

MOTION

6. Revisiting the Random Ballot for Equity's Sake

At the Regular Council meeting on July 23, 2019, Council referred the following motion to the Standing Committee on City Finance and Services meeting on July 24, 2019, to hear from speakers, with a start time of 3 pm.

Submitted by: Councillor Kirby-Yung

WHEREAS

1. Barriers in the electoral system can contribute to reduced voter participation;
2. One of the goals of the Healthy City Strategy is to increase voter turn-out, which is a common proxy for measuring democracy, and the City is actively working on the development of an Equity Framework;
3. In April 2018, Vancouver City Council voted to list Mayoral, Council and Park Board Commissioner candidates in random order instead of alphabetical order on Vancouver's next municipal election in October that year. This was purported to create a more even playing field for candidates. A by-law was subsequently enacted by Council per the provisions of Section 79 of the *Vancouver Charter*;
4. The April 2018 Taking the ABCD Bias off the Ballot Motion suggested that alphabetical bias in the ballot has a particularly negative impact on people who have last names that are Chinese, South Asian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese or Latino - among others; however, cultural representation actually decreased following the 2018 election that used a random order ballot;
5. It has been suggested that switching from an alphabetically ordered to a random order ballot could eliminate order bias. However, 60% of Councillors elected in October 2018 appeared in the first one-third of the one-version random ballot, indicating that one order bias was changed for another;
6. Voters cited confusion and inertia at the overwhelming ballot length and random form for the October 2018 Vancouver municipal election;
7. In November 2018, Council directed staff to prepare a 2018 Municipal Election Review report to Council by May 2019 including but not limited to such factors as the efficacy of the random ballot, with the goal of supporting strong voter turnout and confidence in the electoral process. Voter turnout in 2018 was 39% vs 43.4% in 2014 not achieving the City's goal of increasing civic participation;

8. The 2018 Municipal Election Review report indicated that random order ballots were cited as more personally confusing by Chinese, South Asian and minority voters compared to Caucasian voter survey respondents;
9. The same post-election survey indicated that Caucasian respondents were significantly more likely to prefer random order ballots, compared to Chinese, South Asian and minority respondents.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED

- A. THAT Council acknowledge that the 2018 Municipal Election Review report indicated that random order ballots were cited as more confusing by Chinese, South Asian and minority residents, and that given the goal of equity as well as increasing voter turnout, it is prudent to reconsider the use of an alphabetical vs. a random order ballot for the next Vancouver municipal election as permitted by Sections 78 and 79 of the *Vancouver Charter*.
- B. THAT Council direct staff to engage with appropriate Resident Advisory Committees for their feedback on the use of an alphabetical vs random order ballot, including the Racial & Ethno-Cultural Equity Advisory Committee, Urban Indigenous People's Advisory Committee, Persons with Disabilities Advisory Committee, and Seniors Advisory Committee.
- C. THAT staff report back to Council by Q1 2020 with Committee feedback and recommendations related to whether or not to return to an alphabetically ordered ballot for the next Vancouver municipal election, including possible recommendations for by-law enactment per the provisions of Section 79 of the *Vancouver Charter*.

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