Clean and Open Elections Task Force

Meeting Notes May 8, 2018

I.   Participation

In attendance

Joe Beckmann, Nate Clauser, Vishal Doshi, Ariel Horowitz, Andrew Levine, Sara Oaklander, Josh Rosmarin,

Not in attendance

Annie Connor, J.T. Scott, Nick Salerno, Eric Weisman

II.   Recommendations designed to enhance the civic engagement of Somerville citizens in general

1. Publish and distribute comprehensive voter guides to ensure voters have access to complete, accurate, and unbiased election information

Discussion

- State does one for the ballot questions
- Ideas for how it could be produced/distributed: video, high school civics project, a project of SCAT
- Multiple languages

Adopted by consensus – *Assigned to Joe*

2. Increase civic education of young people in schools

- Use polling and mock elections
- Collaborate with other groups - e.g., Welcome Project, MPAS, others
- Develop a civics curriculum that can be used on multiple venues
- Leverage work that's already being done/funded – e.g., Knight Foundation, Barr Foundation

Next step: Sara will research what the civic education programming consists of now in Somerville schools

III. Recommendations designed to lower the barriers to participation for potential candidates and increase the number and diversity of candidates running for election

NOTES:
- *The recommendations related to recommending support for reforms at the state level will be grouped together in the report.*
- *Meet with Rep Provost and/or Sen Jehlen to review the recommendations we're making related to reforms at the state level and/or requiring state approval. Seek their input on how the recommendations are framed.*

1. **Adopt ranked choice voting**
   - Support adopting of ranked choice voting in city elections
   - Support (advocate for?) adoption of ranked choice voting in state elections (in some form, agnostic on primaries)

Adopted by consensus - *Assigned to Ariel*

2. **Encourage the state to adopt electronic voter books, which would allow for voting centers and same day registration**
   - Concerns expressed about potential fraud, lack of redundancy, issues of documentation and importance of paper records

Adopted by consensus – *Assigned to Vishal*

3. **Introduce public financing of local elections**
   - What mechanism would we use?
     a) Democracy vouchers, like are being used in Seattle?
        a. Argument these perpetuate same spending as with cash donations
        b. Not supporting it
     b) Matching of donations, like at the federal level
        a. Not recommending this
     c) Tiered/Staged public financing – raise up to a certain amount and get a specified reimbursement
        a. Easier to start running and clears some of initial hurdles
        b. Would need to think about what the administration of this looks like
        c. Ariel just made this up. Vishal will write it up.
     d) Bulk buying program – if a candidate foregoes certain outside spending, can use city's procurement/bulk mail/etc. – in-kind public financing
        a. Not recommending for now – but perhaps worth researching more?
        b. Considerations

Tiered/Staged public financing of local elections – Adopted by consensus – *Assigned to Vishal*

4. **Increase the availability of information on the role of each elected position and on how to run for office**
    - The focus is on developing awareness of the option to run for office and on skill development for successful campaigning and service
    - Push out more information on how to run for office and create more and varied opportunities for information sharing about serving as an elected official
    - Covering the cost of attending existing training programs is not viable as those programs are party-affiliated. Instead, recommend creation of a directory of existing resources on how to run for office
    - The city has increased its communications capacity – this can be leveraged. Recommend using the city's existing communications staff and systems to push out information about running for office in multiple languages
    - Consider suggesting that existing officials host information sessions (although the issue of why they would want to promote competition was raised)

Adopted by Consensus – *Assigned to Sara*

5. **Allow spending of campaign funds on child and elder care expenses incurred as a direct result of time spent on campaigning**
    - Expenditure rules are at the state level and it disallows this. Would require a change in state law
    - Concerns
        - Can create perverse incentive
        - Workaround for something we're not doing as a society, which is to provide universal child care and support for elder care
    - In support…given the status quo, interests of those with child and elder care responsibilities are underrepresented
    - Context of recommendation: "In the absence of what ought to be available" – that is, put this in the context of the lack of universal child care and resources for elder care that are needed in order to boost the participation of candidates who would otherwise be prevented from running for office
    - Recommend support for this change at the state level
    - Include caveats – make sure there are restrictions (??)

Adopted by consensus – *Assigned to Ariel*

6. **Increase the financial and logistical support provided to elected officials in Somerville**
   - How specific do we want to be vis-à-vis naming the Board of Aldermen's pay scale and lack of professional and administrative support? Have we done adequate research to support the claim that it is insufficient?
   - The city could obtain comparables vis-à-vis neighboring cities of similar size and governance structure. Should we recommend this?
     - Many considerations here
       - Full time job but part time compensation?
       - Staff too would be helpful – could reduce demands on elected officials
   - What tests/considerations should add to pay scale – city's GDP, population – when should we have a professional city council?
   - Is there a reverse incentive – that is, elected officials less likely to step aside if there's more pay?
   - What is the expectation for the Board of Aldermen? Current board is trying to act like a more professional body without the resources to do so (and arguably without the power to do so – can't draft legislation)
   - Does status quo push people away from running/serving?
   - To what extent is it within our mandate to have this conversation on what the role is of an alderman and what their compensation/workload should look like?
     a. Relevance is the extent to which it would lead to increased candidate participation

Adopted by consensus: *Assigned to Josh (based on his articulation)*
   - Two options: decrease workload by providing staff support and/or increase compensation

7. **Term Limits**
Opposed by consensus

IV. *Next Steps*
- May 22 – Sara and Josh cannot attend; Ariel gone the 24th through June 6th
- Agreed to use the time instead to do our work and meet next as scheduled on June 12, 6:30-8:30
- Andrew makes chart on recommendations we've approved with notes re: consensus or majority vote and assignments

From Annie via Eric:
The plan is that the Task Force would have a 30-minute meeting with the Mayor to present recommendations. It might be helpful to share the final recommendations with the Mayor ahead of the meeting so that he can review ahead of time. After that meeting, the Task Force or the City would submit the recommendations to the Board. The Board will then likely refer the recommendations to a committee. Then, the Task Force will present to the committee. If we all would like, the Task Force could submit a draft to the Mayor for feedback but it's up to the group.