study controlled for demographic factors, preexisting civic commitments, and academic test scores.⁶⁰ Another suggests that a supplementary civics education program can increase subsequent participation in politics by building long-term gains in political self-efficacy and skills in using the news media to follow government and political affairs.⁶¹

PATH TO IMPLEMENTATION

This is a city initiative. Budget and resource implications would be a function of staff time and the cost of the development and implementation of relevant new programming.

Options for consideration should include:

- Design and implementation of mock elections coincident with City elections, involving candidates for election engaging directly with students
- Opportunities for students to meet with elected officials and learn about their roles and work
- Collaboration with community groups such as Teen Empowerment and The Welcome Project to develop and implement civic engagement programming
- Development and implementation of a student internship program to engage students directly with the members of the Board of Aldermen and School Committee.

Recommendation: Increase availability of election-related data and incorporate into Somerville’s Key System Indicators.

BACKGROUND

The City collects a variety of election-related data, including a “voter file” of all registered voters in Somerville as well as statistics on turnout by ward. Some of this data is available on the City’s data clearinghouse⁶² or its statistical data page, SomerStat.⁶³ Other important election-related data, including campaign finance information,⁶⁴ is housed on state-run repositories.

These data can be important tools for candidates in shaping campaign strategy. Based on our research, we understand that potential candidates are given access to the City’s voter file upon indicating their intent to run for office to the City’s Elections Commission; however, not all candidates may understand the type of data available and the different locations thereof. The City should prepare a one-page document to provide candidates along with the Voter File. This document should explain what type of data is available and where each type of data can be found.

Election-related data are also one of the primary ways the City can monitor the openness, inclusivity, and vitality of the city’s electoral system. The City has for several years prepared a variety of Key System Indicators⁶⁵ (KSIs) that can be used to evaluate the performance of city government in Somerville. At present, the City lists no election-related indicators on its dashboard. The City should include a basic analysis of voter turnout by demographic group, registration by demographic group, electoral competitiveness, and other election statistics of interest in its list of KSIs. This will allow the City to measure the effectiveness of its efforts to promote a clean and open electoral system.

EVIDENCE OF EFFICACY

A number of think tanks and other political science organizations have published reports or performed survey research highlighting the importance of transparency and data collection in preserving a free and fair electoral system.⁶⁶ Organizations such as the Pew Charitable Trust perform electoral performance audits of each state, using a methodology which could be adopted in part by the City.⁶⁷ Other municipalities (for example, Glendale, CA⁶⁸) have incorporated election-related statistics into their own KSIs or equivalents.

The primary risks associated with increasing availability of and access to election-related data are twofold. First, data is only as useful as its interpretation. The City must ensure that data-related efforts are accompanied by appropriate caveats and careful analysis to avoid forming mistaken or unsupported conclusions. Second, data can only reveal the impact (or lack thereof) of changes -- data by itself cannot incite change. Neither the City nor its residents should see an effort to monitor electoral performance as an effort to improve electoral performance in and of itself.

PATH TO IMPLEMENTATION

The City can accomplish this recommendation with a modest commitment of staff time. No home rule petition or other legislative change is needed.

Recommendation: Publish and distribute comprehensive voter guides to ensure voters have access to complete, accurate, and unbiased election information.

BACKGROUND

Voter guides are brief pamphlets, booklets, or websites made available to explain key information related to the electoral process. Voter guides may contain practical information on how and where to vote (including for citizens with greater accessibility needs) as well as a ballot preview and information on specific races or ballot questions.⁶⁹ In Massachusetts, the Secretary of State's office distributes a voter guide in even years that has information on ballot questions, including a layperson's explanation of each question⁷⁰ and a statement for and against each question written by relevant advocacy organizations. No voter guides are published by the Commonwealth or the City that pertain to contested races for political office.

We recommend that the City publish an annual voter guide with practical information on voting, a ballot preview, an explanation of each office up for election, and brief candidate statements from each candidate. This voter guide should be made available in multiple languages, including the major languages spoken in the City, and should be available at a variety of drop-off points in the City (such as the three branches of the Somerville Library) as well as online.

