

Clean and Open Elections Task Force

December 12, 2017

In attendance: Joe Beckmann, Nate Clauser, Vishal Doshi, Ariel Horowitz, Andrew Levine, Sara Oaklander, Nick Salerno, Eric Weisman

Not in attendance: Annie Connor, Alderman Maryann Heuston, Josh Rosmarin,

Review of Task Force Charge

From the Mayor's Announcement:

The Task Force will submit a report detailing its findings and recommendations regarding ensuring fair, equitable, and open elections that inspires greater participation for voters and candidates – to the Mayor and the Board of Alderman no later than May 2018.

Discussion

- Shouldn't we be more specific about these goals? We would want a higher turnout?
- We would all need to agree on what fair, equitable, and open means. For example – we could say it's equally easy for men and women to run for office. Is that equitable? Does our work stop there?
- We've had two elections in the last month in Union Square. Neighborhood Council (extremely small turnout) and Alderman (small turnout). When only 700 people determine outcome of a 2-billion-dollar project, that's not great turnout.
- Cost of election – feels like a waste of money that only 35% of people vote. The turnout was much higher this year for some reason or another – other municipalities didn't see a higher turnout.
- Conversations around turnout, disparities within turnout, ideological diversity in our elections,
- The stated charge is sufficient as a purpose for this group.

Sara shared that Annie sent out the Sustainable Neighborhoods Working Group report as a model for what we are working toward.

This group had a much broader mandate/area of focus and much larger group so we should not be overwhelmed by the breadth of it, but it's a similar model: What the group decided to look at, what was learned, and recommendations. This can be thought of as the kind of final report we are expected to submit.

Purpose and Structure

Sara shared feedback she received in reaction to her earlier proposal regarding working groups. In addition to some expressed agreement that working groups would be a good approach, there were other concerns shared:

- We might miss out on certain perspectives if we approached some questions in small groups only alone
- Separating out questions of how elections work and voter participation will feature so much redundancy – these questions need to be answered together
- Mayor’s mandate is also about candidates – a little bit more separate of a bucket

The group then reviewed a revised proposal to form two working groups at the start:

1. Voter Participation, including registration, turnout, administration/mechanics of elections/voting
2. Candidate Participation, including administration/mechanics of running for office including campaign financing

An alternative proposal was made to remain as a full group, given our manageable size, but individually gather information about specific topics and present that information in full group meetings, seminar-style.

Discussion

- Better when you have stronger group working together as a whole – seminar method is preferable: come up with agreement of what topics we’re interested in are – get that information; person presenting would send out information ahead of time, brief everyone and then discuss
- Small enough issue to take on without small groups
- We could also invite outside people and have presentations
- How do we make sure we’re not just dipping in to certain details, so how do we actually make progress with our charge?
- We could create one-pagers that we can draw on for the content of our final report
- Should we be meeting twice monthly as stated in our charge?
- Some of the questions posed have already been answered – see Google doc

The group agreed to proceed as a full group, with each member taking on specific assignments. Additional details below.

Meaning of “Fair, Equitable, and Open”

Ariel presented three approaches to how we think about this and the group had a discussion about the meaning of these words as relates to the charge of the group.

- Evaluation of the input - Is the structure fair/starting at same point?

- Consequentialist – Pragmatic approach. Are the results fair by a procedural, systematic assessment?
- Gut feeling – Experientially...does it feel fair?

While the group did not come to a final understanding of fair, equitable, and open, we agreed to keep this framework in mind when addressing these issues.

Individual Assignments

Each member chose a specific topic to research before the next meeting:

- Vishal – Campaign finance – What other cities are doing. (Information through OCPF)
- Ariel – Mechanics of running for office, including how a pipeline of candidates can be created in single party controlled areas
- Nate – Non-citizen voting; later: ranked choice, voter registration
- Joe and Nick will work together to make sure we have data to answer the many questions Joe has proposed about the last few elections, including early voting

Agreements/Next Steps

- We'll remain working as a full group and do the work of research and information gathering individually between meetings.
- Each member will prepare a one page document – narrative and/or bullet points - to circulate in advance of the next meeting. These documents will follow a standard format that includes (for now – this may change):
 - Key takeaways or “hot take”
 - Examples of other cities/towns that are doing this
 - Sources
- Each member will make a brief presentation on her/his topic at the meeting of the full group
- Sara will schedule an additional meeting each month
- Our next meeting is January 9, 2018
- Joe and Andrew will work together to get materials onto our shared drive
- Contact Andrew if you are unable to access the Google Drive