



VOTER VOICES= MAJORITY CHOICES

Modernizing Denver's At-Large Elections

Finance and Governance Committee, June 24, 2025

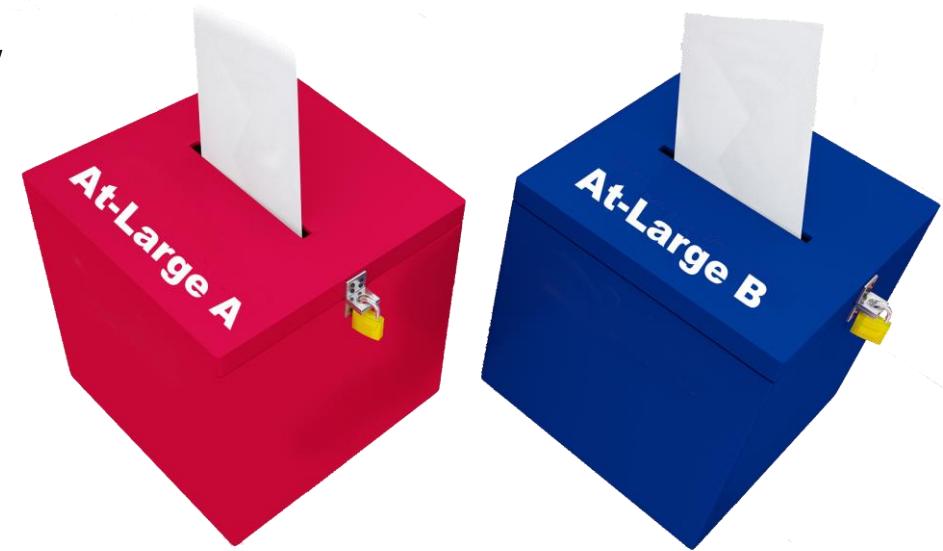
Sponsored by Denver City Council Members

Kevin Flynn (D2), Darrell B. Watson (D9), Flor Alvidrez (D7), Stacie Gilmore (D11) and Amanda Sawyer (D5)

THE PROPOSAL

Separate ballots for at-large seats

- Two at-large members elected on separate ballots – At-Large A and At-Large B – instead of a single “vote for 2” ballot
- Each still represents the entire city, as they do now
- Ensures majority winners, as required of all other Denver city officials
- Eliminates use of “single shot” voting, increasing total vote and bringing more voters’ voices into our democracy



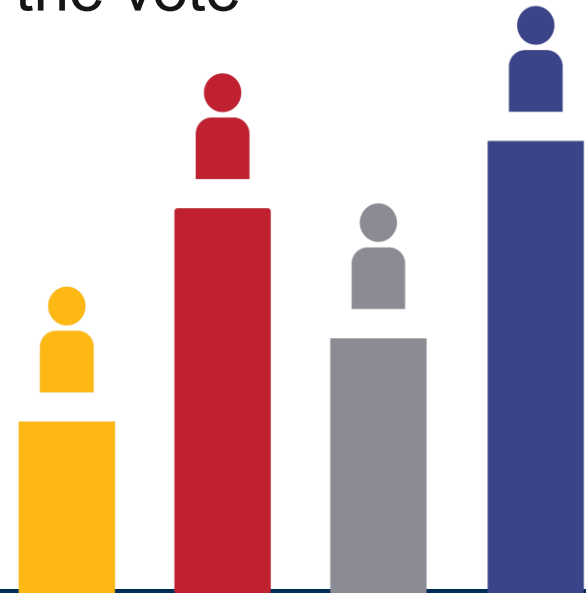
TWO CONCERNS TO BE ADDRESSED

No requirement for at-large winners to achieve majority

- This was not the original intent; voter-approved plan was for two elections – primary and general – but was tossed out by state Supreme Court in 1971
- This proposal restores the original intent and aligns at-large elections with all other Denver elected officials by achieving greater than 50% of the vote

