

Grass Roots Venice Neighborhood Council Bylaws Committee Meeting

Minutes 12-07-05 (DRAFT)

1. Meeting was called to order at 7:05 pm
2. Bylaws Committee Members present – Joe Murphy (acting as Chair), David Moring, Greg Fitchitt, Tom O'Meara, Marta Evry, Stewart Oscars, Ivan Spiegel, Susan Rennie, Dante Cacace, Lisa Ezell, Eilleen Pollack Erickson, Steve Freedman, Colette Bailey, Jodi Gusek.

LJ Carusone (Committee Chair) absent

3. Minutes from 11-28-05 meeting accepted by unanimous consent.
4. Presentation by Greg Fitchitt on the work of the 2002 GRVNC Voting Methods Committee. Explained differences between plurality, cumulative and IRV ("Instant Runoff") voting methods and how these different methods would function for single seat and multiple seat elections(see attached Voting Methods report, which Gregg Fitchitt used as a template for his presentation).

Stewart Oscars commented he thought the Cumulative/IRV system was too complicated for voters. Susan Rennie expressed concerns that voters wouldn't understand the implications of the Cumulative/IRV. Eileen Pollack Erickson expressed similar concerns. Ivan Speigel wanted to limit discussion on this issue for now and save it for another meeting.

David Moring asked Fitchitt if the VM Committee considered how we could educate voters. Fitchitt said education would be needed, but that it was not a primary concern of the VM Committee (see VM Committee report for details).

Steve Freedman thought that voters found just the idea of At Large Candidates hard for many voters to grasp.

Ivan said he thought about 4-5% of ballots were spoiled in the last election because voters did not follow instructions on how to vote for District and/or At Large candidates

5. Tom O'Meara presented a GRVNC "Compromise Plan" (see attached). Plan was not a "voting methods" report as agendized, but a third plan for bylaws revisions.

This presentation started a discussion about how best to eliminate or dilute slate politics, encourage stakeholder participation, encourage stakeholder empowerment, and create a diverse board. Since O'Meara's

proposal was not about voting methods and was about work the committee will be addressing in it's meetings, it was requested that O'Meara limit his presentation to only those items relevant to voting methods.

6. Joe Murphy requested we move on to the next item on the agenda; Board composition (Articles IV and XI)

Ivan Speigel wanted to start the discussion concerning whether the Executive Board should be voted in by the Board or directly by voters, because the number of Board Members will be determined by how this choice is made. He wants to get the sense of the committee before we proceed.

Susan Rennie has concerns about the skills of any potential Executive Committee members who are voted in by other board members.

David Moring wants the voters to vote in all the Executive Board Members.

Tom O'Meara wants the voters to decide this question.

Ivan Speigel thinks there's a danger in letting the Board elect it's Executive Committee, because only one group could control everything. Marta Evry talked about how any block of At Large board members, where they are elected Venice-wide, opens the door to slate politics.

Jodi Gusek thinks smaller districts will enable stakeholders to have a more direct voice in the neighborhood council.

Liza Ezell thinks slates are great and should be encouraged.

David Moring says we need to explore all avenues.

Tom O'Meara has a problem with "micro-districts".

Ivan Speigel proposes 5 Executive Committee Members – President, 2 Vice Presidents, Communications and Secretary – and 16 Districts seats. Marta Evry suggests another composition - President, Treasurer, Communications and Secretary.

Colette Bailey thinks District representation makes board members more accountable.

Stewart Oscars said candidates who have to campaign by meeting stakeholders personally will promote participation.

Marta Evry wants to know how we can put in safeguards to prevent an Exec Committee from being taken over by a single slate.

Greg Fitchitt says smaller districts will not encourage participation.

Susan Rennie suggests only three Executive Committee Positions – President, Secretary and Treasurer. Marta Evry agrees with this idea.

Lisa Ezell is concerned by smaller districts and is concerned about the definition of stakeholder – wants it to be people who live here.

Jodi Gusek disagrees with Greg Fitchitt – she didn't even know the neighborhood council existed until a neighbor was mugged and posted about a neighborhood council meeting. So it takes personal outreach for this to work.

David Moring thinks we need more active committees. And that alone will make it impossible for the Executive Committee to control the Agenda.

Greg Fitchitt says having At large seats encourages involvement by stakeholders.

Dante Cacace thinks we just need to tweak some bylaws, but not do an overhaul.

Gregg Fitchit again promotes cumulative voting. Marta Evry says cumulative voting will guarantee slate politics.

Tom O'Meara says it's a balancing act – we need to have a discussion about values.

Eileen Pollack Erickson says cumulative voting will allow a small number of people to control the board. Greg says there's a difference between a small number winning a voice on the board and winning a majority of the board. Lisa Ezell is concerned that an organized slate will manipulate cumulative voting to control a majority of the board.

