Clean and Open Elections Task Force

Meeting Notes June 12, 2018

I. Participation

In attendance

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

Not in attendance

Annie Connor, Josh Rosmarin, J.T. Scott

II. Meeting Overview

- Go over last three recommendations
- Decide how to proceed with report and next steps

III. Recommendations Designed to enhance openness and transparency of elections

Notes to capture themes, questions, and discussion – see handout

Make existing election-related data more readily available and easily accessible in more digestible formats

1. Discussion
    a. What data would be helpful and for what purpose?
        i. Could suggest KPIs that City should track - would help us find out if our recommendations are having any impact over time.
            1. Voting by education level and income – but don't have access to that level of data presently in Somerville
            2. Average amount spent during campaign
            3. Registration and turnout rates by neighborhood
            4. Percentage of contested races
        ii. Data that would be useful
            1. Data on the OCPF page on Somerville – City could reproduce and digest to some extent. Somerville version of interesting data at state level.
            2. Data used by candidates – could make it more easily searchable and usable – Alderman Hirsch linked demographic data and elections data
            3. Voter file already available for everyone if you request through Elections Office – just not readily available through website...BUT it would be possible for the elections office to request this data regularly (since it's constantly changing) - maybe weekly - and post it on the City's website

b. Data available to candidates can be a barrier, and there's no reason for the data to be hard to get
c. Could publicize the availability of the data – and join them into more usable files
    i. Voter file has name, address, and age, and if they voted
    ii. Resident file – Census – resident information, nationality, etc
    iii. Election Summary file – PDF we've seen
d. Joining this data is possible, but would still be spotty and subject to issues
e. From a data transparency viewpoint, more available data opens up the city for more transparency
f. **Recommendation could be a set of best practices around data – machine readable, readily updated, etc**
2. Do we want to include this recommendation in the report?
    a. Yes (By consensus)
    b. Who writes - Ariel

Increase regulation of campaign financing: Identify gaps between OCPF requirements and our standards and pass stricter regulations than the state - requiring more disclosure (transparency) relative to more platforms (e.g., Facebook and applicable inside and outside of MA

1. Discussion
    a. Introduce policies that will make it so that disclosure pertains to online advertising
        i. Technology used to micro-target ads – effective and cheap
        ii. What could be done on local election level that can be meaningful?
            1. Advocacy one way to approach this – study the issue and make sure we understand scope and direction
            2. Advocate at state level for regular revisiting of 2012 Disclosure law to make sure it is dealing with new technology
        iii. Seattle requires disclosure of what was spent, who spent, and on what candidate, and who was targeted
        iv. Inform citizenry about how they're impacted by money in politics
        v. Require advertising platforms to track and report
3. **Don't need to have the details but could argue to make similar move to Seattle law**
4. Do we want to include this recommendation in the report?
    a. Yes (By consensus)
    b. Ariel and Andrew will write

NOTE: Other notes suggest that we agreed to recommend that the City actively study the existing disclosure law to determine the need for revision. And that we discussed recommending that we pass an ordinance to force disclosures of micro targeting (what was spent, who spent it, on behalf of which candidate or issue, and using what target criteria).

Set stricter standards for campaign financing of local elections such that all candidates raise and spend funds at the same levels

1. Discussion
   a. Not supporting this recommendation - seems it is already covered and we don't have a strong memory of what it attempts to do.

IV. **Discussion of ways to increase candidate participation and diversity of candidates running for office.**

Josh shared an article detailing a study on the effects of increased compensation and staffing on diversity of candidates.
- Does this study make us more or less likely to recommend introducing more staff, compensation, or support for office holders in order to encourage more candidates to run?
   o Study interesting but it has some noisy data
   o Points to larger issues of running when you don't have much money
   o One barrier to people running is that they don't think of themselves as candidates for office
   o No data that increasing staff would increase the diversity /number of candidates running
      ▪ Data already not persuasive that increasing compensation to serve increases diversity in officeholders

Sara and Andrew met with staff in Cambridge's elections office.
   o Biggest take away was it was not the job of the City to do anything except make sure they run the office correctly and get people to know where and how to vote and how to run for office
   o Not their job to try to attract more candidates

Discussion
- Why would we want them to recruit candidates?
   o Elections office is apolitical – encouraging candidacy is a political activity
- What supports could we offer more easily?
   o Nick can do a training if asked on how to run for office – wouldn't go out of his way to recruit people
   o Table at city events like "Ask an Election Commissioner" about running for office
      ▪ Commissioner already does voter registration
      ▪ Could also talk about running
- Another issue is the difference between the expectations and reality of the position
   o Notion expressed that the job the new Aldermen were elected to isn't too difficult, but the job the aldermen are electing to do is much more difficult
- Conclusion: Several members not compelled to make a recommendation along these lines

Agreed not to push recommendation on adding staff/increasing compensation as a way of increasing candidate participation and/or diversity.

V.   *Additional Information and questions*
- Much of data now isn't machine readable - it's in PDF form
- How do we decide what would get in way of other recommendations
- Other Recommendations on Candidate Side
   - Suffrage points should also allow these people who can newly vote to also run for office
   - Would including this detract from the recommendations being taken seriously
      - Getting representation also means you should be able to run for office

VI.   *Overall Questions*
- How to use the chart
   - How can we judge effectiveness for Suffrage criterion?
   - Proposed that we draft summaries and then do ratings by consensus
- Need a recommendation on improving communication on running for office – can think about ideas for this
- Campaign finance – Vishal will put together straw proposal but support studying this further

VII.   *Next meeting - Tuesday, June 26, 6:30 pm*
- Eric and Nick need to be at a City meeting on the budget
- Plan to keep the meeting as scheduled
- Come prepared to start going through recommendations – talk about ratings, and prioritization