
Instant Runoff Voting

Making Every Vote Count

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Overview of the Minneapolis Charter Amendment Initiative

A campaign is building to amend the Minneapolis city charter to make Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) the method by which we elect our city officials.

IRV allows voters to rank candidates in order of preference and ensures in a majority winner in just one election, eliminating costly and low turnout primaries in nonpartisan local elections.

Early Steps – Assessing Support for Instant Runoff Voting

A small group of active Minneapolis residents began working with FairVote Minnesota, a nonprofit elections reform educational and advocacy organization, to assess interest and support among political and community leaders in the potential of a charter amendment for the use of IRV for Minneapolis elections. Two previous petition efforts for an IRV charter amendment fell short of the necessary support to secure a ballot measure. Ensuring adequate support is key to a successful ballot measure effort. Activities and developments during the early stages include:

- In November 2004, the Minneapolis City Council voted 10-3 to support a resolution calling on the state to buy IRV-ready voting equipment. Unfortunately, the legislature failed to include this amendment in the HAVA legislation this past session.
- Following a two-year study, the League of Women Voters of Minnesota came out with a strong endorsement of IRV for local elections. Other organizations that have endorsed IRV include the Minneapolis Star Tribune, MPIRG, the Independence Party of Minnesota and the Green Party of Minnesota, which actively promotes IRV as part of its platform.
- DFL Party members elected IRV supporters Brian Melendez as state party chair and David Weinlick as city party chair, not to mention IRV supporter Howard Dean as chair of the Democratic National Committee.
- A lively on-line discussion emerged during the 2005 endorsement season about the merits of IRV for local elections and convention endorsements on the Minneapolis Issues Forum.
- On April 22, 2005 the Minneapolis City Council held a study session to take a closer look at IRV for city elections. A similar session was held with the Minneapolis Charter Commission on May 4th. See link to the City Council presentation at <http://www.fairvotemn.org/node/28>.
- IRV informational meetings and conversations have been held with several elected and community leaders to assess the potential of an IRV charter amendment. The general sense emerging from these meetings is that such an amendment would be desirable, but that it would require more education and base building in order to be successful.
- IRV charter amendment campaigns in other cities have been reviewed, including discussions with campaign leaders, to understand the requirements of a successful

campaign. These requirements include support from the political and party leadership of the community, clear organizational plan, strong voter education and supportive press coverage.

- House parties and other educational events are being organized to build awareness of and support for an IRV charter amendment campaign.
- FairVote Minnesota sponsored a training session on September 17th for Minneapolis residents interested in becoming involved in charter amendment efforts. A second training is being planned following the November general election. FairVote Minnesota provides ongoing educational opportunities and keeps track of legislation related to IRV statewide.

Setting the Stage for a Possible 2006 Charter Amendment

The stage for an actual charter amendment campaign is now being set. Given the above developments, several pre-campaign strategies are unfolding from now until May 2006 to build support for the campaign and to assess if it is viable to move forward with a 2006 ballot measure. These strategies include:

1. Build awareness during the 2005 city election campaigns. Conduct candidate and voter education efforts in conjunction with the fall city election campaign. This includes a candidate questionnaire (jointly sponsored by FairVote MN, Get Bob, MPIRG, and LWV-Mpls). Candidate responses to the questionnaire are published on line at www.fairvotemn.org/node/164. Citizens are being urged to raise the issue at candidate forums.
2. Establish a governing board for the IRV Charter Amendment Committee, which has been registered with Hennepin County as a political committee to conduct the charter amendment campaign. This entity will write and sponsor the proposal and raise and spend money on a ballot measure campaign. The board will guide the campaign, provide a network of political and community support for a campaign and assist in fundraising.
3. In January 2006, propose a city-sponsored study of the IRV charter amendment proposal with participation by the city council, elected boards, mayor's office, charter commission, the chief judge of Hennepin County District Court, and city and county elections offices. The group would be asked to report findings and recommendations by April 30.
4. Recruit coalition partners and petition signatures. Recruit organizational partners – including the four main political parties (DFL, Republican, Green and Independence) – to build awareness and support for the IRV charter amendment and to gather signatures from their constituencies for a charter amendment petition. The hope would be to get a recommendation from the charter commission without need for recourse to a petition. However, the petition could serve as a show of public support for the proposal and an incentive for the commission to act. It could also serve as a campaign resource for Get-Out-The-Vote among other things.
5. Prepare pro-amendment citizens to apply for appointment to one of six positions on the charter commission, with terms beginning March 26, 2006. Similarly, advise the chief judge of district court (the charter commission appointing authority) of the timeliness of the issue and the need for commissioners to be prepared to consider it.
6. Direct an educational effort at DFL senate district meetings and party interest group caucus meetings in the city leading up to March 7, 2006 precinct caucuses. The goal would be to have pro-amendment resolutions passed in each precinct and senate district conventions,

feeding into the city convention contemplated for May 2006. The city convention is the body that would endorse the charter amendment and put it on the party's sample ballot.