Committee discussion ends.

7. Committee agrees on next meeting (after Dec. 12 meeting with DONE)

Wednesday, Jan. 4th. 7pm at the Extra Storage Space meeting room.

8. Suggested for the next agenda:

Discussions about board composition, stakeholder definitions, and elections.
Discuss "values"

We also need the Committee chair (LJ Carusone) to name a final list of committee members.

Voting Method Committee Report

Please Note: See Appendix C for suggested bylaws amendment.

Please Note: The bylaws amendment as shown in the report below did not receive the 2/3rds vote required to change the GRVNC Bylaws at the Nov. 25th, 2002 meeting.

REPORT

Report on Voting Systems For
Grass Roots Venice Neighborhood Council

Voting Methods Committee
(Report Date: October 2002)

Executive Summary

Which methods of electing the leadership of Grass Roots Venice will best build a unified, powerful, effective, diverse and active neighborhood council?

Or, put another way, which election methods will best avoid the takeover of the organization by a small faction, the exclusion of minority viewpoints, and the waning of enthusiasm and activism from the grassroots – each of which have been the fate of so many community organizations . . . especially in famously diverse Venice?

After eight months of discussions among a broad set of Venice residents about those questions, the Voting Methods Committee recommends that Grass Roots Venice use Instant Runoff Voting (IRV) for single-seat elections and Cumulative Voting for multiple-seat elections, beginning with the next election of Board members. See Foot Note #1.

We believe these voting systems will do a substantially better job of helping to build GRVNC than the currently-used Plurality voting system or four other methods we closely reviewed.

IRV and Cumulative Voting do the best job of meeting the criteria by which the committee agreed the systems should be evaluated – especially those criteria that we felt were most important. Those top criteria are (1) majority rule – that is, promoting unity; (2) promoting increased participation in GRVNC; (3) giving voters as many choices as possible; and (4) promoting representation on the board of minority viewpoints.

The strengths of IRV and Cumulative Voting in meeting those criteria far outweigh their weaknesses, which are their “ease of use” and “ease of administration” – criteria that the committee felt were less important. On the other hand, the relatively greater ease of use and administration of the Plurality, Approval, and Runoff systems are outweighed by their weaknesses in the top criteria.

Even when ease of use and ease of administration are given equal weight with the top four criteria, IRV and Cumulative Voting are the top choices by a significant margin.

The Problem:

Avoiding The Pitfalls of Venice Community Organizations

It's hard to build a community organization – especially one that is unified and powerful enough to be effective.

It's especially challenging in Venice, with its extraordinary diversity of opinions, lifestyles, and wealth . . . and with its great appeal to outsiders aiming to benefit from its many attributes – for better or worse for the people who already live and work here.

The larger and more successful the organization gets, the more people who want to control or influence it. And, the more people who want to take advantage of its power, the more difficult it is to keep the group on the right track.

The history of community organizations around the country is littered with promising groups that were destroyed by small factions taking control of the leadership and steering the group away from what the majority of the community wanted.

There are equally many examples of groups that, by excluding minority viewpoints, became trapped in time and withered away, unable to respond to their neighborhoods' changing dynamics.

The committee that drafted the bylaws for GRVNC recognized these and other similar problems when focusing on the election of leaders.

From the innumerable potential options, they chose to propose electing some officers via “single-seat” races and some via at-large “multiple-seat” races on which the entire group voted, and some via single-seat races in which stakeholders could vote in only a single district. Doing so improves the odds that a majority of the board will have the support of a majority of the community, while some candidates with minority viewpoints have a shot at winning an at-large position.

However, they also recommended a version of Plurality voting as the way to elect those officers. It is similar to the system used to elect California's Governor and legislators -- though without the primary used to narrow down the candidates.

Unfortunately, the flaws in the Plurality voting system have the potential for undoing the committee's balancing act . . . and sowing the seed for serious problems for Grass Roots Venice.

GRVNC dodged a bullet in its first elections in June, as no single ideological faction won a controlling majority of the board. As a result, the board reflects the diversity of Venice's interests reasonably well.

However, a shift of just 50 or so votes one way or the other would have led to a very different board, one that probably would have been much less representative of the community.

GRVNC also luckily avoided the situation of its officers being elected with the support of less than a majority of the voters . . . or, put another way, with the opposition of most of its members. That's partly because almost all of the single-seat positions were contested by only two candidates.

But, as GRVNC grows, the potential for problems will grow with it.

As more people, organizations, and businesses recognize GRVNC's power, there will be more seats contested by three or more candidates. That means there will be an increased potential for a disciplined faction winning all of the elections with 40% or less of the votes.

