

Home of the PR Count

**CAMBRIDGE
ELECTION
COMMISSION**



REGISTER AND VOTE

Presentation to the Charter Review Committee

January 31, 2023

Cambridge Municipal Elections

- Municipal Elections are in November in odd number years
- The only offices elected are City Council (9 members) and School Committee (6 members)
- Elected at-large, which means they represent the entire city, rather than districts or wards
- Elected for a term of two years
- Elected through Proportional Representation

Running for City Council or School Committee

- Candidates must be registered to vote in Cambridge
- Candidates must submit nomination papers:
 - 50 certified signatures of registered voters required to get on the ballot
 - Candidates can turn in no more than 100 signatures
 - Nomination papers must be notarized
 - Voters can only sign nomination papers for one candidate per office

What is Proportional Representation (PR)?

- Proportional representation ranked choice elections are designed to uphold the principal of “majority rule” while also giving minority groupings fair representation
- Example: If 67% of Cambridge prefers M&Ms and 33% prefers Skittles
 - PR elections would elect about 6 councilors who support M&Ms and about 3 who support skittles
 - In other systems, a majority might elect all M&M supporters, or the number of Skittle representatives would depend on where district lines are drawn
- PR elections are at-large so that a bloc of voters doesn't have to live within one geographic area to be represented

Ideals of Proportional Representation:

- Minimize wasted ballots and reduce the need for “tactical” voting
 - If the candidate you rank first loses, or already has enough votes to win, your ballot will be transferred to your next choice
- Candidates can run for office without fear of splitting the vote
 - In other election systems candidates may be discouraged from running as “spoilers” that take votes away from the front runner
- Civil campaigning and coalition building
 - Candidates have an incentive to reach out to other candidates to pick up second or third choice votes from the other candidates’ supporters

How to Vote: Ranked Choice Ballots

- Voters rank the candidates by filling in the numbered ovals next to the candidates' names
- Voters do not need to rank all the candidates; they should only rank those they support

Only one vote per candidate. Only one vote per column.		DO NOT USE RED TO MARK BALLOT														
HERSHEY CHOCOLATE BAR , 1600 Smores Road	CANDIDATE FOR RE-ELECTION	①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨	⑩	⑪	⑫	⑬	⑭	⑮
GUMMY BEAR , 2564 Haribo Street		①	②	●	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨	⑩	⑪	⑫	⑬	⑭	⑮
CANDY CANE , 12 Peppermint Lane		①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨	⑩	⑪	⑫	⑬	⑭	⑮
CHARLESTON CHEW , 292 Main Street		●	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨	⑩	⑪	⑫	⑬	⑭	⑮
M. M. CHOCOLATE , 255 Character Way		①	②	③	●	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨	⑩	⑪	⑫	⑬	⑭	⑮
REESE P. B. CUP , 24 Peanut Place		①	●	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨	⑩	⑪	⑫	⑬	⑭	⑮
NESTLE CRUNCH , 007 C... D... B... J...		①	②	③	④	⑤	⑥	⑦	⑧	⑨	⑩	⑪	⑫	⑬	⑭	⑮

How are ballots counted?

- Ballots are counted in rounds, or “counts”
- For the **First Count**, we give each ballot to the candidate marked #1 on that ballot
- Once we know how many total valid ballots we have, we can figure out the **quota**, which is the number of votes needed to be elected



Calculating Quota

$$\frac{\text{Total number of Valid Ballots}}{\text{\# of Candidates to be elected} + 1} + 1$$

- City Council has 9 winners, so a candidate needs 1/10 of the votes, plus one, to win

Example: if there were 25,000 ballots cast for City Council, the quota would be 2501

- School Committee has 6 winners, so a candidate needs 1/7 of the votes, plus one, to win
- In an election with 1 winner, a candidate needs a majority: one more than 1/2 of the votes

