



# Multnomah County Charter Review Equitable Representation Subcommittee

April 4, 2022, 7:00 – 8:30 pm

## SUBCOMMITTEE MEETING 5

Purpose: To learn about proportional representation.

### Attendees

#### Committee Members Present:

- Samantha Gladu (she/they)
- Annie Kallen (she/her)
- Meikelo Cabbage (he/him)
- Timur Ender (he/him)

#### Absent:

- *Maja Harris (she/her)*
- *Jude Perez (they/them)*

#### Staff:

- Kali Odell (she/her), Charter Review Committee Program Coordinator

#### Invited Speakers:

- George Chung, More Equitable Democracy
- Colin Cole, More Equitable Democracy

In addition, members of the public were welcome to observe the meeting as non-participatory attendees. There were three observers at this meeting.

### Welcome

Kali went over Zoom logistics. Samantha welcomed everyone.

### Public Comment

Samantha noted that the subcommittee received a written comment from Mont Chris Hubbard that aligned with his remarks at the subcommittee's last meeting.

No one signed up for public comment in advance. Kali asked attendees if anyone wanted to make a public comment.

Sara Wolk from Equal Vote Coalition spoke about proportional representation. Sara was present for More Equitable Democracy's presentation at the subcommittee's March 7<sup>th</sup> meeting and said they did a great job of discussing the benefits of proportional representation. She was present to speak about how proportional

representation intersects with accountability. She said that in a proportional representation model, someone elected in a district with three representatives needs roughly 1/3 of voters to be elected to office, but needs 2/3 of voters in order to be removed. She acknowledged that as it's being discussed, this system is meant to give greater voice to smaller factions, with consideration for people of color, particularly. She pointed out that the group underrepresented in Multnomah County government right now is white males, particularly those who identify as conservative. She pointed out that giving more power to smaller factions might result in power for groups that are antagonistic toward people of color and liberals, which she thinks is counter to what More Equitable Democracy (MED) is advocating for. She was concerned about this and hoped MED would speak to this in their presentation.

Meikelo said that he thought it would be helpful for subcommittee members to state their opinions on different issues so the public is clear on where they stand and can address comments to the subcommittee instead of presenters.

Timur shared information about a recent vote by the Portland Charter Commission, which concerned topics the Equitable Representation Subcommittee was discussing.

## **Presentation on Proportional Representation by More Equitable Democracy**

George introduced himself and More Equitable Democracy, a group that advocates for racial justice through electoral reform.

George gave an overview of some of the terms he would be using throughout the presentation.

Winner-take-all elections are currently the system used in most of the U.S. Multiple voting methods can be used in winner-take-all, including ranked choice and STAR voting. Ultimately, one candidate is elected by a majority of voters.

Proportional elections give minority groups representation (seats) in proportion to their percentage of the voting electorate.

George discussed single-winner, at-large; single-winner, district; multi-winner, at-large; and multi-winner, districts. He mentioned that the Portland Charter Commission was considering recommending multi-winner districts for Portland City Commissioners. He also overviewed ballot structure differences using STAR and ranked choice voting as examples.

George demonstrated what a ballot looks like if a jurisdiction uses proportional ranked choice voting (electing multiple candidates per district using ranked choice voting). In this system, voters' first choices are tallied and candidates that receive a certain threshold of votes get a seat. If a candidate wins a seat in the first round, any votes they received in excess of the threshold are redistributed to those voters' second choice candidates. If there are still seats open after that, the candidate with the least votes is eliminated and all of their voters are redistributed to those voters' second choice candidates.

Meikelo said that in his experience people like to be able to vote strategically and also raised concerns about polling in a ranked choice system. How would voters be able to strategize in this type of system?

George said he thinks that strategic voting is actually bad for democracy. Following polling and fundraising and trying to determine who is most viable is hard, and those are not factors in determining who the best candidates are to actually represent you. He thinks it is better to have a more expressive system so voters can just choose the candidates they like the best and ideally end up with someone more representative of the electorate. He pointed out that polling and fundraising favor a subset of candidates who have the most resources and name recognition.

Meikelo said he thought the current system was pretty representative of different factions. He asked if George had a rebuttal to that.

George said that the U.S. probably has about four or five political parties in terms of distinct policy preferences. But the U.S.'s current system makes it too challenging for third parties to win or gain momentum. If you like having interparty disputes play out in primaries, then the current system may work, although it's undermined by the reality that turnout in primaries is typically lower than general elections, which in turn means options in a general election are constrained by who voted in the primary. Those primary voters are typically older, whiter, wealthier, and more conservative than the general electorate. George thinks this often results in high-stakes primaries and limited options in the general election make it a bit of a farce.

