

CAMBRIDGE CITY COUNCIL

ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION WITH THE ELECTION COMMISSION

JUNE 11, 2001

City of Cambridge

HEARING SCHEDULE CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS BEGINNING JUNE 11, 2001

Monday, June 11, 2001	5:30 P.M.	Roundtable Meeting Discussion with the Election Commission. Informal meeting with no public comment, at which no votes will be taken. Meeting will not be televised. (Sullivan Chamber)
Tuesday, June 12, 2001	8:30 A.M.	The Housing Committee will conduct a final committee discussion on the Community Preservation Act. (Ackermann Room)
Tuesday, June 12, 2001	4:00 P.M. - 6:00 P.M.	The Civic Unity Committee will conduct a public meeting to continue planning and implementation for a catalogue of existing mediation resources and to receive a presentation on circle justice. (Sullivan Chamber)
Monday, June 18, 2001	5:30 P.M.	Regular City Council Meeting (Sullivan Chamber)
Monday, June 25, 2001	5:30 P.M.	Regular City Council Meeting (Sullivan Chamber)

City of Cambridge does not discriminate on the basis of disability. The City Council will provide auxiliary aids and services, written materials in alternative formats, and reasonable modifications in policies and procedures to person with disabilities upon request. Contact the Office of the City Clerk 349-4260, tty/TDD 349-4242.

City of Cambridge

Friday, June 29, 2001	12:30 P.M.	The Economic Development, Training and Employment will conduct a public meeting with the Superintendent of Schools and the Principal of the high school to discuss the School to Careers Program and to present the survey results entitled "Education and Skill for New Cambridge Economy. Patterns of Employment in New Economic Sectors." (Ackermann Room)
Wednesday, July 18, 2001	5:00 P.M.	The Ordinance Committee will conduct a public hearing on the Special District 4 and 4A (Alewife area) zoning petition. (Sullivan Chamber) This hearing is televised.
Monday, July 30, 2001	5:30 P.M.	Special City Council Meeting (Sullivan Chamber)
Wednesday, September 5, 2001	4:30 P.M.	Ordinance Committee (Sullivan Chamber)
Monday, September 10, 2001	5:30 P.M.	Regular City Council Meeting (Sullivan Chamber)
Wednesday, September 12, 2001	4:30 P.M.	Ordinance Committee (Sullivan Chamber)
Monday, September 17, 2001	5:30 P.M.	Regular City Council Meeting (Sullivan Chamber)
Monday, September 24, 2001	5:30 P.M.	Regular City Council Meeting (Sullivan Chamber)
Tuesday, September 25, 2001	4:30 P.M.	Ordinance Committee (If necessary) (Sullivan Chamber)

City of Cambridge

Monday, October 1, 2001	5:30 P.M.	Regular City Council Meeting (Sullivan Chamber)
Wednesday, October 10, 2001	4:30 P.M.	Ordinance Committee (Sullivan Chamber)
Monday, October 15, 2001	5:30 P.M.	Regular City Council Meeting (Sullivan Chamber)
Monday, October 22, 2001	5:30 P.M.	Roundtable Meeting Informal meeting with no public comment, at which no votes will be taken. Meeting will not be televised. (Sullivan Chamber)

Cal 6

Consent Agenda #6

Awaiting Report Item Number
01-147, regarding a report on
clarifying certain rules and
operating procedures of the
Election Commission.

In City Council February 12, 2001

CHARTER RIGHT
BY Mayor

Galluccio

*In City Council
February 26, 2001*

*Tabled on the motion
of Councillor Brandt
In City Council
March 19, 2001*

*Referred to Roundtable
on June 11, 2001 with
Election Commission*



CITY OF CAMBRIDGE • EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT

Robert W. Healy, City Manager Richard C. Rossi, Deputy City Manager

February 12, 2001

To The Honorable, The City Council:

Please find attached a response to Awaiting Report Item No. 01-147, regarding a report on clarifying certain rules and operating procedures of the Election Commission, received from the Board of Election Commissioners.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert W. Healy". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Robert W. Healy
City Manager

RWH/mec





CITY OF CAMBRIDGE

362 GREEN STREET, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS 02139-3395 • TEL (617) 349-4361

FAX (617) 349-4366

TTY (617) 349-4242

BOARD OF ELECTION COMMISSIONERS

ARTIS B. SPEARS
DARLEEN G. BONISLAWSKI
LYNNE ALEXIS MOLNAR
WAYNE A. DRUGAN, JR.
Commissioners

TERESA S. NEIGHBOR
Executive Director

To: Robert W. Healy, City Manager
From: Board of Election Commissioners *TSN*
Date: February 5, 2001
Subject: Council Order #2, dated 1/22/01 RE: report on clarifying certain rules and operating procedures

Part 1 – Inactive Voters

When removing Cambridge residents from the active voter list and placing them on the inactive list through the city census, the Election Commission follows statutory requirements of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

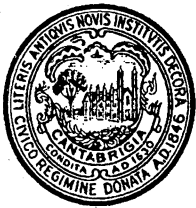
M.G.L. Chapter 51, s. 10A mandates the method of collecting information from multi-unit dwellings. Although the Commission may send individual household forms to residents in multi-units, the landlord is still required to submit the required information to the Commission. When the landlord of a multi-unit dwelling does not cooperate in census distribution to tenants, a complaint is filed in Cambridge District Court pursuant to M.G.L. Chapter 56, s. 4.