Transferring the Surplus

- Candidates who receive more than quota in the first count have a **surplus**, or extra ballots beyond what they need to win a seat
- To minimize wasted ballots, we transfer the surplus ballots to the #2 candidate marked on the ballot
- Example: A candidate has 1,000 ballots but only needs 800 to win:
 - We would pull 200 ballots out so the candidate will be left with just 800
 - The 200 ballots would be transferred to the next choice marked on the ballot
 - Which 200 ballots? Cambridge uses a method that can easily be done by hand or by machine

Eliminating/Electing Candidates

- For each count, the candidate with the lowest number of votes is declared defeated
- The defeated candidate's ballots are transferred to the next **continuing candidate** ranked on each ballot
- As candidates reach quota, they are declared elected and no more ballots are transferred to them
- This process continues until all the candidates have been eliminated except the nine winners for City Council or six winners for School Committee

How might Ward based elections affect the system?

Issues to consider

- Will at-large elections retain proportional representation?
- Would Ward Council elections be ranked choice?
 - Ranked choice elections to elect one member are counted essentially the same way as multi-member PR elections
- Candidate recruitment might be an issue: would every ward have a competitive race?
 - Some wards might have no candidates – how will that be handled?
 - How will it affect turnout if some wards have more competitive races than others?
- There are limitations to how Ward boundaries can be drawn

Creating Ward boundaries

- Ward boundaries are redrawn once every 10 years following the federal census
- The city is required to draw wards that have approximately the same population (within 5%), but it is based on **census population**, not number of **registered voters**
 - Census population includes children, non-citizens, temporary residents who register to vote elsewhere, etc

Ward size in Cambridge will always be uneven

- Students at MIT, Harvard, and Lesley University are counted within the census population, but most of the students don't register to vote in Cambridge.
 - This is their choice – some may feel more connected to their hometowns, some may have scholarships that require them to remain registered in another state, some may come from presidential election swing states so they would rather register there.
 - As a result, the wards that have university dorms will always have a lower number of registered voters than other wards
- We are not allowed to draw ward lines that anticipate upcoming new construction even if we know it is coming

There is a significant difference in turnout by ward in Cambridge

- The last Municipal Election used the old wards and precincts, but we can look at November 2022 to see the differences in turnout
 - Ward 1 is the smallest ward in terms of number of voters but also has the lowest turnout percentage
 - Ward 9 had almost 2.5 times as many voters as Ward 1

	Ward 1	Ward 9	Average Ward
Census Population 2020	10,286	10,745	10,764
November 2022 Registered Voters	4,713	7,818	6,415
November 2022 Ballots Cast	2,047	4,960	3,354
November 2022 Turnout	43%	63%	52%

Legislative Districts also limit where Ward Lines can be drawn

- A 2021 law allows the State Legislature to draw legislative districts before the cities approve new ward and precinct lines
 - When we draw Cambridge wards, they now must match the district lines or else we face elections that are impossible to administer
 - The legislature will not take local considerations into account (based on our experience in 2021)
- Cambridge is divided more than most cities in MA
 - 2 congressional districts
 - 3 State Senate Districts
 - 6 State Representative districts

Campaign Finance

Campaign Finance is governed by MGL ch. 55

- The current city charter does not mention campaign finance
- For cities with a population of more than 65,000, which includes Cambridge, city council candidates file their campaign finance reports with the Office of Campaign and Political Finance (OCPF)
- School Committee candidates and local ballot questions committees file their campaign finance reports with the Election Commission
 - Violations are reported to OCPF for enforcement – our role is limited

Costs of Campaigns

- The Election Commission does not monitor or have statistics for:
 - The historical cost of campaigns
 - How much is typically raised or spent in each cycle
 - How the amount correlates to success or failure
 - How Cambridge candidates compare to other cities
- The Election Commission posts the School Committee reports and links to OCPF for the City Council reports online at:

www.cambridgema.gov/cfr

Public Financing

- There have been a variety of public financing ideas discussed over the past few years in City Council and it is difficult to respond without knowing specifics
- Past proposals generally had spending or fundraising limits tied to public financing
 - Auditing campaigns for compliance and enforcing consequences for campaigns that violate the rules is beyond the capacity of the Election Commission Office with our current staffing levels