Single ballot with 2 votes prompts many voters to leave their second selection blank

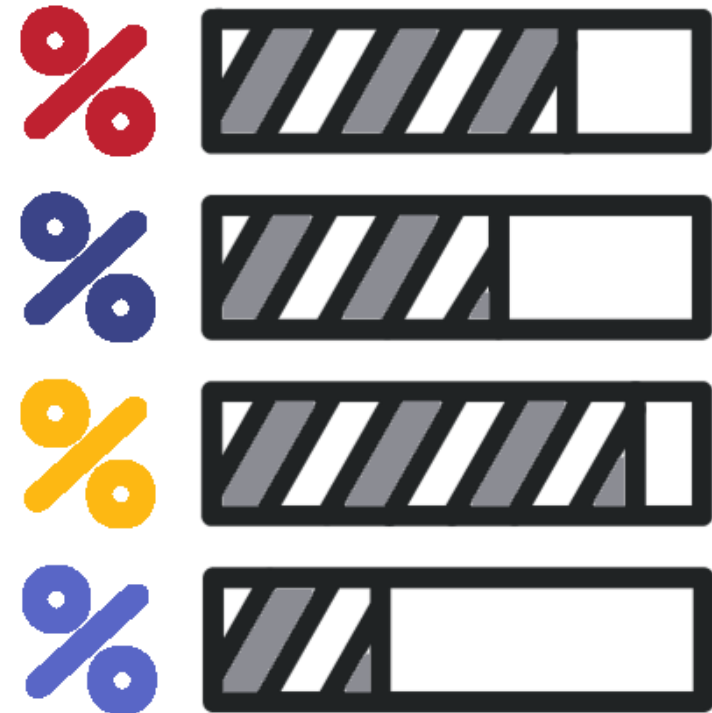
- Data from voting records clearly indicate significant amount of additional undervoting due to “single-shot” voting strategy



MAJORITY CHOICES

Require at-large winners to win more than 50% of the vote

- This amendment ensures winners will receive majority support
- In nine elections since 1991, average first-place percentage was 32.77%, average second-place percentage was 24.41%
- Aligns at-large voting method with all other elected city officials, which was the original intent when the at-large seats were established in 1971
- Ensures use of same system for all municipal offices



INCREASE VOTERS' VOICES

Strengthening the voices of the voters

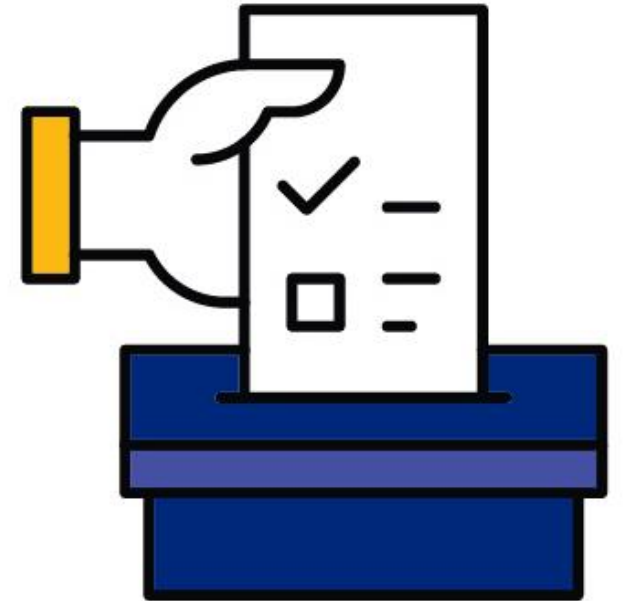
- Since 1991, undervoting in the at-large races averaged 31.59% — **more than 12 times the rate of mayoral undervoting**
- In the last three elections, undervoting in at-large races averaged:
 - ✓ **3½ times** the rate of contested district races
 - ✓ **84%** higher than the auditor race
 - ✓ **61%** higher than the clerk and recorder race
 - ✓ **25%** higher than uncontested district races
 - ✓ Clear evidence of the impact of “single-shot”
 - ✓ System should not incentivize voters to not vote