Elections will be more hotly contested, with a greater potential for divisive campaigning.

The defeated candidates and their supporters will be more likely to pull out of the organization in disgust or rebellion, taking some of the vitality and the "troops" needed to make GRVNC effective.

Are there ways of reducing the likelihood that GRVNC will run afoul of these pitfalls?

It was in the wake of a heated debate that illustrated the dangers posed by those very pitfalls that the GRVNC Voting Methods Committee was created.

And it was with that question in mind that the Committee spent eight months of research and discussion, before coming to its conclusion and recommendation.

The Process

There is no single election procedure that can always fairly decide the outcome of an election that involves more than two candidates or alternatives.

Summary of "Arrow's Impossibility Theorem"
Devised by Prof. Kenneth Arrow,
Nobel Prize Laureate, in 1952

"But you say, 'Well, okay, since we can't get perfection, let's at least try to find a method that works well most of the time.' Then when you do have a problem, you don't notice it as much. So my theorem is not a completely destructive or negative feature any more than the second law of thermodynamics means that

people don't work on improving the efficiency of engines. We're told you'll never get 100% efficient engines. That's a fact – and a law. It doesn't mean you wouldn't like to go from 40% to 50%. In the same vein, one way of developing research on voting is to seek systems that do break down occasionally. Just try to do it in such a way that it doesn't happen too often.”

-- Prof. Kenneth Arrow

At the December 2001 meeting of GRVNC, the group overwhelmingly passed a motion made by Nancy Silverman to create a committee to study voting systems for the election of GRVNC board members and to recommend to the group which system or systems should be used in the second election.

Beginning on Feb. 19, 2002, a diverse set of GRVNC members spent the next eight months carrying out that mission. Through ten formal meetings, several post-meeting get-togethers, and countless emails, roughly 30 people went through the process that resulted in the above recommendation.

Among the participants at various times were Nancy Silverman (who chaired the initial meetings), Greg Fitchitt, Sheila Bernard, Jason Parry, Tom Gibson, Chris Wood, Richard Carter, Nils Lambrecht, Naomi Nightengale, Kirk Weinert, Alice Stek, Elena Popp, and Carolyn Ward See Foot Note #2.

The process largely followed the method spelled out in the book “Behind The Ballot Box”, by Professor Douglas J. Amy of Mt. Holyoke College.

The process was as follows:

1. Deciding Criteria For Evaluating The Systems

Recognizing that no system is perfect and that different systems can produce very different results, the committee came up with a list of criteria by which to evaluate any voting system. We then ranked them in order of importance.

The idea is to decide which qualities we want to foster in GRVNC, which are the most important, and which are least important.

After several meetings, we agreed upon the following twelve criteria and their relative importance.

Top Tier

Majority Rule: How well does the system ensure that winning candidates have the support of a majority of voters?

Organizational Participation: How well does the system encourage members to vote? How well does the system lead to increased numbers of people participating in all organizational activities? Given the extra barriers many members of “minorities” have in being able to vote (e.g. language, lack of free time), how well does the system help them overcome those barriers?

Voter Choice: How fully does the system allow each voter to express her opinion, by encouraging a broad range of candidates to run and by allowing voters to express the degree of their support for particular candidates?

Minority Representation: How much does the system give people with “minority” views – whether they be ideological, ethnic, or otherwise – a reason to vote, by making it possible for some of their favorite candidates to be elected?

Second Tier

Ease of Use: How easy it is for voters to learn how to cast their votes and to understand and trust the outcomes of the election?

Quality of Candidates: How well does it encourage good candidates to run, through such methods as reducing personal attacks, reducing the possibility a candidate will be a “spoiler” for another candidate, increasing the possibility that less-known (and less-financed) candidates can have an impact on the election?

Sincere Voting: How well does the system encourage voters to cast their votes according to their sincere opinions and minimize the need to “vote strategically” (such as voting for the “lesser of two evils”) so that one’s vote won’t backfire?

Organizational Stability and Effectiveness: How well does the system promote a stable organization, especially during transitions from one set of board members to another? How well does it promote the election of a board of directors which will have an effective working majority, so that the organization can work on issues, rather than on dealing with internal squabbling?

Third Tier

Ease of Administration: How easy is it to administer the election, including the counting of votes – taking into account the size of the group? How much does the system discourage fraud?

Cooperation and Coalition Building Among GRVNC Members: How much does the system encourage candidates to reach out for support from many groups?

Positive Campaigning: How much does the system encourage positive campaigning, debate of policy differences between candidates, and dialogue, instead of conflict within the organization?

Used Elsewhere: How often is the system used by similar organizations elsewhere in the country?