Increasing Voter
Turnout/Engagement

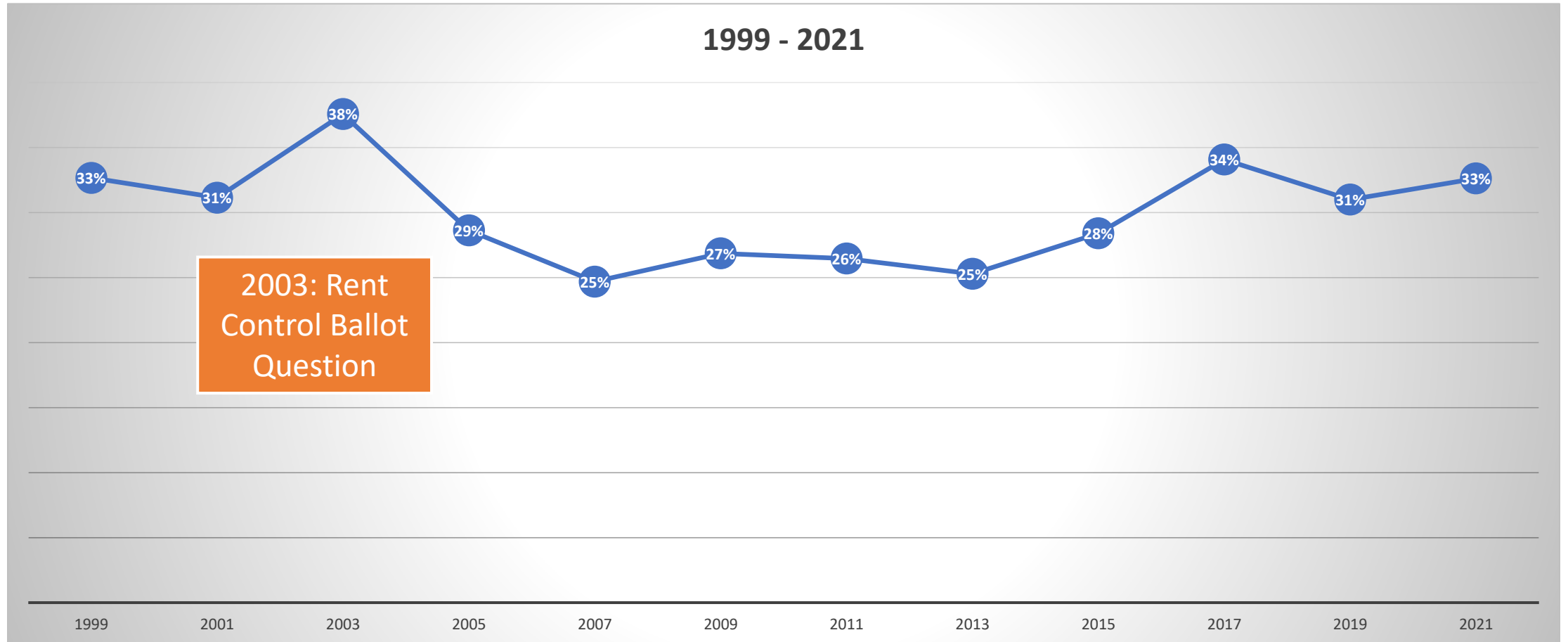
Moving Municipal Elections to Even Years

- Holding state elections at the same time as PR elections would be extremely problematic
 - Our voting machines use different firmware for PR elections
 - Poll worker training is very different for PR elections
 - Election night procedures are incompatible
 - No way to handle post-election tallying for state elections at the same time as we count auxiliary ballots for a PR election