Year	Mayoral Undervote	At-Large Undervote
2023	1.40%	26.73%
2019	3.83%	31.70%
2015	7.27%	29.15%
2011	0.79%	37.80%
2007	1.66%	37.16%
2003	0.85%	30.04%
1999	4.54%	26.91%
1995	0.95%	32.34%
1991	1.33%	32.51%
9-Election Average	2.51%	31.59%

MOST PEER CITIES USE SIMILAR METHODS

33 of the 100 largest U.S. cities have at-large members

- **25** of them (76%) use a two-round election system
 - ✓ **16** cities make majority wins more likely with two-round systems, as Denver uses for district seats
 - ✓ **9** cities require at-large members to win by a majority
- **11** place at-large candidates on separate ballots
- Only **6** other cities use single-ballot plurality voting for their at-large members with no requirement for a majority win



ENDORSEMENT

Doug Linkhart, President of the National Civic League, Denver City Council At-Large Member 2003-2011

“Separating the two at-large seats would be a benefit to local democracy and representation. Requiring that all Council members receive a majority vote helps elect candidates with broad support, and establishing two separate positions helps voters distinguish among candidates, improving accountability.”

“The present system also results in less visibility for the at-large seats, as indicated by the undervote in each election, which weakens the City Council as a representative body.”



ENDORSEMENT

Debbie Ortega, Denver City Council At-Large Member 2011-2023, District 9 Member 1987-2003

“The current system for electing at-large members has resulted in only three people of color being elected in the last 56 years. But in the same time, the majority election used for all other offices that includes the runoff has resulted in people of color elected as mayor a majority of the last 14 elections.

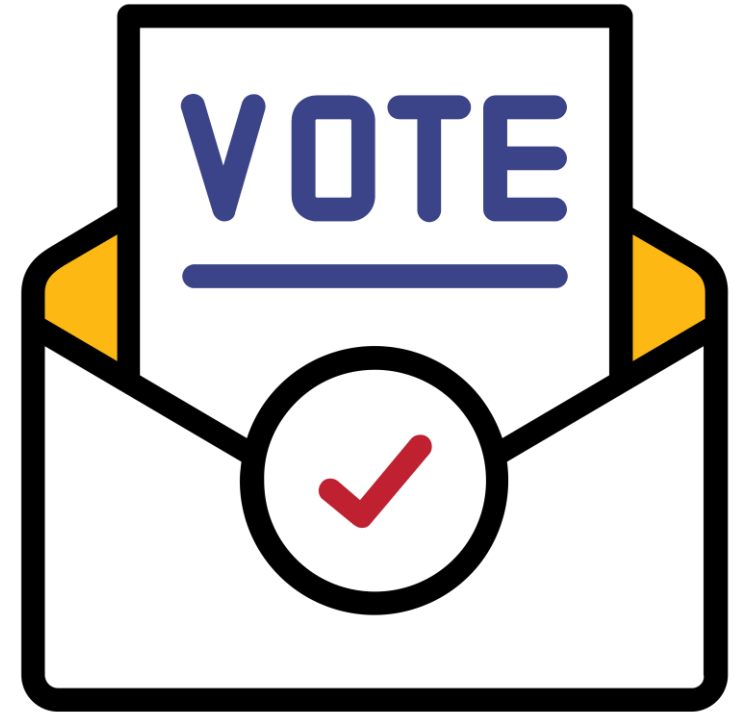
“The plurality voting method should not be a barrier to making majority choices”



TIMELINE

- **June 24:** Finance and Governance Committee
- **July 17:** Mayor-Council
- **July 14:** First reading at City Council
- **July 21:** Second reading at City Council
- **Nov. 4:** Election

Q&A responses from Budget and Policy Committee and town hall meeting available at <https://bit.ly/AtLargeAnswers>



Questions and Discussion