2. Evaluating Voting Systems Following some research by various members, the committee came up with a list of seven voting systems See Foot Note #3 to be evaluated See Foot Note #4:

For single-seat elections (e.g. President, Treasurer), the systems are:

Plurality
Approval
Runoff
Instant Runoff Voting (IRV)
Limited Instant Runoff

For multiple-seat elections (e.g. the seven At-Large positions), the systems are:

Plurality
Approval
Cumulative
Single Transferable Vote (STV)
Several members were then assigned to do more substantial research on each system.

They then made a presentation to the group on how their assigned system worked – e.g. how people vote, how votes are counted and the results decided – and how the system met each of the 12 criteria.

During and after the presentation, the group then decided how well the criteria were met. We initially used a three star system, but – because we often wanted to give _ stars – five stars were ultimately used:

Five Stars (*****) means that the system did an excellent job of meeting the criteria. For example, for single-seat elections, Plurality earned five stars for “ease of use”, as voters are familiar with the system and have to cast only one vote per race.

Four Stars (****) means that the system did a good, but not perfect, job of meeting the criteria. For example, for single-seat elections, Runoff earned four stars for “ease of use”, as voters are familiar with the system [the same one used to elect the mayor and city council of LA] and have to cast only one vote per race, but required voters to come to a second election – perhaps weeks later – to decide any races in which no candidate got a majority in the first round.

Three Stars (***) means that the system does a so-so job of meeting the criteria or is neutral. For example, Approval Voting earned three stars for “majority rule” in single-seat elections because, while it doesn’t require candidates to get the support of a majority of candidates, it makes it more likely that will happen.

Two Stars (**) means that the system does a poor job of meeting the criteria. For example, Instant Runoff Voting earned two stars for “Used Elsewhere”, because it’s not yet commonly used – though, since the Utah Republican Party, the American Political Science Association, and (as of next year) the city of San Francisco use it, it’s not completely unknown.

One Star (*) means that the system generally does a very poor job of meeting the criteria. For example, Cumulative Voting earned one star for “Cooperation and Coalition Building” for multiple-seat elections, since it is designed to promote the election of at least some (but not a majority of) candidates with minority viewpoints.

The systems ended up being rated as detailed in Appendix A and Appendix B.

3. Comparing Voting Systems

The committee then produced a chart that compared the systems to each other.

The chart assigned points to each system by multiplying the number of stars a system received for a particular criteria times 3 if the criteria were in the top tier of importance, 2 if it were in the second tier, and 1 if it were in the third tier.

Here are two examples of how points were assigned to, say, Approval Voting:

For the criteria of "Majority Rule", the group decided that the Approval system merited three stars – that is, it did a so-so job of ensuring majority rule. Majority Rule is a top tier criterion, which means that the three stars should be multiplied by three. So, Approval gets nine points for this criterion.

For the criterion of "Used Elsewhere", the group decided that Approval merited one star – that is, Approval is rarely used elsewhere. Used Elsewhere is a bottom tier criterion, which means that the one star is multiplied by one. So, Approval gets one point for this criterion.

The total points awarded to each system turned out to be as follows (see Appendix B for details):

Using All Criteria
Weighted By Level Of Importance

Single Seat Elections
(e.g. President, Treasurer, District Representative):

Instant Runoff Voting (IRV): 98 points
Limited IRV: 76
Runoff (two rounds of voting): 62
Approval: 64
Plurality: 54

Multiple-Seat Elections
(e.g. 7 At-Large Positions)

Single Transferable Vote: 91 points
Cumulative: 86
Approval: 64
Plurality: 54

At our July 24th meeting, we discussed what would happen if we only used six criteria (ease of use, ease of administration, increasing organizational participation, majority rule, minority representation, and increasing voters' choices) and gave each one equal weight. This would have the effect of dramatically increasing the importance of "ease of use" and "ease of administration" - which would make up a third of the rankings.

As it turned out, the results would vary only slightly, with IRV still getting the most points by far for single-seat elections, but Cumulative Voting moving ahead of Single Transferable Voting for multiple-seat elections. The tally would be as follows:

Using Top Four Criteria, Ease of Use, and Ease of Administration Weighted Equally

Single-Seat Elections

Instant Runoff Voting (IRV): 65 points

Limited IRV: 57

Approval: 54

Plurality: 48

Runoff (two rounds of voting): 42

Multiple-Seat Elections

Cumulative: 72 points

Single Transferable Vote: 56

Approval: 54

Plurality: 48

4. Making A Recommendation

At its July 24th meeting, following the above discussion, each of the seven members of the group present See Foot Note #5 at the meeting expressed her/his recommendation.

For single seat elections, six members recommended IRV and one member abstained – though, at the subsequent August 7th meeting, he recommended using the Runoff system, citing its familiarity to voters as outweighing the other factors for now.