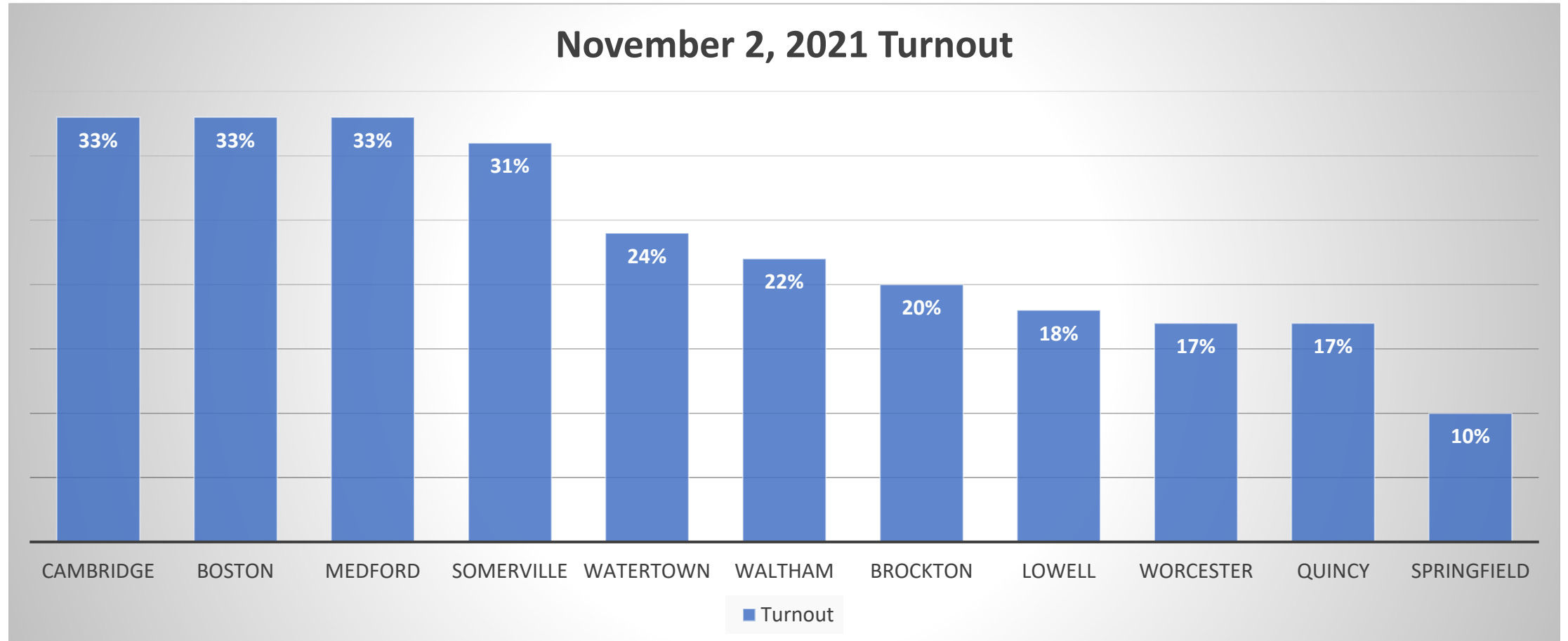
Moving Municipal Elections to Even Years

- Without ranked choice voting, it would still be difficult to have both elections at the same time
 - Municipal elections would still be printed on separate ballots
 - Cambridge has sub-precincts that apply only to state elections and not municipal elections – this will cause voter and poll worker confusion
 - Staffing issues: we would have twice as much election prep to do in even years and none to do in odd years (unless there is a special election)
 - Space issues: we physically don't have room for all the ballots
 - We might have to delay municipal election results to meet state deadlines

Municipal Election Turnout



2021 Municipal Election Comparison



Election Commission 2021 Voter Engagement

- Postcards were sent to every registered voter to request vote-by-mail ballots
- A voter guide was mailed out to educate voters on PR elections, as well as voter registration, early voting, and vote-by-mail
- PSA videos were produced on how to mark PR ballots and how to vote by mail
- In-person early voting was available at three locations
- Postcards were mailed to every registered voter with a map of their polling location for election day
- Signs were posted throughout the city with election information in the weeks leading up to the election