

# Santa Monica Ranked Voting

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www.smrankedvoting.org

June 7, 2005

Dear Ms. Maria Stewart,

Santa Monica Ranked Voting (SMRV) is a community group that advocates voting systems that allow people to rank their preferences. We would like to respectfully request that the Santa Monica city council direct city staff to study the feasibility of adopting and implementing ranked voting (known as Choice Voting or the Single Transferable Vote when used to fill more than one seat) for Santa Monica's municipal elections. We would like to request that this be placed on a city council meeting agenda as an "Item 12."

**Background:** Santa Monica's voting system and possible alternatives have been studied extensively, and Choice Voting has repeatedly emerged as a promising alternative. In 1992, a City Charter Review Committee studied various alternatives to Santa Monica's current voting system. Eight of the 15 members of that committee favored Choice Voting for Santa Monica. In 2000, the League of Women Voters of Santa Monica (LWVSM) also studied the advantages and disadvantages of many possible voting systems for this city, and in October of 2001, LWVSM conducted a workshop on voting systems in partnership with the City of Santa Monica. LWVSM is currently putting together a summary and evaluation of that workshop per city council direction. In this packet of materials, we include a letter from the LWVSM supporting the request to explore this issue and asking the council to take into account those points made in their position statement on voting systems; that position statement is included in their letter.

Since January of 2004, SMRV has been educating the community about ranked voting by speaking to neighborhood groups and other organizations. As a result, in July of 2004, the Wilshire/Montana Neighborhood Coalition adopted ranked voting to elect its officers. In addition, SMRV released a study in May 2004, with a follow-up study in November 2004, showing that consistently at least 30% of the voters in Santa Monica's city elections are not casting all of the votes allotted to them. Our current system may be a strong motivation for this "undervoting." Also in November of 2004, San Francisco successfully held its first ranked voting election for its Board of Supervisors. Last year, three cities -- Berkeley (CA), Ferndale (MI) and Burlington (VT) -- saw landslide wins for ranked voting in city elections. In March 2005, a City Governance Task Force in Davis, CA voted (8-0-1) to recommend Choice Voting for that city and the Davis City Council just voted 5-0 to start the process of putting a city charter and choice voting on the June 2006 ballot.

Given this history of events with regard to Choice Voting in Santa Monica, coupled with the growing interest in and awareness of the system in this city and in other California cities, it is an appropriate time for Santa Monica for take a look at the feasibility of implementing Choice Voting for this city's elections.

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**Feasibility:** A study of the feasibility of adopting and implementing Choice Voting is an important step before the system's adoption is ready to be considered by the voters. We feel that key elements of the study should include the following:

1) City Charter – Analysis of the method by which Santa Monica could legally adopt Choice Voting for its elections, including whether a charter amendment would be needed or if the system would be adopted by ordinance.

2) Voting Machines – Assessment of the best way for Santa Monica to obtain (if needed) the necessary voting machines and tallying equipment to hold a ranked voting election.

3) Education – Recommendation of specific steps that the city would take to familiarize the city with voting under a ranked voting system.

We invite you to review the supporting documents which provide more detail about Choice Voting and Santa Monica, and in some cases, SMRV's suggestions for possible solutions. We also provide additional materials which we hope will be helpful to staff as they perform the feasibility study and prepare a report to the council. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have (805-252-6110, cell).

We request that our item be placed on the city council meeting agenda on or after June 14<sup>th</sup>, but not July 12<sup>th</sup>. We would like to request that city staff submit a report to the city council summarizing the results of the feasibility study within three months.

Sincerely,

Amy Connolly  
for Santa Monica Ranked Voting

Enclosures: Letter from the League of Women Voters of Santa Monica  
Supporting materials from SMRV (3 pages)  
Report by the San Francisco Department of Elections  
Report by the Center for Voting and Democracy

# Supporting Materials from SMRV

## Implementation

SMRV does not believe that a charter amendment is needed since Section 1400 of the city charter begins, “*Unless otherwise provided by ordinance* [our emphasis], hereafter enacted, all elections shall be held in accordance with the provisions of the Elections Code of the State of California....” However, we seek confirmation from the city attorney on this matter.

## Voting Equipment

This is a summary of voting equipment used in cities in the United States where ranked voting is either being used or where there is a strong interest in its implementation. This list was compiled by Chris Jerdonek from the Center for Voting and Democracy ([www.fairvote.org](http://www.fairvote.org)).