Voters whose current residence is not confirmed through the census and whose names, therefore, are not included in the annual Street List, are put on the Inactive Voting List. They are mailed a "confirmation notice" pursuant to M.G.L. Chapter 51, s. 37. Making them inactive is required by law, but the voter's status is protected by sending this notice. Notice is always given through an individual mailing to voters of record in multi-units when census information has not been provided by management of the multi-units.

Part 2 – Absentee Voting

Anyone can request an absentee ballot application form. The form can be mailed, faxed, or picked up in person. It is available at numerous City distribution sites for voter registration forms, including all branches of the Post Office. Forms are also available at sidewalk voter registration sessions prior to November Elections. The absentee ballot application form will be available on the City's web site for the 2001 Municipal Election.

When an application has been received and a ballot mailed out, the dates of receipt of the application and mailing are recorded on the application form or letter. The voter can contact the Election Office at any time to ascertain the status of the ballot.



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Executive Director

FASTER RESULTS OPTIONS PROPOSAL

Statement of Purpose

The Board of Election Commissioners proposes to explore, in concert with the City Council at a Roundtable Meeting on June 11, 2001, the following options for producing and reporting faster municipal election results through the computerized Proportional Representation (PR) tabulation process:

- Release on Tuesday evening of “unofficial results¹” from ballots scanned at the precinct;
- Scanning of all “blank ballots²” at the precinct.

Background

Computerization of Proportional Representation elections has improved the efficiency and speed of the municipal election tabulation process. This has led to a dramatic reduction in the amount of time required to determine the election of candidates to the City Council and School Committee. Even though substantial progress has been made, the Board believes there is room for further improvement.

Current policy permits the release on election night only of “unofficial first choices³” for City Council and School Committee candidates. (Transfers are distributed on Wednesday.) These results are “unofficial” because they do not include all votes cast on all ballots. The votes tabulated do not include the following:

- Ballots with write-ins;
- Ballots which the scanner ejected as showing no preferences for candidates;
- Ballots which the scanner ejected for other reasons, such as a creased absentee ballot.

¹ “Unofficial results” in this context refers to results of a PR election after distribution of surplus #1’s and transfers from all but 9 candidates (City Council) and 6 candidates (School Committee) of only those ballots scanned at the precincts. These results do not include votes cast on write-in, blank, or auxiliary ballots.

² “Blank ballots” are ballots on which the scanner detects no preferences for candidates.

³ “Unofficial first choices” refers to the total number of votes cast which rank a candidate as number “1,” the voter’s first choice for City Council or School Committee.

These ballots are reviewed by the Commissioners at the PR Count the day after the election and the voter's intent recorded on a Hand-Count Tabulation Form (HCTF). The HCTF's are then scanned. At the conclusion of this process, every ballot by every Cambridge voter has been counted or scanned. Software then performs the "Count" according to established PR rules.

The results thus generated, after review by the Auditor, the Board of Election Commissioners, and the Director of the Count, are the "official results." When PR elections were counted by hand, Commissioners reviewed ballots that were difficult to read throughout the seven days of the Count. In the last two computerized elections, this process took eight hours.

Changes Proposed for Discussion

Reduction of the length of the PR Count from seven days to one notwithstanding, it is possible to provide more information about election results sooner and to reduce the time it takes to complete the tabulation of votes with a computerized system. The Board proposes the following two options for discussion.

Option #1 - Release on Tuesday evening of "unofficial results" from ballots scanned at the precinct.

The PR Master software has the capability to generate on election night "unofficial results" for City Council and School Committee, including the distribution and transfer of votes cast on all ballots scanned at the precinct. Based on our experiences in 1997 and 1999, it is expected that "unofficial results" will not differ substantively from "official results" tabulated the next day at the PR Count.⁴

At the PR Count, on Wednesday, the Commissioners would review all ballots not scanned at the precinct, prepare HCTF's, and record write-ins. Once all ballots are properly recorded, software then performs the "Count" again according to established PR rules and without reference to the earlier distribution. It is theoretically possible that, in a close election, "official results" on Wednesday may differ from Tuesday night's "unofficial results." No announcement of results has legal effect until and unless the Board of Commissioners declares candidates elected.

Option #2 - Scanning of all "blank ballots" at the precinct

Reduction of the time required on Wednesday to complete the PR Count can be accomplished by the expedient of scanning all "blank ballots" at the precinct on election day, thereby leaving only auxiliary ballots and those with write-ins to be reviewed the following day.

Manual review of "blank ballots" was desirable during introduction of the new system. Experience has shown that most ballots seen as "blank" or showing no preference by the scanner are genuinely blank ballots.

⁴ In the City Council race in 1999, there were 598 auxiliary ballots, of which 199 were marked and 399 were either blank or contained write-in's for candidates not on the ballot. The 1999 School Committee race produced 1,294 auxiliary ballots, of which 411 were marked and 883 were either blank or recorded write-in's for candidates not on the ballot.



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Robert W. Healy
City Manager

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