EVIDENCE OF EFFICACY

Voter guides are one of the best ways to communicate clear, unbiased information on the electoral process to voters. They are used in a variety of jurisdictions (including for statewide ballot questions in Massachusetts, as above). In California, the Easy Voter Guide has been published for nearly 25 years.⁷¹ In 1996, a pilot study found that distribution of the voter guide increased voter turnout by community and continuing adult education students from an expected 35-36% to over 70%.⁷² Voter guides are also published on the municipal level in San Francisco, CA;⁷³ Portland, Maine;⁷⁴ New York City;⁷⁵ and others.

PATH TO IMPLEMENTATION

The City has jurisdictional authority to create and publish an annual voter guide. Publication of such a document would require staff time as well as the cost associated with printing and distribution. Voter guides are not always published by public entities. Often, they are a collaboration between public entities and relevant non-governmental organizations, such as the League of Women Voters. Somerville may seek to partner with the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts⁷⁶ or others to publish an annual voter guide.

Recommendation: Take action to increase the transparency of political ad purchasing online.

BACKGROUND

The role of advertisements in elections has been a controversial one for many years, eliciting strenuous public debate about the impact of these ads on the electorate and the propriety of specific advertising strategies.⁷⁷ Until recently, these debates focused on advertisements placed in traditional media (radio, television, and print). The increased prevalence of online political advertising through both general ad delivery services (e.g., Google’s AdSense and AdWords) and social media platforms (e.g., Facebook) has complicated this landscape. Most notably, the use of targeted Facebook advertising by agents affiliated with Russia during the 2016 Presidential Election⁷⁸ has been an ongoing topic of concern and discussion by the public⁷⁹ and by lawmakers.⁸⁰

Since the 2016 Presidential Election, foreign purchases of online political advertising have continued, for example in special elections and the upcoming midterms⁸¹ and directly pertaining to major policy debates.⁸² As the machine learning-fueled technology behind ad targeting improves, the barrier to applying such ads to smaller-scale elections (on the state or even municipal levels) will decrease. Meanwhile, the potential benefits of employing divisive or misleading advertising in local elections are great, due to a relative lack of competing information.

Massachusetts state law governs the disclosure requirements associated with purchases of political advertising for state and municipal offices. These requirements are set forth in Chapter 55 of the Massachusetts General Law (MGL 55),⁸³ amended in 2014 by the Massachusetts Disclosure Law. Among the key provisions of this law are:⁸⁴

- Organizations must list their top five contributors above \$5,000 in TV or print advertisements.
- Super PACs must disclose their donors within 7 days of running a paid advertisement.
- Disclosure of Internet and email advertisement electioneering communications is required.

This law requires any entity other than a candidate or a PAC spending at least \$251 on electioneering communications (political ads) to disclose “the name and address of the individual, group, association, corporation, labor union or other entity making the electioneering communication, the name of any candidate clearly identified in the communication, the total amount or value of the communication, the name and address of the vendor to whom the payments were made and the purpose and date of the expenditure.” However, this requirement falls on the *purchaser* rather than the media outlet.

The Office of Campaign and Political Finance (OCPF) regulates campaign finance disclosure in Massachusetts.⁸⁵ OCPF hosts a database of all reported expenditures. For example, OCPF reports \$165,217.20 of reported expenditures on Facebook advertising statewide in 2017.

MGL 55 cannot require disclosure from entities not subject to MA state jurisdiction (e.g., foreign agents). This leaves state elections open to a substantial vulnerability in terms of potential influence from out-of-state actors. We recommend that the City both adopt stricter requirements for municipal elections and support tightening of disclosure requirements at the state level. In addition, we recommend that both City and state law regarding disclosure requirements be regularly revisited in light of the rapidly-changing landscape of this issue.

EVIDENCE OF EFFICACY

The recommendations above would place the City and State at the cutting edge of electoral transparency laws. As such, there is little existing documentation of the effectiveness of these additional disclosure requirements, even as prophylactic measures taken against bad-faith electioneering. However, similar measures have been recommended by experts at the NYU School of Law's Brennan Center for Justice as a means of reducing the influence of foreign expenditures on American elections.⁸⁶

The City of Seattle and State of Washington have attempted to solve this issue by requiring media outlets to disclose the purchasers of political ads purchased for municipal elections. Seattle's statute text reads:

Each commercial advertiser that has accepted or provided political advertising during the election campaign shall maintain open for public inspection during the campaign and for a period of no less than three years after the date of the applicable election, during normal business hours, documents and books of account which shall specify:

- 1) The names and addresses of persons from whom it accepted political advertising;
- 2) The exact nature and extent of the advertising services rendered; and
- 3) The consideration and the manner of paying that consideration for such services.⁸⁷

In Washington State, the amended campaign finance law requires that all commercial advertisers maintain "books of account" that record "details of political advertising or electioneering communications provided by the advertiser, including the names and addresses of persons from whom it accepted political advertising or electioneering communications, the exact nature and extent of the services rendered and the total cost and the manner of payment for the services."⁸⁸ Although innovative, this language leaves out a key element of online advertising, in particular the parameters used to target ads to specific populations.

