



ARLINGTON COUNTY, VIRGINIA

County Board Agenda Item Meeting of December 17, 2022

DATE: November 14, 2022

SUBJECT: Establishment of Ranked Choice Voting as the election method for the June 2023 County Board Primary Election.

RECOMMENDATION:

Adopt the attached uncodified ordinance to establish Ranked Choice Voting as the election method for the June 2023 County Board primary election.

ISSUES: State law provides that any changes to an election must occur at least 90 days before such election. Endorsement of Ranked Choice Voting and adoption of the resolution brings Arlington into compliance with the law, and allows the Arlington County Registrar sufficient time to educate and engage the community on the changes, as well as prepare the new ballots and tabulation system;

SUMMARY: This is a request of the County Board Chair to establish Ranked Choice Voting as the election method for the June 2023 County Board primary election.

BACKGROUND: In July 2020, the Virginia General Assembly passed a bill to amend the Code of Virginia [[section 24.2-673.1](#)] to allow localities to implement Ranked Choice Voting in elections of members of a county board of supervisors or a city council may be conducted by ranked choice voting. In fall 2021, the Arlington Electoral Board conducted a public engagement with Q&A and a “mock election,” and held a joint work session with the County Board to discuss this method of voting in the County. Board members expressed interest in soliciting public feedback and exploring a pilot program for the 2023 County Board primary elections.

DISCUSSION: Ranked Choice Voting is an election method that allows voters the option to rank candidates in order of preference (first, second and third choice, etc.), though they are not required to do so. RCV differs from plurality voting, Arlington’s current method, in which voters may only select one candidate. If a candidate receives more than half of the first choices, that candidate wins, just like in any other election.

County Manager:

MJS / MLC

County Attorney:

MNC

Staff: Amina Ait-Bella, CBO

However, if there is no majority winner after counting the first choices, the race is decided by an instant runoff. The candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and voters who ranked that candidate as their first choice will have their votes count for their next choice. This process continues until a candidate emerges with more than half of the vote and is declared the winner.

The threshold for winning in RCV is adjusted based on the number of seats to fill. A similar process of eliminating and electing candidates through rounds of counting occurs until all the seats are filled

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT:

Level of Engagement: Communicate & Consult

Outreach Methods: The Arlington Electoral Board began its discussions after HB506, the state enabling legislation, took effect in July of 2021. At its public meetings, the Electoral Board reviewed analyses of [Ranked Choice Voting and its application in Arlington](#).

In August 2021, the Arlington Office of Elections held a community event at the Bozman Government Center to educate and inform about Ranked Choice Voting. Participants completed a model RCV ballot, in a mock election facilitated by Elections staff and volunteers, to select Arlington's favorite farmer's market, followed by a town-hall style Q&A about implementation of RCV.

In October 2021, the County Board held a work session with the Electoral Board and Registrar, in part on the topic of RCV. The work session, [video available here](#), was an opportunity for County Board members to learn about RCV, both in its impacts on voters and the specifics of tabulation. The conversation also surfaced related issues, such as independent local elections of School Boards (not eligible for RCV under state code).

Beginning in fall of 2022, the County Board invited public input on the idea of implementing RCV as a pilot with County Board primaries in June of 2023. A survey (Images shown below) was developed in conjunction with the Registrar and announced at the September 18 Recessed Board meeting. Staff also announced the survey through regular media channels. Another announcement was made at the October Recessed Board meeting.

Ranked-Choice Voting

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is ranked-choice voting?

Ranked-choice voting (RCV) is an election method that allows voters the option to rank candidates in order of preference (first choice, second choice, third choice, and so on). Ranking candidates is different from simply selecting one candidate or what is known as plurality voting. (source: <https://www.rcvresources.org/what-is-rcv>)

2. How does ranked-choice voting work?

If a candidate receives more than half of the first choices, that candidate wins, just like in any other election. However, if there is no majority winner after counting the first choices, the race is decided by an instant runoff. The candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated, and voters who ranked that candidate as their first choice will have their votes count for their next choice. This process continues until a majority winner, or a candidate won, with more than half of the vote. Ranked-choice voting works equally well when there are multiple seats to fill. The threshold for winning is adjusted depending on the number of seats to fill. A similar process of eliminating and electing candidates through rounds of counting occurs until all the seats are filled. (source: <https://www.rcvresources.org/what-is-rcv>)

3. Do I have to rank candidates? Can I just choose one?

No, you may rank as few candidates as you like. You may choose just one candidate on the form.