7. Continue building awareness and interest through educational events with coalition partners, house parties, public media and other means.
8. Develop and move forward with a funding plan for a charter amendment campaign.
9. Organize a volunteer base of field and coalition organizers and fundraisers to help implement the above strategies. A campaign manager and other staff may be hired once funding is in place.

Conditions for a Charter Amendment on the 2006 Ballot

The success at implementing the above plan, with events culminating in May 2006, will indicate whether it is viable to go forward with an amendment campaign in 2006 or whether a slower, more incremental approach will be needed. Specific benchmarks that will indicate whether or not to proceed with a 2006 campaign include:

- Composition (favorable vs. unfavorable) of the charter commission and/or city council (i.e. do we have the votes?)
- Number/size of organizational partners and the number of amendment petition signatures they were able to gather (i.e. sufficient to put it on the ballot)
- The outcome of a city study and whether it is favorable to the amendment
- The outcome of the city DFL convention, specifically whether there is an endorsement of the charter amendment
- The ability to raise funds for the campaign

If the decision is made in May of next year to move forward with a charter amendment on the 2006 ballot, a full campaign would be put into motion. Activities would include:

- Hire/Organize campaign manager and other staff and volunteers
- Continue to fundraise
- Seek concurrently Charter Commission and City Council approval
- Develop and implement communications/public media plan
- Develop and implement a voter outreach and education plan
- Conduct other campaign activities as they are developed

Internship and Volunteer Opportunities

The charter amendment initiative is seeking interns and volunteers to assist in four areas of organizing from now until May 2006 (a decision to pursue the campaign for the November 2006 ballot would mean the activities would continue):

Field Organizers:

Duties: Recruit, train, and mobilize a network of supporters who would attend precinct caucuses, introduce resolutions of support for the IRV Charter Amendment, get elected to the senate district convention resolutions committee and as a delegate to the senate district and city conventions.

Coalition Organizers:

Duties: Recruit organizations with memberships/constituencies in Minneapolis to 1) endorse the IRV Charter Amendment, 2) pledge some form of support for the campaign, particularly collecting petition signatures from their memberships/constituencies.

Event Organizers:

Duties: Plan and coordinate trainings and other educational events relating to field organizing and coalition building.

Fundraising Organizers:

Duties: Assist in developing fundraising plans, contacting potential organizational and individual donors and organizing fundraising events.

What Coalition Partners Can Do

- Endorse the IRV Charter Amendment, including promoting the IRV charter amendment campaign on the organization's web site and in other public communications
- Gather signatures from members or constituents for a charter amendment petition. The due date for returning petition signatures in May 8, 2006.
- Recruit constituent supporters to participate in the 2006 precinct caucus process to promote the IRV charter amendment resolution
- Co-sponsor educational events to promote the campaign for members and constituents
- Provide a staff person to work on the campaign
- Pledge a contribution and assist in fundraising for the campaign
- Ask constituencies to write letters to the editor and commentaries to community papers
- Recruit other coalition partners
- Recruit individuals to become involved in the campaign (see list below)

What Individuals Can Do

- Endorse the Minneapolis IRV Charter Amendment
- Attend IRV educational events
- Participate in candidate forums during the 2005 campaign to ask candidates their view on IRV
- Advocate for a city-sponsored study
- Present to party caucuses, senate district and other meetings
- Work for an IRV charter amendment resolution at precinct caucuses and conventions
- Recruit organizational partners
- Apply for appointment to the charter commission
- Host a house party to build interest in IRV
- Assist in organizing other IRV educational events
- Talk to 10 people about IRV and get them connected to the campaign
- Help fund raise for a Minneapolis campaign
- Write a letter to the editor or commentary
- Help create a media and communications plan