Seattle has recently received disclosure from Google in compliance with its law.⁸⁹ This is likely to be the sole disclosure received given that, after dedicated enforcement actions on the part of Washington State to ascertain compliance with *its* law, Google has decided to cease accepting political advertising in Washington. This also de facto ends the ability of foreign or bad-faith actors to run untruthful or deliberately manipulative advertising using this platform.

Facebook is currently out of compliance with the City of Seattle's requirements.⁹⁰

The main counter-argument against this recommendation is that it may not be necessary for municipal elections.

PATH TO IMPLEMENTATION

We recommend that the City take strong action to increase the transparency of political ad purchasing online. We recommend the following steps:

- 1) The City should adopt a requirement that goes beyond MGL 55 and requires disclosure of ad purchases by media outlets and online advertising vendors (including both Google and Facebook):
 - a) The City's statute should require disclosure of a similar set information as Seattle's statute, such as the advertising material itself, the candidate on whose behalf the advertisement was purchased, the purchaser of the advertisement, the number of impressions or views of the advertisement, and the cost and manner of payment of the advertising services.
 - b) Additionally, the City's statute should require disclosure of any parameters used to target advertising towards particular audiences and/or to exclude particular groups from viewing the advertisement.
 - c) The City should commit to updating this statute at least every five years, in light of the rapid evolution of the nature of online political advertising.

- 2) The City should formally encourage the State of Massachusetts to update MGL 55 to include the same requirements described above, and to commit to a regular review and update as necessary, of this law.

The City would require a successful home rule petition to adopt a municipal statute requiring additional disclosures related to political advertising. While the City can encourage action at the state level such as a regular update of MGL 55, only the Massachusetts General Court has the ability to implement this recommendation.

If this recommendation were to be adopted, the City might incur minorly increased resource needs for enforcement and data analysis.

Recommendation: Adopt ranked choice voting for all municipal elections and support the adoption of ranked choice voting at the state level.

BACKGROUND

Somerville’s municipal elections, like the vast majority of elections in the United States, use a voting system known as “first past the post.” In the simplest and most common version of this system, voters can endorse only a single candidate for a given office regardless of the number of contenders. The candidate with the plurality of votes wins the office, even if no candidate received a majority of the votes cast. This system is used for the partisan primaries held in state-level elections, nonpartisan primaries held in municipal elections, and general elections at both levels.

While this voting system is straightforward, it can lead to undesirable or perverse results. In races with two or more candidates (most notably, party primaries), the need for a candidate to go on to capture a plurality of votes forces voters into a prisoner’s dilemma-esque focus on “electability”—that is, the perception on the part of a voter that a given candidate will perform well in a general election—rather than allowing voters to simply vote for the candidate that represents them and their views best. In tightly-contested general elections, first past the post systems heavily discourage voters from voting for third-party candidates. Third-party candidates are reputed to have played the role of a “spoiler”—drawing just enough votes away from one candidate that the other candidate secures a plurality—in several notable elections, including Ralph Nader in the 2000 Presidential Election and others.

In light of these outcomes, some have suggested that elections in America use an alternative voting system. Alternative voting systems use different approaches such as vote-casting, vote-counting, or both in an effort to arrive at election results that more closely reflect the preferences of the electorate in as wide a range of circumstances as possible.

This Task Force recommends the adoption of ranked choice voting. In this system, voters rank candidates for office in preference order. When votes are counted, all first-choice votes are tallied and if no candidate has received an absolute majority (more than 50% of first-choice votes), the candidate with the lowest number of first-choice votes is eliminated. The voters that had ranked the eliminated candidate as first then have their votes allocated to their second-choice candidates. This process repeats until one candidate has a majority of the votes.

EVIDENCE OF EFFICACY

Many jurisdictions throughout the U.S. and globally have implemented ranked choice voting including Australia, Maine, and the cities of San Francisco, CA; Minneapolis, MN; St. Paul, MN; and Cambridge, MA.