Samantha said that polling tends to be done more often for high profile, expensive races versus smaller local elections. She also noted that because Oregon has a later primary, at the presidential level nominees are often decided by the time Oregonians vote in their primary.

Meikelo said he thinks there is a rhetoric issue around this topic and that people who turn out for primaries – people who are constantly involved in politics, people who staff commissioners and representatives, etc. – are not older, whiter, conservative people; these people are younger, highly educated, generally white and generally wealthier and tend to be more progressive. He thinks it's important to remind people that in Portland, these voters are more likely to be ultra-liberal than ultra-conservative.

Samantha responded by pointing out that in a Democratic primary the voters might be more liberal, but in a Republican primary they might be more conservative, with the bases for each party driving turnout.

Timur asked George if he could talk about whether it makes sense to have primaries?

George said he doesn't think they need primaries run by the government. In other countries, candidates are nominated through internal party processes. He doesn't think it makes sense to subsidize these nominations, especially when so many voters are not affiliated with a party. He also pointed out that whether the electorate leans left or right, it is generally less representative of all the voters than a general election. He also noted that forms of preferential voting like ranked choice are designed to make primaries unnecessary, which saves money and can lead to higher turnout in general elections that is more representative of the electorate.

George noted that Multnomah County currently has five county commissioners. The U.S. has small legislative bodies in comparison to other places in the world and George made comparisons to other jurisdictions in the U.S., as well. His opinion is that five is small for the jurisdiction. He said one method political scientists use to determine the number of representatives is to take the cube root of the population and use that as an estimate for the number of representatives. The cube root of Multnomah County's population (800,000) is 93. This is a large number, but would mean that people would have a tighter relationship to their representative. George also pointed out that more representatives means minority groups are more likely to be represented in the elected body.

George presented an example of Washington State counties increasing their number of commissioners.

George said that increasing the number of commissioners might come with the temptation of decreasing salary or making commissioners part-time. He pointed out that doing this would limit who could run for office, making candidates more likely to be wealthy or dependent work in another industry (could create conflicts of interest). George said he thinks it is important for these positions to pay well in order to attract more candidates from a variety of circumstances.

George addressed the committee's interest in partisan versus nonpartisan elections and the equity impacts of that change, particularly for candidates of color. He presented research demonstrating that candidates of color received less support in nonpartisan elections. He hypothesized that in the absence of party cues about which candidates align with voters' values, voters may rely more on other indicators, like how the candidate looks.

George identified some considerations for how to make the switch to partisan elections. He said that if the subcommittee wanted to avoid closed primaries that would require a change to state law. He noted that Washington State allows candidates to share a "party preference" on the ballot to help voters identify affiliation, but they are not running as the party's nominee, which also avoids holding a closed primary.

George offered to come back to the subcommittee with some multi-member district map drafts that the subcommittee could use if it decided to recommend the adoption of multi-member districts. He showed examples of maps MED created for the Portland Charter Commission.

Timur said he was interested in seeing examples of five by three or six by three maps since his preference is for a larger board of commissioners.

Annie said that in addition to the distribution of people of color, she would also like to see maps that include information about ideological representation, renters, income.

Meikelo asked what others think of the possibility that having more commissioners or adopting multi-member districts could impact accountability since things like media attention would be more diluted.

George said that he has seen a number of people running in the current system who are not challenged because of the power of incumbency. He says this does not happen with proportional representation because while some incumbents may easily pass the lower threshold for election, it is rare to not have more candidates running than there are seats available.

Annie asked George to talk about the higher threshold for recalling a candidate in a proportional system.

George said that if the threshold for election is 33% or 25%, then that official is representing some constituency. Just because he does not agree with that official does not mean they should not be in office, and he is okay having that person as long as he feels like he is also represented by another elected official.

Annie noted that the tradeoff, then, is that it's easier to vote people in but harder to vote them out.

Samantha said it's hard to do a recall election, but as George said, they are representing somebody.

Timur said that he would like to hear from George in the future about the benefits of at-large elections versus districts. He said he saw potential tension between legislators elected by districts and an executive elected at-large. He also asked about the think tank George cited when talking about nonpartisan elections.