SMRV believes that the voting machines that Santa Monica currently use (InkaVote) could theoretically be used for ranked voting elections; voters would indicate one preference (ranking) per page. The tallying system in place (called the Micro Tallying System) would need to be adapted to support ranked voting and ballot scanners that support ranked ballots would be needed. Alternatively, there is the possibility that ES&S, the company that implemented ranked voting in San Francisco, could “lease” their services and conduct Santa Monica’s elections. Diebold may be willing to do this as well.

Acronyms:

IRV Instant Runoff Voting: Ranked voting for filling a single seat  
(Choice Voting is ranked voting for multi-seat elections)

OS Optical Scan

TS Touch Screen

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### DIEBOLD EQUIPMENT

Cambridge, MA -- old AccuVote-OS. Currently uses Choice Voting for council and school board. Up until 1997, ranked choice voting elections in Cambridge were tallied by hand. Their equipment was upgraded at that time to handle ranked choice ballots. The scanned ballots are currently tallied using Voting Solutions' ChoicePlus Pro software.

Burlington, VT -- old AccuVote-OS. A resolution to support adopting IRV for their mayoral elections passed with 65% of the vote. Same equipment as Cambridge, MA, so it can be upgraded very cheaply (using the same process) to allow ranked choice ballots. Because Burlington is small (population in 2000: 38,889), they can also tally the IRV elections by hand instead if there is no majority in the first round.

Alameda County, CA (Berkeley, Oakland, San Leandro) -- AccuVote-TS (polling place) and AccuVote-OS (absentee voting). On March 2, 2004, voters in Berkeley (CA) voted 72%-28% to authorize IRV for city elections. Oakland voters have passed charter amendments that require the

## Supporting Materials from SMRV (cont)

use of special elections to fill vacancies for mayor and city council and authorize the city council to provide by ordinance for the use of IRV. In nearby San Leandro, voters adopted a city charter amendment to use majority runoff (two-round runoff) elections for city council with the option to use IRV when the technology is available. Back in May 2000, Diebold (then Global) wrote in their bid to get the contract that their "AccuVote-OS and TS system is THE ONLY SYSTEM on the market today that handles cumulative and preferential voting." They also said "the AccuVote-TS can easily be programmed for preferential voting."

Eureka, CA (Humboldt County) -- AccuVote ES-2000. There is some interest on the Eureka city council. Their county registrar has said ranked choice will not be a problem on their optical scan equipment. The county is currently in contract negotiations with Diebold to buy some AccuVote-TS's as well.

Ukiah, CA (Mendocino County) -- AccuVote-OS. There is some interest in the city council here. The county purchased this equipment in 2003. The contract also included some touch-screens (for HAVA compliance), but the TS's are not being delivered until certification issues are resolved. Ranked choice voting was not mentioned in the contract.

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### ES&S EQUIPMENT

San Francisco, CA -- Optech Eagles. San Francisco used IRV for the first time in November, 2004 to elect its Board of Supervisors. Used optical scan with precinct-based Scanners which were certified for use in San Francisco alone. The Optech Eagles are ES&S's older (legacy) model.

Davis, CA (Yolo County) -- Model 100, the new optical scan with precinct-based scanners. A city Governance Task Force just recommended ranked voting nearly unanimously for Davis's city council elections. The county is currently in contract negotiations with ES&S. The county is working to have ranked choice set in the contract. Significant interest in the city and county around ranked choice voting.

Nevada County, CA -- ES&S 150/550. Beginnings of community interest.

Sarasota, FL -- ES&S Ivotronics touch screen. Some local activism surrounding this issue. There is no software certified by the state that supports ranked voting is and this has stopped their local campaign as the city commission will not put it on the ballot without software approved by the state.

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### INKAVOTE EQUIPMENT

Santa Monica, CA (Los Angeles County) -- optical scan. It does not seem likely that Inkavote will be able to conduct ranked choice elections, but the city could conduct a ranked voting election concurrently. Two council members support it and there is an active group promoting ranked voting in the community.

## Supporting Materials from SMRV (cont)

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### SEQUOIA EQUIPMENT

Santa Clara County, CA -- Sequoia AVC Edge (polling place touch-screens) and Sequoia Optech (absentee optical scan). Voters passed an IRV charter amendment several years back.

### Education

Before asking residents of Santa Monica to use ranked voting for city elections, they will need to be educated about the system. Even before the decision is made to adopt ranked voting, the city could educate the community about ranked voting by utilizing it when the city surveys the public on various topics. Once the city decides to adopt the system, a more thorough education program would be needed. Please see the attached document for a summary of San Francisco's educational effort that resulted in a very successful ranked voting election in 2004. We feel that many aspects of the educational effort used in San Francisco would also work well Santa Monica. We also include a report by the Center for Voting and Democracy ([www.fairvote.org](http://www.fairvote.org)) summarizing San Francisco's experience with IRV.