There is some evidence that the use of preferential voting systems, such as ranked choice systems, increases voter satisfaction with their elected officials.⁹¹ However, ranked choice voting has a minimal

impact on voter turnout overall.⁹² Experientially, ranked choice systems appear to increase the civility of elections,⁹³ due to candidates' desires to maintain a good image in the eyes of voters who might rank them second or third.

The main concern associated with ranked choice voting is that it is confusing for voters. However, Maine's recent experience⁹⁴ suggests that populations can accept ranked choice voting with a minimal level of difficulty and can rapidly adopt new electioneering and voting strategies.

PATH TO IMPLEMENTATION

The City would need a home rule petition to adopt ranked choice voting at the municipal level. The incumbent Secretary of State of the Commonwealth, William Galvin, has endorsed state adoption of ranked choice voting.⁹⁵

Importantly, we do not endorse any particular form of ranked choice voting.⁹⁶ Our recommendation is agnostic as to whether or not the City endorse elimination of party primaries (which is common for ranked choice systems) and to whether voters are given a limited number of preferences (i.e., voters can select their top three candidates or no more) or allowed to rank an unlimited number of candidates.

If ranked choice voting were to be adopted by the City only, the City would need to print additional ballots for municipal elections. Otherwise, there are minimal budget and resource requirements known to be associated with this recommendation.

Recommendation: Align with new federal guidelines to allow spending of campaign funds on child and elder care expenses incurred as a direct result of time spent on campaigning.

BACKGROUND

In Massachusetts, it is prohibited for campaign funds to be spent for “personal use”.⁹⁷ Forbidden personal uses of campaign funds have included dependent care, such as childcare and elder care. Because campaigning itself is often a full-time commitment, this prohibition functionally acts as a barrier to single parents and others with high dependent-care obligations participating fully in our electoral system. This is especially true because Massachusetts has no universal pre-K system, despite multiple efforts in the state legislature to advance such proposals.⁹⁸

In May of 2018, the Federal Election Commission determined that dependent care is an eligible use of campaign funds for congressional candidates.⁹⁹ We recommend that the City adopt this guidance at the municipal level and support adoption at the state level.

EVIDENCE OF EFFICACY

The question of whether or not prohibiting use of campaign funds for dependent care expenses reduces the diversity of candidates has not been widely studied. The main objection is that candidates may use funds in a way that is improper or corrupt; however, we find this to be unlikely with appropriate oversight of spending, as with any other use of campaign funds.

PATH TO IMPLEMENTATION

The City would require a home rule petition to implement this change at the municipal level. Legislation allowing this change has been proposed in the state legislature, and is sponsored by members of Somerville’s legislative delegation;¹⁰⁰ however, the proposal has not yet been voted on.

Recommendation: Create and implement a public financing model for municipal elections.

BACKGROUND

The influence of money in politics is well-documented. Indeed, because campaign expenditures at the state and city level tend to be lower than for federal races, a small amount of money can have a dramatic effect. Further, candidates that have to spend less time raising money can spend more time engaging their constituents.

Massachusetts currently has a public financing program for candidates for six statewide offices,¹⁰¹ but none at the municipal level. Nationwide, there are 16 counties and cities that have public financing available for candidates. There are many different models for public financing that are used.

Generally, public financing programs either (a) match private donations up to some maximum, (b) give fixed grants to eligible candidates, or (c) give vouchers to citizens to give to candidates. Further, accepting the public funding limits the total amount the campaign can spend. And finally, there is usually some requirement to demonstrate sufficient support within the constituency to qualify for public financing.

EVIDENCE OF EFFICACY

There is some support in the literature for public financing improving candidate and voter participation, but evidence is limited.¹⁰² Nevertheless, it would certainly help make elections in Somerville more open and cleaner.

PATH TO IMPLEMENTATION

We propose a hybrid model between (a) and (b). (Note that the amounts listed are notional to demonstrate the model. There needs to be further study and research to determine the right amounts for particular elections.) In particular, candidates that qualify for the ballot would receive an initial public grant of \$500. The candidates would receive additional grants of equal value for every 250 unique donors up to a maximum of \$10,000 (equivalently, 5,000 donors).

This would require some additional administration from the City's Elections Department, as well as OCPF approval and a home rule petition. The total amount required for budgeting would depend on the specific races supported.