George said the think tank is New America. He said he'd get back to Timur about his at-large question. The relationship between the legislative and executive branches was a little outside of MED's expertise.

## Subcommittee Research

Samantha said she heard resonance around seeing some maps. She also brought up the list of topics the subcommittee had previously prioritized for research and suggested that two members could volunteer to dive into each topic in order to gather more information to help the group move forward. She raised that there are various experts, peer reviewed research, and other information the group could access on each topic area. She then shared that Annie had met with Multnomah County Elections Director Tim Scott and would report on that meeting to the group, modeling some of the outside work subcommittee members could do moving forward.

Annie shared notes from her conversation with Tim Scott and two members of the Portland Charter Commission. She said that Tim was not able to provide a lot of detail about implementing ranked choice voting until the subcommittee put a proposal in writing so that he could investigate. That is true on any of the topics the subcommittee is considering, and she sees it as a bit of a catch-22, that it is hard to know what to include in a proposal when the subcommittee does not understand the potential pros and cons at the implementation level, but with limited resources, the county's elections team cannot explore every potential avenue. In response to Annie's question about risk-limiting audits, Tim said the county is not performing those now, but may in the future. The Secretary of State's role is to aggregate data across jurisdictions. Tim also said that processing ballots can include preparing ballots to mail out, receiving returned ballots, verifying them, running them through machines. Cities contract with the county to conduct elections.

Annie continued that there is a 21 day cure period after an election to correct ballot errors. The county runs frequent reports when an election is being conducted. Tim told Annie that Benton County (which has adopted ranked choice voting) uses a different election vendor than Multnomah County, which is important because the county's vendor would need to be able to run ranked choice, STAR, or whatever voting method the subcommittee is proposing. Tim reported that Clear Ballot, which is the vendor Multnomah County uses, is working on ranked choice voting in Colorado, however new voting software has to be certified state by state. Annie noted that Oregon state law requires reporting final results by precinct and she thinks that could be challenging for reporting full ranked choice results; she would be interested to know how Benton County is handling this.

Annie also spoke to Tim about registration for noncitizens to vote in county elections. He said that if registration can be done through the state, then the county would use that system. If not, then it will cost money to develop a new, county-specific system. He also noted some factors that could complicate the process; for example, noncitizens being able to vote on different things than citizens if their rights are limited to county elections. They would need to figure out how to send different ballots to different people depending on what they are allowed to vote on. Annie also noted that the Portland Charter Commission may be considering the issue of noncitizen voting in Phase II of its process.

Meikelo asked if subcommittee members could do research through online resources and not just interviews.

Samantha said yes, they can.

Annie said she had also met with Sara Wolk recently to talk about proportional representation. She asked if she could share presentation slides.

Kali said that she can share a link to presentation slides, but if it is an editable document, Annie cannot edit the contents within that same document once it is shared with the committee. She also recommended giving

others view-only permissions to ensure that there was not a risk of communication through the document outside of the subcommittee meeting.

Annie shared the link and noted that a lot of the contents aligned with George's presentation. She said she thought it was most interesting to see that a large number of commissioner seats per district would be needed to guarantee representation for people of color. Annie outlined some of the advantages she saw in retaining districts, including that it was easier to campaign in the community.

Timur returned conversation to the list of priority topics Samantha had shared earlier, which he said did not totally align with the topics he thought the subcommittee was focusing on. He said most was captured, but he didn't see partisan elections or single versus multi-winner elections.

Samantha added those topics to the list, which included number of commissioners/proportional representation; voting method, expanding the franchise to noncitizens, and holding all county elections at the same time. Samantha also added eliminating primaries to the list.

Samantha said that she and Annie had discussed having members pair up to research each topic area and bring information back to the subcommittee to help it make recommendations.

Kali clarified that breaking into smaller groups was fine, but they should focus on research and information gathering. If a subset of the subcommittee meets to develop recommendations, they could be subject to Public Meetings law. The goal should be to present multiple sides of an issue to the subcommittee to help with informed decision-making.

Timur suggested doing a fist of five on each of the topic areas to determine how committee members feel about each of them and whether research is necessary.

Samantha suggested doing a survey to evaluate support for topics among subcommittee members and bringing the results for discussion at the next meeting. She asked Timur if he would co-draft a survey with her.

Timur agreed. He responded to a question from Meikelo whether more topics could be added and suggested that they set a deadline for introducing new topics.

Meikelo agreed. He was asking for the immediate future. He also said he did better working under clear deadlines.