For multiple-seat elections, four members recommended Cumulative Voting, two preferred STV, and one abstained See Foot Note #6. The two STV supporters said they liked Cumulative, as well, and would not block consensus on the matter.

Drafts of this report were subsequently circulated to all committee members, plus some other GRVNC leaders. This version of the report incorporates all of their comments, though they did not explicitly support or oppose the report as a whole.

Appendix A

Summary of Voting Systems

Single-Seat Elections

Approval Voting

How voters express preferences: Voter selects candidate(s) that voter approves of. Voter can select all candidates, none of the candidates, or some of the candidates from the list.

How winner is determined: Each time the name of a candidate is selected on the ballots, that candidate gets one vote. The candidate receiving the most votes is declared the winner.

Key Advantages: Tends to produce winners that have broad support. Relatively easy for voter to understand.

Key Disadvantages: While winners tend to have broad support, this support might be weak. Strategic voting could undermine some advantages.

Instant Runoff Voting

How voters express preferences: Voter ranks candidates in order of preference (e.g. 1 for first choice, 2 for second choice). Voter can select all candidates, none of the candidates, or some of the candidates from the list.

How winner is determined: The first candidate to have a majority of top choices wins. If, after the first choices are counted, no candidate is the top choice of a majority, the candidate with the least support is eliminated and his/her supporters' votes are given to their next highest choice among the remaining candidates. (It as if there were a runoff election, without voters having to go to the polls again.) The process is repeated until a candidate gets a majority of the votes.

Key Advantages: Produces winners that have broad support. Encourages positive, issue-oriented campaigning, because of importance to candidates of being the second choice of the supporters of other candidates. Encourages more quality candidates to run, because of lack of "spoiler effect". Allows voters to express their opinions more fully.

Key Disadvantages: Vote-counting system is unfamiliar to people, raising concerns about legitimacy.

Limited Instant Runoff Voting

How voters express preferences: Voter ranks candidates in order of preference (e.g. 1 for first choice, 2 for second choice). Voter can select all candidates, none of the candidates, or some of the candidates from the list.

How winner is determined: The first candidate to have a majority of top choices wins. If, after the first choices are counted, no candidate is the top choice of a majority, all but the top two candidates are eliminated. The votes of the eliminated candidates' supporters' votes are given to their next highest choice among the two remaining candidates. (It as if there were a runoff election, without voters having to go to the polls again.) In the second round of counting, whichever candidate gets the most votes (which will inevitably be a majority) wins.

Key Advantages: Produces winners that have broad support. Encourages positive, issue-oriented campaigning, because of importance to candidates of being the second choice of the supporters of other candidates. Encourages more quality candidates to run, because of reduced “spoiler effect”. Allows voters to express their opinions more fully.

Key Disadvantages: Vote-counting system is unfamiliar to people, raising concerns about legitimacy. Potentially eliminates third and fourth-place candidates who are actually acceptable to more people than top two choices that get into the second round.

Plurality

How voters express preferences: Voter casts ballot for one candidate.

How winner is determined: Candidate who gets the most votes wins.

Key Advantages: Easy-to-understand system for voting and counting votes. Can lead to coalition-building.

Key Disadvantages: Can result in winners having less-than-majority support. Promotes negative campaigning. Has spoiler effect – i.e. casting a vote for your first choice can help your least-favorite choice.

Runoff

How voters express preferences: Voter casts ballot for one candidate. If there is a second round of voting because no candidate gets a majority of votes, voter casts ballot for one of two remaining candidates.

How winner is determined: If a candidate gets a majority of votes, she/he wins. If no candidate gets a majority, a new election is held between the top two vote-getters. In the second election, voters again vote for one candidate. The candidate with the most votes (which will be a majority) wins.

Key Advantages: Produces winners that have broad support. Encourages positive, issue-oriented campaigning, because of importance to candidates of being the second choice of the supporters of other candidates. Familiar to Venice voters because of its use to elect LA mayor, city council.

Key Disadvantages: Often requires voters to come back for second round of elections. Can result in elimination of third and fourth place candidates who are actually acceptable to more people than top two choices that get into the second round. Has some spoiler effect – i.e. casting a vote for your first choice can help your least-favorite choice.

Multiple-Seat Elections

Approval Voting

How voters express preferences: Voter selects candidate(s) that voter approves of. Voter can select all candidates, none of the candidates, or some of the candidates from the list.

How winner is determined: Each time the name of a candidate is selected on the ballots, that candidate gets one vote. The candidates receiving the most votes are declared the winners. For example, if there are three seats open, the top three vote-getters are elected.

Key Advantages: Tends to produce winners that have broad support. Relatively easy for voter to understand.

