

COUNCIL MEMBERS' MOTION

5. UBCM Resolution - Local Choice: Tools to Improve Representation in Local Government Elections

Submitted by: Councillor Boyle

WHEREAS

1. On February 10th, 2021, Council voted in support of the following direction:

THAT Council direct the Mayor to write to BC's new Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Attorney General to request that the Province of British Columbia create "Local Choice" legislation that grants municipalities the power to consider, choose and adopt more inclusive voting systems as a means of improving representation and racial diversity on Council in future elections;
2. Vancouver's municipal elections have historically seen low levels of engagement and inadequate representation of Black, Indigenous and People of Colour residents, women, and renters, due to various intersecting barriers to participation and representation;
3. The City of Vancouver has a highly diverse population, with people from racialized communities constituting more than half of the City's population. While this term Vancouver elected a majority of women to Council for the first time, the city's racial diversity has never been well reflected in the composition of Vancouver City Council;
4. Greater diversity on Council would mean that people from Indigenous, South Asian, East Asian, Black, and other communities of colour would be better represented, allowing more residents to see themselves around the table, resulting in more trust in decisions being made, and better policy outcomes;
5. There are a variety of voting systems that have been shown to elect more representative proportions of people from racialized and underrepresented communities. These results have been observed in San Francisco, New York City, and Cambridge, MA, New Zealand, and several European countries. More inclusive voting systems are also associated with nearly 10% higher rates of women being elected to public office, on average, than winner-take-all systems such as our current At Large Block Voting system and the First-Past-the-Post system;
6. Major cities across North America have recently modernized their voting system in an effort to increase participation and diversity. These cities include London (ON), Minneapolis, and New York City;
7. Vancouver should be proactive in exploring more inclusive voting systems, not only to include a diverse range of voices in the city but also

to reaffirm our commitment to democratic institutions as a whole. Representation in government is an essential cornerstone of democracy and is more important than ever;

8. Numerous jurisdictions in the United States have been required by the courts to dismantle At Large Block Voting systems due to their discriminatory effects on racialized communities (particularly African-American and Hispanic populations), which were found to violate fairness and equal treatment provisions of the Voting Rights Act, and replace them with more inclusive voting systems;
9. More inclusive voting systems have demonstrated improved turnout in local elections, attributed both to reducing voters' feeling that their votes are wasted and increasing parties' incentives to mobilize their supporters;
10. Justice Thomas Berger recommended in his [2004 Vancouver Electoral Reform Commission](#) report that "Council seek amendment of the Vancouver Charter to permit elections to be conducted using systems of proportional representation." Vancouver City Council unanimously approved resolutions endorsing Justice Berger's recommendation, and in 2005, 2010 and 2012 requested that the Province grant the municipality authority to determine its electoral system. Previous provincial governments have declined to act upon all such requests to date;
11. In 2017, Vancouver's Independent Election Task Force recommended pursuing electoral reform in Vancouver, in order to more accurately reflect the political preferences of Vancouver voters and to promote greater representational diversity. The Task Force noted that the present electoral system frequently leaves certain ethnic groups and neighbourhoods unrepresented and half or more of the voters significantly under-represented (or completely unrepresented) on Council;
12. In 2016, Ontario became the first province in Canada to allow local councils to modernize their elections with Bill 181, The Municipal Election Modernization Act, which offered cities the option of using a ranked ballot. When London switched to ranked ballots in 2018, they saw immediate results with increased voter choice, more diversity on Council and a stronger mandate from voters;
13. The [2014 Report of the City of Vancouver's Engaged City Task Force](#) and the [2017 Report of the City's Independent Election Task Force](#) recommended allowing permanent residents to vote in municipal elections. This call was endorsed by Vancouver Council in 2018, and has also been endorsed by Councils in Port Moody, New Westminster, Victoria, Esquimalt, Colwood, Prince Rupert, Port Edward, Kitimat and Terrace. In 2019 the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) endorsed a resolution asking the Province to make the necessary changes to allow permanent residents to vote in local elections;
14. In 2019, the Union of BC Municipalities (UBCM) [endorsed a resolution](#) calling on the province to revise the minimum voting age in local

government elections to 16 years of age. That [resolution](#) has also been endorsed at conventions of both the BC NDP and the BC Green Party, along with the BC Teachers Federation;

15. There is no one-size-fits-all solution for local elections. Each municipality in BC has unique challenges, history, size and demographics. Local councils are best positioned to tailor their local election system and rules to respond to local issues and needs. By providing tools and options, the Province would be opening the doors to positive change and modernization.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the following resolution be submitted to LMLGA for submission as a 2021 UBCM Resolution, and titled: “Local Choice: Tools to Improve Representation in Local Government Elections”

WHEREAS Local government elections in British Columbia typically see low levels of engagement, and result in inadequate representation of Indigenous, Black, and People of Colour residents, women, and renters. More inclusive voting systems could strengthen local democracy and produce fairer and more representative election outcomes.

AND WHEREAS there is no one-size-fits-all solution for local elections. Each municipality in BC has unique challenges, history, size and demographics. Local councils are best positioned to tailor their local election system and rules to respond to local issues and needs. By providing tools and options, the Province would be opening the doors to positive change and modernization.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the UBCM Executive write to BC’s Minister of Municipal Affairs and the Attorney General to request that the Province of British Columbia create legislation that grants municipalities the power to consider, choose and adopt more inclusive voting systems as a means of improving representation and racial diversity on Council in future elections.

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