Samantha asked Kali to provide some guidance around timeline.

Kali said that the only strict deadline in the Charter Review Committee process was presenting final recommendations by August 4, 2022. She explained that they need to build a timeline that factors in what needs to happen with a subcommittee recommendation. They should factor in time for the full committee to discuss a recommendation and potentially make changes. She also pointed out that the other subcommittees were also considering recommendations that would likely also need time for full committee discussion. She said that after the committee voted to approve a recommendation, Charter amendment text would need to be drafted by the County Attorney's Office and there needed to be time for the committee to review that language. She recommended that the subcommittees work to wrap up their work by the end of May at the latest and mentioned that she would propose to the full committee at its April 20<sup>th</sup> meeting that it add meetings in June and July to accommodate more discussion. She said if there were recommendations the subcommittee could agree on earlier, it could bring those to the full committee at any time.

Samantha said based on that, perhaps April 12<sup>th</sup> should be the final date for solidifying the topics considered by the subcommittee.

Meikelo proposed a later date, ideally after the next MCCRC meeting.

Samantha suggested May 2<sup>nd</sup> as an alternative. Annie said she was fine with that.

Timur said that seemed a little late. He said he didn't think they needed to have fully baked proposals, but wanted to establish the universe of research.

Samantha said that she was proposing that they focus on the list they'd put together and if any subcommittee members had other proposals to bring forward, they could gauge subcommittee interest on adding them.

Annie asked Kali if there was any way to survey community members on the viability of some of these topics the subcommittee was considering.

Kali said that the Community Engagement Subcommittee was working on the possibility of surveying community members, but that probably wouldn't be solidified until May or June, so it was best for the subcommittee to start its research and identify specific questions it would be interested in having community members weigh in on.

Samantha asked if she could share the Google doc she was showing the group, which included the research topic areas.

Kali said Samantha could share the content she wrote and showed members in the meeting, but that she should not edit it after the meeting nor give other people edit permissions. She suggested sharing it as a PDF, instead.

Samantha asked subcommittee members to identify the topic areas they were most interested in researching. She said she was most interested in researching expanding the franchise to noncitizens and voting methods.

Annie said she was most interested in number of commissioners/proportional representation and voting methods.

Meikelo was most interested in eliminating primaries/holding all county elections at the same time and expanding the franchise to noncitizens. He asked if expanding the franchise would include other groups and Samantha said she would catch him up later on what was discussed at the subcommittee's last meeting.

Meikelo said he had long been interested in campaign finance and wanted to let other subcommittee members know that he would be proposing they focus on this topic.

Timur said he was interested in number of commissioners/proportional representation and timing of county elections/eliminating primaries/partisan elections.

Samantha encouraged duos to connect on their topics ahead of the next meeting and committed to drafting a survey with Timur to evaluate subcommittee members' interest on the different topics.

## APPENDIX A: ZOOM CHAT

19:01:32 From Samantha Gladu (she/they) to Everyone:

Here is our agenda for tonight: <https://multco-web7-psh-files-usw2.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/Equitable%20Representation%20Subcommittee%20Agenda%2004.04.22.pdf>

19:03:58 From Samantha Gladu (she/they) to Everyone:

Again, here is our agenda for tonight: <https://multco-web7-psh-files-usw2.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/Equitable%20Representation%20Subcommittee%20Agenda%2004.04.22.pdf> 😊

19:04:59 From Samantha Gladu (she/they) to Everyone:

<https://www.multco.us/crc/mccrc-upcoming-meetings>

19:06:50 From Timur Ender (he/him) to Everyone:

I have a short comment after the public comment

19:06:59 From Samantha Gladu (she/they) to Everyone:

Thank you, Timur!

19:11:52 From Timur Ender (he/him) to Everyone:

brb

19:14:05 From Timur Ender (he/him) to Everyone:

Allowing voters to rank candidates in their order of preference

Four new geographic districts with three council members elected to represent each district, creating an expanded city council

A city council that focuses on setting policy and a mayor elected citywide to run the city's day-to-day operations, with the help of a professional city administrator

19:46:06 From Samantha Gladu (she/they) to Everyone:

thanks!!

19:52:20 From Samantha Gladu (she/they) to Everyone:

Here are the annual salaries for MultCo's elected officials as an fyi! <https://www.multco.us/salary-commission/annual-salaries-multnomah-countys-elected-officials>

19:53:39 From Meikelo Cabbage to Everyone:

As long as we end at like 8:35

19:58:10 From Annie Kallen she/ her to Everyone:

That would be great.

