

Proposed Ballot Measure Regarding the Structure of City Government

Portland Proposed Measure 26-228



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS



If Passed, the Proposed Ballot Measure Would Restructure City Government and Process for Electing City Officials

If passed by voters, what would the proposed measure do?

The measure includes three proposed changes to city government:

1. Allow voters to rank candidates in order of their preference, using ranked choice voting
2. Create four new geographic districts with three members elected to represent each district, expanding the City Council to a total of 12 members
3. Replace the commission form of government and create a system where the City Council would focus on setting policy and a city administrator would be hired to run the city's day-to-day operations with the mayor

What would happen if voters do not pass the proposed ballot measure?

If the proposed measure is not passed by voters, Portland would maintain its current form of government structure and process for electing city officials, and the additional cost of the proposed new government structure would not be incurred.

Why are the proposed reforms in one ballot measure?

The proposed interdependent reforms are in one ballot measure because they are connected by the single unifying principle of reforming the structure and operations of city government. All the provisions in the proposed measure are connected to that principle. The proposed reforms work together to restructure city government and the process for electing city officials.

What is Portland's current form of voting system?

Currently, Portland voters cast one vote for each candidate for each office in citywide elections for mayor, auditor, and city council members. If no candidate for an office receives more than 50% of votes at the May primary, the top two candidates compete in a November runoff election.

BACKGROUND ON THE CHARTER REVIEW PROCESS

WHAT IS A CITY CHARTER?

A City Charter is like a city's constitution. It is the guiding document that defines how to vote for city elected officials and sets out their roles and responsibilities, among many other things.

WHY PROPOSE A CHANGE TO THE CITY CHARTER NOW?

City Council must appoint a 20-person Commission at least once every 10 years to review and suggest changes to the City Charter. The Charter Commission has a unique authority: if 15 or more of the 20 commissioners agree on a change, then those changes go directly to the ballot.

WHO CAN CHANGE THE CITY CHARTER?

The City's Charter can only be changed by City voters.

HOW WAS THE PROPOSED RESTRUCTURING PLAN CREATED?

The Charter Commission engaged a wide range of people to collect feedback regarding the city government and elected leaders. The proposal was developed using the collected input, along with input from city staff and topic-specific subject matter experts.



What is ranked choice voting?

In a ranked choice voting system, voters may rank candidates in order of preference, with votes tallied in rounds until there is a winner. Ranked choice voting results in one general election, eliminating primary elections.

For officials chosen in a citywide election—mayor and auditor—an “instant runoff” process would be used to count ballots in rounds. If no candidate receives over 50% of the votes in the first round, the candidate receiving the fewest votes would be eliminated, and that candidate’s votes would be transferred to each voter’s next-highest ranked candidate. The process would continue for as many rounds as necessary until a candidate exceeds a 50% majority.

For multi-member district-based city council seats, a “single transferable vote” method would be used. Candidates would win when they exceed a threshold set by the number of available positions. Ballots would be counted in rounds; any candidate exceeding the threshold would be elected, and that candidate’s votes above the threshold would be proportionally transferred to other candidates based on voters’ preference. The candidate receiving the fewest votes each round would be eliminated, and that candidate’s votes would then be transferred to other candidates based on voters’ preferences. The process would continue for as many rounds as necessary until all positions are filled.

Who else uses ranked choice voting and geographic districts with multiple representatives?

As of November 2021, 43 jurisdictions used ranked choice voting in their most recent elections, and more than 50 jurisdictions are projected to use it in their next election. Some of these examples include Benton County in Oregon, which uses ranked choice voting for its general elections to elect County Commissioners, and Alaska, which employed statewide ranked choice voting for the first time in its August 2022 election.

Many jurisdictions use ranked choice voting for multi-member districts, including the following: Australia, Ireland, Malta, cities in Scotland, and cities in New Zealand. Geographic districts with multiple representatives per district are a common type of voting system across the world.

Why would the proposed ballot measure do away with primary elections for city offices?

Primary elections have far fewer voters participating than in general elections. Eliminating the May primaries would help ensure that more Portland voters participate in electing city officials.

How are city council members elected currently in Portland?

Currently, Portland has been electing city council members in an at-large system, meaning any eligible candidate in the city can run for office and be elected, regardless of their geographic location.