Key Disadvantages: Makes it very difficult for candidates with minority viewpoints to get elected. While winners tend to have broad support, this support might be weak. Strategic voting could undermine some advantages.

Cumulative Voting

How voters express preferences: Voters may cast as many votes as there are seats, and cast as many of those votes for any one candidate as they choose. For example, if there are seven seats open, they may cast up to seven votes. They may cumulate their seven votes for particular candidates, casting as much as all seven of their votes for one candidate . . . or casting three for one candidate, two for another candidate, and one each for two other candidates . . . or giving one vote each to seven different candidates.

How winner is determined: The candidates receiving the most votes are declared the winners. For example, if there are seven seats open, the top seven vote-getters are elected

Key Advantages: Enables candidates with viewpoints shared by significant minorities to get elected, while still generally leading to a majority of seats being won by candidates with majority views. Allows voters to express their opinions more fully.

Key Disadvantages: System for casting ballots is unfamiliar to most voters.

Plurality

How voters express preferences: Voter can cast as many votes as there are seats, giving no more than one per candidate.

How winner is determined: The candidates receiving the most votes are declared the winners. For example, if there are seven seats open, the top seven vote-getters are elected

Key Advantages: Easy-to-understand system for voting and counting votes. Can lead to coalition-building.

Key Disadvantages: Makes it very difficult for candidates with minority viewpoints to get elected.

Single Transferable Vote

How voters express preferences: Voter ranks candidates in order of preference (e.g. 1 for first choice, 2 for second choice). Voter can select all candidates, none of the candidates, or some of the candidates from the list.

How winner is determined: If a candidate for a seven-seat election receives more than 12.5% of the #1 rankings, that candidate is declared one of the winners. Candidates who do not receive more than 12.5% of the #1 rankings might still be elected through a process of transferring excess votes and votes for eliminated candidates:

Transferring Excess Votes: When a winning candidate receives more #1 votes than the 12.5% threshold, the votes that exceed this threshold are transferred to the various candidates who were ranked #2 behind the successful candidate. If this transfer of excess votes brings any of the remaining candidates above the 12.5% threshold, that candidate is declared one of the winners.

Transferring Votes of Eliminated Candidates: After transferring excess votes of candidates who exceeded the 12.5% threshold, not all seven seats may be filled. In such an event, the candidate with the fewest #1 rankings is eliminated and his or her votes transfer to the candidates ranked #2 on those ballots. This transfer may also bring one or more remaining candidates above the 12.5% threshold, and make them winners.

The process of transferring votes continues until seven candidates surpass the 12.5% threshold, and are declared winners.

Key Advantages: Enables candidates with viewpoints shared by significant minorities to get elected, while still generally leading to a majority of seats being won by candidates with majority views. Allows voters to express their opinions more fully. Encourages positive, issue-oriented campaigning, because of importance to candidates of being the second choice of the supporters of other candidates. Encourages more quality candidates to run, because of lack of “spoiler effect”.

Key Disadvantages: Vote-counting system is unfamiliar to people, raising concerns about legitimacy, and logistically challenging for Elections Committee.

Appendix B

Rating The Systems

Single Seat Election Systems

Multiple Seat Election Systems

Appendix C

Recommended Bylaw Amendment

Article VI- ELECTIONS

G. Voting

Voting for election of Officers shall be by ballot. For positions for which only one candidate is elected, the Instant Runoff Voting method of voting, as described below, shall be used. For positions for which more than one candidate is elected, the Cumulative Method of voting, as described below, shall be used.

Each Voting Member shall be entitled to cast votes (as applicable due to staggered elections) as follows for the positions of:

- One vote for President
- One vote for Vice President
- One vote for Secretary
- One vote for Treasurer
- One vote for Communications Officer
- One vote for Government Relations Officer
- One vote for Second Vice President

Voters will be instructed to rank the candidates in order of preference.

The first choice marked on each ballot shall be counted initially by election officials. If any candidate receives a majority of the first choices, that candidate shall be declared elected. If no candidate receives a majority of first choices, the Election Committee shall conduct the “instant runoff”, consisting of additional rounds of ballot counting.

In each round, the candidate with the fewest votes shall be eliminated, and all ballots shall be recounted. Ballots of voters who gave their top ranking to the eliminated candidate are redistributed to their next-choice candidates, as indicated on each voter’s ballot. Last place candidates are successively eliminated and ballots are redistributed to next choices until one candidate receives a majority of the valid votes in a round.

Each Voting Member shall be entitled to cast seven (7) votes for At-Large Officers. The seven At-Large Officer candidates with the highest vote totals shall be elected. Each GRVNC Voting Member may vote for up to seven (7) candidates when the seven (7) At-Large Officer positions are up for election. Voters may give all of their votes to one candidate, split them up among two or more candidates, or give one vote to each of seven candidates. Fractional votes are not allowed.