Recommendation: Increase the proactive dissemination of information regarding all aspects of elected positions in the city: Mayor, Board of Aldermen, and School Committee, including the role and responsibilities of each and how to run for elected office.

BACKGROUND

Greater participation in the electoral process in the City—by voters and candidates alike—requires a well-informed electorate. Specifically, without adequate information about local government, eligible residents are less likely to consider participating by running for elected office.

The Somerville Elections Department is charged with managing and conducting all aspects of the voting process for municipal, state, and federal elections within the City. The Department readily distributes information related to running for office to anyone who inquires, and makes that information available through a link on the City’s website¹⁰³ that includes information on the legal eligibility requirements to run for City office and how to get on the ballot by securing a sufficient number of signatures from registered voters.

Most candidate recruitment in Massachusetts occurs informally. Because many areas (including Somerville) are effectively single-party, the national Democratic and Republican Parties are minimally involved in local races (including for US House) in Massachusetts. The state Democratic Party does not provide funding for local races but does operate a training program (described below). Moreover, because many races are ultimately decided in the Democratic primary stage, the state party is restricted in demonstrating preference for one candidate over another.

Therefore, there is little to no formal candidate recruitment process from the Democratic party in Somerville. There does not appear to be an active Republican Party organization in Somerville, nor do the alternative parties (Libertarian, Green-Rainbow, etc.) have a robust presence. Ultimately, most candidate recruitment occurs through person-to-person encouragement to run. This process is prone to reproduce systemic biases, as members of groups with less connection to the political system are less likely to be encouraged to run by political “operatives” (be they professional or amateur).

Several organizations operate candidate training programs or “bootcamps”. These include:

- Mass Dems offers “Campaign Bootcamps¹⁰⁴ in various communities throughout the state.
- Mass GOP, the state’s Republican Party, has in the past operated candidate and campaign training programs; however, there is nothing currently available.
- Emerge Massachusetts,¹⁰⁵ an organization dedicated to increasing the number of Democratic women leaders from diverse backgrounds in public office, offers a six-month training program to women considering running for public office and a short-term “bootcamp” for women who have already declared their candidacy.

- MassAlliance,¹⁰⁶ a coalition of progressive political and advocacy organizations, offers introductory and in-depth training opportunities for progressives considering running for elected office.
- Democracy for America¹⁰⁷, a political action committee, typically offers intensive in-person workshops as well as on-line training program for progressive candidates.
- National Democratic Training Committee Training¹⁰⁸ offers free, online training that is aimed at democratic and progressive candidates running for office at every level, including down-ballot/local elections.

The biggest barrier to candidate access appears to center around engagement. Potential candidates don't know what the day-to-day job of an alderman, school committee member, or state representative is, how to construct a platform, and how to build a compelling case to voters based on that platform. Many potential candidates do not view themselves as viable for various reasons; this appears to be especially true of women.

EVIDENCE OF EFFICACY

Because there is limited academic or published literature on this topic, our primary evidence is the informal testimony provided by Alderman J.T. Scott, a member of this Task Force, as well as the personal experiences of the Task Force members generally. Alderman Scott spoke with us about what he learned as a first-time candidate for local elected office. He spoke to the limited extent to which some individuals in the city are exposed to information about the political process, including the option to run for elected office. In his opinion, the information that is available could be expanded and improved upon and made more available, and it could be clearer whose responsibility it is in the city to help residents become more aware that it is an option to run for office and how to do it.

PATH TO IMPLEMENTATION

Information shared about how to run for office should include but also extend beyond the nuts and bolts provided by Somerville's Elections Department. It should include a directory of resources available within and beyond Somerville that offer training and information designed to assist potential candidates with the process of running for elected office. The City's efforts should also include identifying civic and community groups and engaging them in outreach and dissemination of this information.

The information provided by the Elections Department and potentially other groups would be made available more pro-actively, thereby reaching more eligible Somerville residents. By providing more information, more people will be afforded the opportunity to consider running for elected office.