4. Will every office on the ballot - federal, state, and local - be by ranked-choice vote?

No, ranked choice voting in the June primaries will only be for Arlington County Board candidates.

RCV Feedback

Ranked Choice Voting Questionnaire and Feedback

What is your Zip Code? **Required**

What comments do you have for the Board about ranked-choice voting? **Required**

1000 Characters Max - If you have further comments, you may upload a file below or submit via email to Countyboard@arlingtonva.us

Maximum 1000 characters (1000 remaining)

What questions would you raise about ranked-choice voting implementation? **Required**

1000 Characters Max - If you have further comments, you may upload a file below or submit via email to Countyboard@arlingtonva.us

Maximum 1000 characters (1000 remaining)

Have you ever voted in a ranked-choice voting election before? (Previous jurisdiction, etc.) **Required**

How favorably do you feel about ranked-choice voting? **Required**

Upload any supporting materials here:

Select file

In addition, the County Board took public comment on the item on [November 12, 2022](#) as part of its consideration of a request to advertise a public hearing on the matter at its December 17, 2022, meeting.

Community Feedback: Over 780 responses to the survey were received as of the closing date on November 4. Responses were reported from every zip code in Arlington. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 4 and 5 being ‘favorable’ and ‘very favorable’, 75% of respondents voted in favor of implementing RCV. A zip code analysis indicates that feedback from each region of the County is favorable, with the lowest favorability in 22207 at 63%, and the highest in 22203, at 88%.

FISCAL IMPACT: The County’s current voting machines support rank choice voting (RCV) with ranking up to three choices. Arlington’s current voting machines are also due for replacement and a new system will include the capability for voters to rank six or more candidates.

Arlington Elections is currently evaluating whether the replacement of voting machines will occur in 2023 or 2025 based on “end of life” signs presenting in the current system. The Adopted Capital Improvement Plan (CIP) FY 2023 – FY 2032 provides funding for replacement of the current voting machines in FY 2025 at a cost of \$2,000,000, but capital funding of \$2,000,000 may need to be accelerated from FY 2025 to FY 2023.

Adoption of RCV for the June 2023 County Board primary election – and the ability for voters to rank more than three candidates – will be one factor in Arlington Elections’ timeline for replacing voting machines. Additionally, there will be an increased operational cost associated with printing longer ballots (up to \$30,000). If approved, staff would begin developing a community education campaign at an approximate cost of \$50,000.

**ENACTMENT OF AN UNCODIFIED ORDINANCE TO ESTABLISH RANKED
CHOICE VOTING IN THE JUNE 2023 PRIMARY ELECTION.**

BE IT ORDAINED by the County Board of Arlington, Virginia, that the following uncoded ordinance is hereby enacted and ranked choice voting is hereby adopted as the election method in the June 2023 County Board primary election.

WHEREAS, ranked choice voting (RCV) means the method of casting and tabulating votes in which voters rank candidates in order of preference, tabulation proceeds in sequential rounds in which last-place candidates are defeated and the candidates with the most votes in the final round are nominated; and

WHEREAS, in July 2021, the Virginia General Assembly amended the Code of Virginia (§ 24.2-673.1) to allow localities to implement RCV in elections of members of a county board of supervisors or a city council, and the decision to conduct an election by ranked choice voting shall be made, in consultation with the local electoral board and general registrar, by a majority vote of the board of supervisors or city council that the office being elected serves; and

WHEREAS, the Electoral Board and Registrar of Arlington County, Virginia have engaged in educational efforts about RCV during 2021, including conducting a mock election using the application of RCV and a work session with the Arlington County Board to introduce and establish familiarity among stakeholders of the process of RCV; and

WHEREAS, the method of RCV empowers voters to express their full preferences on their ballots and has been successfully adopted in various localities and states across the nation, and has been shown in research to support more diverse candidate pools and improved civility in campaigns and elections, and the use of RCV in the June 2023 primary elections for Arlington County Board will allow for the introduction of this new method to our community; and

WHEREAS, state law provides that any changes to an election must occur at least 90 days before such election and with the passage of this resolution Arlington County is compliant, and adoption of this resolution more than six months before the primary election allows the Arlington County Registrar sufficient time to educate and engage the community on the changes, as well as prepare the new ballots and tabulation system;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT ORDAINED, that the County Board of Arlington County, Virginia, hereby establishes RCV as the election method in the June 2023 County Board primary election.

Adopted the 17th day of December 2022.