Each GRVNC Voting Member may vote for only one Geographical Representative Officer when the seven (7) Geographical Representative Officer

positions are up for election. Votes for Geographical Representative Officers shall be cast and counted using the procedure described above for single-seat positions (Instant Runoff Voting).

No voting by proxy is allowed, either in elections or for the Board of Officers to rule on business.

Appendix D

Some Questions And Answers About Instant Runoff Voting and Cumulative Voting

The following section addresses concerns raised about the two systems recommended by the committee.

Q. Are these systems too complicated for the average person in Venice to understand and use?

A. No. Voting systems that rank candidates (like IRV) are used throughout the world, including in Third World countries with populations with much less formal education than folks here in Venice. Similarly, Cumulative Voting is used in numerous communities with relatively poor and less-formally-educated voters in the South, with the approval of the U.S. Justice Department.

Also, people often use ranking systems in non-electoral situations – such as deciding MVPs in sports and nominations for the Oscars. Shareholders in 10% of the country's corporations use Cumulative Voting to choose their boards of directors.

Counting the votes under IRV and Cumulative Voting will take longer than under Plurality, but not excessively so. The Elections committee will also have to make more of an effort to explain the systems to voters and there will undoubtedly be some confusion during the first election under the systems. However, the Voting Methods committee felt that these Election Day concerns were more than outweighed by the benefits the systems would provide the other 364 days of the year – in the quality of the campaigns leading up to the elections, the quality of the leadership elected, and the quality and quantity of Venetians involved in GRVNC as a result.

Q. Do these systems meet DONE's guidelines for voting methods?

A. It appears so.

According to a 3/20/02 memo from DONE's general manager (a memo that was the basis for the way GRVNC's Election Committee ran the June 2002 election),

"Section 904 (f) guarantees that the regulations, which came to be known as the Plan for a Citywide System of Neighborhood Councils "shall not restrict the method by which the members of a neighborhood council are chosen, if the process otherwise satisfies the requirements of this Article." In essence, this

means that the Neighborhood Councils (NC) can pick the way through which they will elect and/or select their officers as long as it doesn't violate any laws.

IRV and Cumulative Voting systems do not violate any federal, state, or local laws – as evidenced by San Francisco's adoption of IRV and the use of Cumulative Voting in numerous elections in the South and by corporations chartered by the state of California.

Concerns have been raised that the City Attorney's office may consider the systems to be "exclusionary" – i.e. to reduce participation in elections. There has been no such formal or informal ruling by the City Attorney. Moreover, increasing participation has generally been considered to be strengths of the systems. For example, Cumulative Voting is frequently used by the U.S. Justice Department (under Republican and Democratic Administrations) to resolve voting rights cases in the South (often in municipalities with a relatively poorly-educated population), where it has been shown to increase voter turnout.

Q. Do these systems violate the "one person, one vote" rule?

A. No. - The courts have consistently upheld the constitutionality of IRV and Cumulative Voting. Indeed, as mentioned above, Cumulative Voting is often used by the Justice Department as a means of settling voting rights cases in the South.

The reason the systems are fine is that the essence of the "one person, one vote" concept is that of equality – that is, that any person has as much power in the voting booth as everybody else. In both IRV and Cumulative, each voter has the same amount of power, because everyone has the same number of votes.

Appendix E

Selected Bibliography and Research Sources

Books and Articles

1. Amy, Douglas J. Behind The Ballot Box: A Citizen's Guide To Voting Systems, Prager Publishers, 2000
2. Ferrell, David M., Comparing Electoral Systems, Prentice Hall, 1997
3. Brams, Stephen J., and Peter C. Fishburn, Approval Voting, Birkhauser, 1983.
4. LeDuc, Lawrence, Richard Neimi, and Pippa Norris, eds. Comparing Democracies: Elections and Voting in Global Perspectives, Sage Publications, 1996.
5. Richie, Robert, Caleb Kleppner, and Terril Bouricius, "Instant Run-Offs: A Cheaper, Faster, Better Way to Conduct Elections", National Civic Review 89, no. 1 (Spring 2000), pgs. 95-110.