The following are ideas for how the City of Somerville could increase the availability and dissemination of information on the role of each elected position and on how to run for elected office:

- Recruit and partner with civic and community groups on this project
- Engage in more proactive advertisement of the process required to become a candidate, including deadlines to submit nomination papers and other relevant milestones

- Facilitate online submission of nomination papers
- Disseminate information about the availability of candidate training programs
- Design and implement a city-sponsored scholarship program to assist eligible residents with participation in candidate training programs
- Partner with Somerville Community Access TV to design, produce, and disseminate brief video interviews of the Mayor and each current member of the Board of Alderman, School Committee, and State Delegation describing why each decided to run for office, what their job consists of, reflections on campaigning, and reflections on their experience in office (e.g. favorite part of being an elected official).
- Partner with local media outlets and/or Tufts University to design and implement an initiative by which a regular podcast or similar format bulletin is produced to communicate more broadly throughout the community details about the major issues being discussed by the two groups.

This is a city initiative. The only relevant issue in this regard is around the actual and perceived role of the Somerville Elections Department when it comes to proactively disseminating information about running for elected office.

The resources required would be in the form of the time of City staff spent on designing and implementing a program of this nature, and the cost of developing and producing materials beyond what is already in place.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Municipal offices are non-partisan; that is, office-holders are not formally considered to represent any political party.
- ² <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/07/27/turnout-in-this-years-u-s-house-primaries-is-up-especially-on-the-democratic-side/>
- ³ <https://fivethirtyeight.com/features/the-sheer-number-of-democrats-running-for-congress-is-a-good-sign-for-the-party/>
- ⁴ <https://www.npr.org/2018/05/10/610099506/fec-says-that-candidates-can-use-campaign-funds-for-child-care>
- ⁵ <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2018/06/maine-lepage-ranked-choice-voting/562871/>
- ⁶ <http://www.michiganradio.org/post/5-things-know-about-ballot-proposal-end-gerrymandering-michigan>
- ⁷ <https://nextcity.org/daily/entry/boston-city-council-considers-giving-legal-immigrants-voting-rights>
- ⁸ <https://www.somervillema.gov/departments/programs/votesomerville>
- ⁹ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sMFO-Q3VsvbnQiHgf0NaCLCuNu7YRYp-/view?usp=sharing>
- ¹⁰ <https://www.cambridgema.gov/Departments/electioncommission/electionresults>
- ¹¹ <https://www.metrowestdailynews.com/article/20160228/NEWS/160226491>
- ¹² https://www.census.gov/newsroom/blogs/random-samplings/2017/05/voting_in_america.html
- ¹³ http://pages.ucsd.edu/~zhajnal/page1/page2/files/page2_3.pdf
- ¹⁴ http://www.ncsl.org/Documents/Elections/The_Canvass_April_2016.pdf, p2
- ¹⁵ http://www.mlive.com/lansing-news/index.ssf/2015/04/michigan_house_votes_to_end_fe.html
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- ¹⁷ <http://greenlining.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Research-Brief-Odd-Year-vs-Even-Year-Consolidated-Elections-in-California.pdf>
- ¹⁸ <http://greenlining.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Research-Brief-Odd-Year-vs-Even-Year-Consolidated-Elections-in-California.pdf>
- ¹⁹ http://www.ncsl.org/Documents/Elections/The_Canvass_April_2016.pdf, p3; <http://greenlining.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/Research-Brief-Odd-Year-vs-Even-Year-Consolidated-Elections-in-California.pdf>, p11
- ²⁰ 2007 study: http://jwolf-ra.wdfiles.com/local--files/field-experiments/Party%20-%20Addonizio_Green_Glaser_2007.pdf and 2017 study: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2999305
- ²¹ <https://www.good.is/articles/puerto-rico-does-it-right-imagine-an-election-day-like-this>
- ²² http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/victory_lab/2012/01/puerto_rico_voter_turnout_why_is_it_so_high_single.html
- ²³ <https://votetogetherusa.org/>
- ²⁴ <https://ideas.repec.org/a/now/ijlqjps/100.00011073.html>
- ²⁵ https://ballotpedia.org/Features_of_official_voter_guides,_compared_by_state
- ²⁶ <http://www.ncsl.org/research/elections-and-campaigns/electronic-pollbooks.aspx>

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- ²⁷ Stein and Vonnahme, 2008
https://www.bakerinstitute.org/media/files/Research/0af68d74/pol_pub_steinvonnahmeunengagedvoter_042008.pdf; Vonnahme, et al., 2012 https://cpb-us-east-1-juc1ugur1qwqqgo4.stackpathdns.com/blogs.rice.edu/dist/2/1060/files/2012/02/sppcPaper_vonnahmeEDVC.pdf; Stein and Vonnahme, 2012
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