Why does the measure propose geographic districts with three city council members to represent each district?

Geographic districts with three city council members per district would increase geographic representation to residents of the city and would provide voters of each district with the opportunity to elect a candidate from their community and hold those elected leaders accountable. If passed, each part of the city would be represented by multiple elected leaders allowing for residents to access multiple pathways to share feedback.

What is the reasoning behind expanding city council from 5 to 12 members in the proposed measure?

Portland has not increased the size of the City Council in a century. Over the past 100 years, Portland’s population has grown more than threefold, but the size of its City Council has remained at five people (including the mayor). Peer cities, such as Denver and Boston, both have 13 council members

What is Portland’s current form of government?

Portland currently has a commission form of government. City council, consisting of a Mayor and four Commissioners, exercises legislative and executive powers. Executive power includes managing city bureaus.

How would separation of powers be balanced between the mayor and city council in the proposed ballot measure?

If passed, City Council would continue to exercise legislative power to make laws and approve the city’s budget. The Mayor would not be a member of City Council but could introduce laws and break tie votes on non-emergency ordinances.

The proposed measure includes an even number of city councilors. What would happen in the event of a tie?

The Mayor, who would be elected by the city at large, would have a tie-breaking vote.



If the measure passes, how would the mayor’s veto power change?

If passed, the mayor would no longer have veto power. The mayor would have a vote in matters before city council only to break a council tie. The mayor would no longer serve or regularly vote on city council.

If passed, what would be the role of the city administrator?

The city administrator would implement the laws approved by city council and manage city bureaus. The city administrator would hire, fire, and supervise bureau directors, except for the Police Chief and the City Attorney, both of whom would be hired by the Mayor, after approval by the City Council.

If passed, who would hire the city administrator, and how would their powers be checked?

The city administrator would be hired by the Mayor and confirmed by City Council. The Mayor would manage the city administrator, who could be fired by either the Mayor or a vote of ¾ of City Council.

Implementation & Transition

If passed, how long would it take to implement the proposed ballot measure?

If voters pass the proposed measure, Portland residents could expect geographic-based council elections using ranked choice voting to be implemented in the November 2024 election. The new council would enter office in January 2025 into the new form of government’s roles and responsibilities.

If passed, what would happen to current council members and the mayor?

If voters pass the proposed measure, all current elected officials would run for office in 2024. The city auditor and half of the city council would run for initial 2-year terms and the mayor and the other city council half would run for 4-year terms.

If the proposed measure passes, how much would this cost?

The City Budget Office estimates the cost of implementing the measure is about \$900,000 to \$8.7 million annually, representing 0.1% to 1.4% of Portland’s discretionary funding. Discretionary funds

are approximately 10% of the overall city budget. The range of the cost estimate is dependent on policy decision making outside of the charter scope. For example, the Salary Commission would set the salaries of elected officials. The current estimates do not include potential cost savings from the consolidation of bureau functions and streamlining of the city’s structure and services.

If passed, how much would city councilors and the mayor be paid?

The current form of government is silent on council salaries. City commissioners to set their own salaries when they vote on the budget. If voters pass the proposed measure, an independent salary commission would be appointed in January 2023 to determine the compensation for Portland’s mayor and councilors in the new system. The salary commission would document the basis of its decision and decide by majority vote. Elected or appointed City of Portland officials, city employees, and officially filed candidates are prohibited from serving on the salary commission. The salary commission would be composed of human resource professionals with compensation experience who represent a diversity of race, age, gender, and geography.

If passed, how would the districts be drawn, and how would we ensure equal population?

If voters pass the proposed measure, an Independent Districting Commission would be responsible for preparing and adopting a districting plan for dividing the city into four geographic districts and leading a public involvement process. The independent Districting Commission would be appointed by the mayor in January 2023, subject to confirmation by city council.

The Independent Districting Commission would ensure that each district, as nearly as practicable, would be contiguous (one connected piece), utilize existing geographic or political boundaries, not divide communities of common interest, be connected by transportation links, and be of equal population. Subsequent redistricting would be tied to census population updates every 10 years, beginning 2030. Future independent redistricting bodies would be tracked to a slightly different timeline, with the commission confirmed and in place by March 31 in every year following the census. The districting commission’s term ends upon adoption of a districting plan, which must be completed by September 1.