Web Sites

1. League of Women Voters of Seattle (<http://seattle.wa.lwv.org/pubs/emstudy.pdf>). Following a Supreme Court ruling outlawing the “blanket primary” system used by the state of Washington and cities and counties in the state, the League of Women Voters of Seattle conducted in 2000 a study of voting methods that is very similar to ours.
2. The Center for Voting and Democracy (www.fairvote.org). CVD is a non-profit organization based in Washington, DC, which is a leading advocate of Instant Runoff Voting and alternative voting systems.
3. The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (www.int-idea.se). This is the web site of a Sweden-based organization that promotes democracy throughout the world, with a specialty in voting systems.
4. Voting Methods.org (www.votingmethods.org). The web site is the product of Mike Ossipoff, a long-time critic of plurality and Instant Runoff systems.
5. PR Library: Readings in Proportional Representation (www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/poli/damy/prlib.htm). This is a web site coordinated by Prof. Douglas Amy (see above), which includes a wide range of readings and links on voting methods—especially for multiple-seat elections.

FOOTNOTES

1 The specific recommended bylaw amendment is listed in Appendix C.

2 A larger number of people were involved in the very initial meetings in which the process was decided. Each of the listed thirteen people cast their votes to decide which criteria should be the most important (and the least important) in evaluating the voting systems. All thirteen also attended at least one of the subsequent meetings in which specific systems were evaluated. The initial research on the systems was conducted by Greg Fitchitt, Nils Lambrecht, Jason Parry, Nancy Silverman, Chris Wood, and Kirk Weinert. The final meetings of the committee, in which the process culminated, had 6-7 attendees – including Greg Fitchitt, Sheila Bernard, Jason Parry, Tom Gibson, Richard Carter, Kirk Weinert, and Chris Wood. Feedback was also continually solicited throughout the process via posting of the meetings’ minutes, invitations to meetings, and circulation of drafts of voting system analyses and this report.

3 For more details on each of these systems, see Appendix A. Instant Runoff Voting and Cumulative Voting are discussed in more details in the Questions and Answers section (Appendix D).

4 The committee originally considered several other systems, but decided they were too impractical for GRVNC. Among them were the so-called Infinite Runoff System (which is actually the system favored by Roberts’ Rules of Order where practical, but which requires a new round of elections each time no candidate gets at least 50% + 1 of the vote, with no candidates being eliminated from the next round) and the Condorcet system (which is designed to determine how each voter would decide between any pair of candidates, but which requires a complex

computer program to calculate the results for a group as large as GRVNC is now, much less how large we hope it will be).

5 Those present were Greg Fitchitt, Richard Carter, Sheila Bernard, Tom Gibson, Chris Wood, Jason Parry, and Kirk Weinert.

6 At the August 7th meeting, he expressed his support of Plurality for these elections, again citing the importance of voter familiarity overriding the other factors for the first few GRVNC elections – though not necessarily afterwards.

Tom O'Meara's "compromise plan"

Basic Structure

- **Create Two Revisions for stakeholders to approve**
 - 1) A fair proposal for board structure where board appoints the executive committee
 - 2) A revision that allows stakeholders to vote for Executive Committee from among people elected to the board (let the voters decide)

Executive Committee

- **The executive committee is chosen by the board from among board members by Ranked Choice Voting**
- **Feature of both the "Full Representation" plan and the "Full District" Plan**

- **Motion to Eliminate President on 2004 Board**

- **Creates Diversity by requiring executives to be on the board**

- **Stakeholders given choice if they would prefer to elect the EC**

Geographic/At-Large Ratio

- **Create 11 Geographic / 10 At-Large seats**

- **(Currently 7 Geographic and 14 At-Large)**

- **Increases the Ratio from 0.33 to 1.10**

– (more than 3 fold increase)

- **11 Census Tract regions set ideal number**

- **Easy for voters to think about splitting a vote 10 ways**

Non-Geographic Needs

- **9 At-Large seats elected by Cumulative Voting**

- **Full District Plan fixes 7 seats for specific non-geographic interests**

- **Cumulative Voting Allows Community to decide interests at every election.**

- **Allows for self-organization as needs change**

- **Venice Surfers plan to run a candidate next year**

Misc.

- **Full District Plan creates 26 member board**

– Too large and unwieldy

– Difficult for all board members to speak on every issue

- **2004 Board Failed to Pass Cumulative Voting**
- **Let “All of Venice” means both location and opinion. However, people vote, not property, so emphasis should be on diverse opinion, not diverse location.**

Values Ranking

- **Voter Choice: 6**
- **Stakeholder Participation: 7**
- **Overall Board Member Quality: 9**
- **Positive Campaigning (with IRV election of Executives by public): 9**
- **Majority Rule: 7**
- **Geographic Proximity: 8**
- **Full Representation of Opinions: 7**
- **Ease of use for Voter: 6**

Cumulative Voting

- **Found by Voting Methods Committee to be best for Venice At-Large seats**
- **Gives no advantage to those running in a slate.**
- **In a hypothetical election with two at-large seats, a single candidate would campaign for all of the vote (2), but a “slate” candidate would have to ask for half the vote (1)**
- **A slate running more candidates than supported will win no seats at all!**