19:58:25 From Samantha Gladu (she/they) to Everyone:

^^ agree!

19:59:20 From Annie Kallen she/ her to Everyone:

As promised, the visuals created by CCC were great!

20:06:35 From Samantha Gladu (she/they) to Everyone:

<https://multco-web7-psh-files-usw2.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/Equitable%20Representation%20Subcommittee%20Agenda%2004.04.22.pdf>

20:06:56 From Timur Ender (he/him) to Everyone:

Thank you George & Colin; this was super helpful and directly on point for the type of info I was looking for.

20:07:17 From George Cheung, he/him, MED to Hosts and panelists:

Thank you - I'm going to take leave now

20:07:23 From Annie Kallen she/ her to Everyone:

Thanks George!

20:07:48 From Annie Kallen she/ her to Everyone:

FYI, here is some information on Proportional STAR Voting for anyone who is interested:  
<https://www.equal.vote/pr>

20:08:21 From Kali Odell (she/her) to Everyone:

Yes, thank you Colin and George for sharing and sticking around for a bit. You're welcome to stay until the end if you want, but also understandable that you may have other things to get to this evening.

20:15:19 From Timur Ender (he/him) to Everyone:

Thank you Annie- that was very helpful

20:17:29 From Annie Kallen she/ her to Everyone:

<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1OQjPR5mIMYm52RWTkC2Z8Gpi7LeqEnmUQOm9f541xiA/edit?usp=sharing>

20:20:06 From Timur Ender (he/him) to Everyone:

Eliminating primaries  
# of Commissioners  
Ballot style (RCV vs. STAR)  
Proportional vs. winner take all  
At large vs. district  
Single/Multi-winner  
Partisan elections  
Expanding franchise

20:20:52 From Meikelo Cabbage to Everyone:

Will we be able to bring new issues to the floor if we do research/presentation work?

20:27:07 From Annie Kallen she/ her to Everyone:

Great point-- Deadlines are very helpful.

20:31:28 From Timur Ender (he/him) to Everyone:

I propose that the universe of topics to be explored by finalized by subcmte next meeting in 2 wks. That way we can focus on where we have consensus and doing research on areas on where we do not have yet have consensus. This doesn't prevent us from doing temp checks and moving fwd with research.

20:34:09 From Samantha Gladu (she/they) to Everyone:

Do ya'll have ideas of what you might like to dig into?

20:35:31 From Timur Ender (he/him) to Everyone:

Samantha- can you share this google doc w/ us in some format? It would help me track

20:38:15 From MED's Screen (Colin Cole, he/him) to Hosts and panelists:

I have to hop off - thanks for a great meeting! All of your collective volunteerism and hard work is greatly appreciated

20:38:28 From Kali Odell (she/her) to Everyone:

Thanks, Colin. Take care!

20:39:12 From Samantha Gladu (she/they) to Everyone:

I'll send a newer version of this doc after names are in here!

## APPENDIX B: SUBCOMMITTEE RESEARCH TOPICS

Topics	Number of Commissioners / Proportional Representation	Voting Method (Ballot Style - RCV v STAR)	Expanding the Franchise to Non-Citizens	All County Elections at Same Time  Eliminating Primaries  Partisan Elections
	Single v multi winner At large v district Proportional v winner take all			
Committee Members:	Annie Timur	Samantha Annie	Samantha Miekelo	Miekelo Timur
Possible Research	- Follow up with MED on proposals on modeling likely outcomes from proportional systems  -	- Questions to Tim Scott	- Ricardo Lujan in Commissioner Rubio's office  - -	- MED

GOAL: present multiple sides of argument to full subcommittee

**Survey - co-draft and temp check to signal how much research we need to do :)**

Survey drafters: Timur, Samantha, anyone else?

Deadline setting -

- August 4th is very last date full committee can present to MultCo Commissioners
- Must account for process of moving recommendations from subcommittee to full
  - Discussion, questions, changes, rejection
- Once full committee votes on recommendation, Katherine drafts ballot language and needs time to confer with committee on the language
- Kali recommends subcommittees try to wrap most, if not all, work by end of May
- Gives full committee time to process in June and July - perhaps in more frequent and shorter full committee meetings

May 2nd = pencils down date; no additional topics in the subcommittee

Community engagement subcommittee is looking to get more community input in May and June, could potentially give feedback on recommendations or topics of consideration →