



# **VOTER VOICES= MAJORITY CHOICES**

**Modernizing Denver's At-Large Elections**

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**Sponsored by Denver City Council Members**

Kevin Flynn (D2), Darrell B. Watson (D9),  
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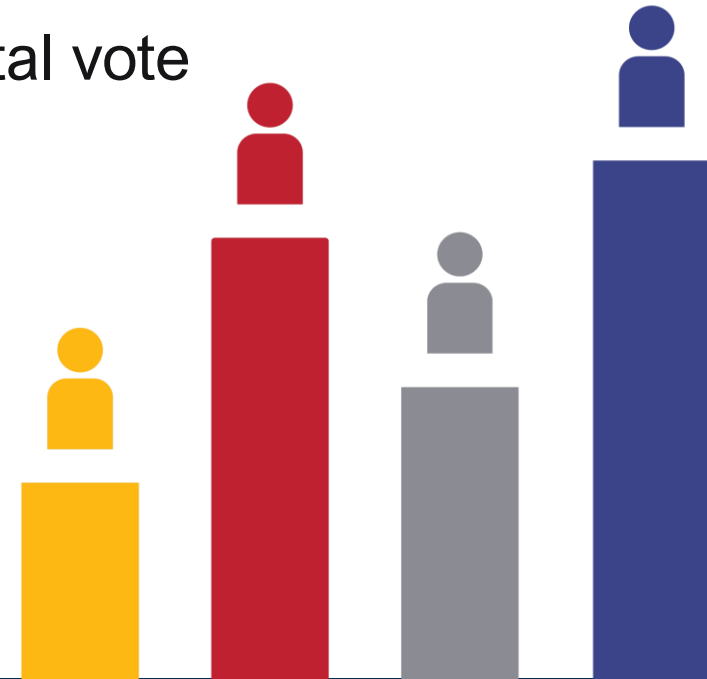
# TWO CONCERNS TO BE ADDRESSED

## Plurality election method doesn't require winners to achieve a majority of the vote

- Every elected official in Denver, except for the at-large candidates, must be elected by greater than 50% of the vote
- At-large winners have averaged less than one-third of the total vote

## Two winners on same ballot prompts many voters to waste their second vote

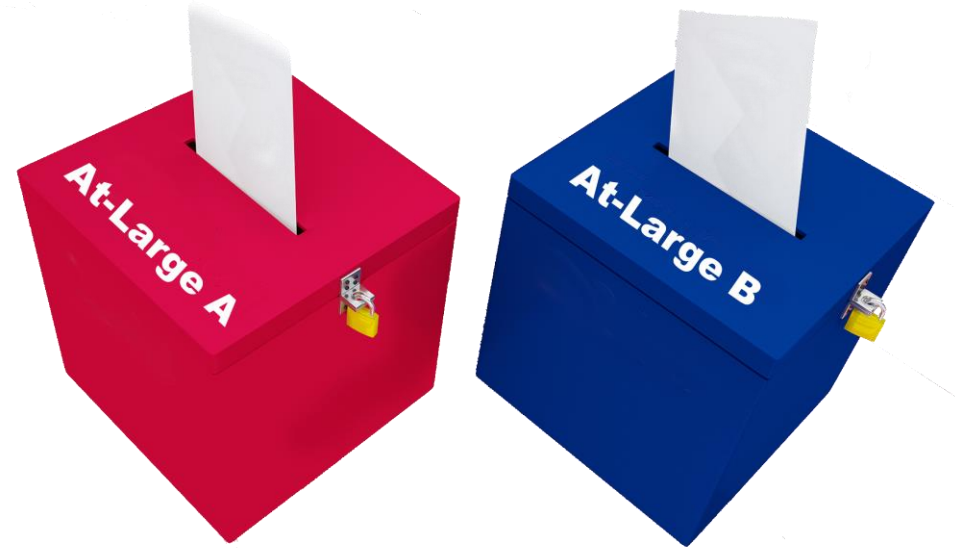
- Electing two candidates on a single ballot incentivizes “single shot” voting, in which numerous voters leave their second choice blank to improve the chances of their favored candidate, leading to massive undervoting



# THE PROPOSAL

## Two ballots for at-large seats

- Instead of voting for both at-large members on a single ballot, voters would choose them separately on two ballots – At-Large A and At-Large B
- This would ensure each winner gets more than 50% of the vote, like all other Denver elected officials are required to do
- It eliminates the incentive for voters to “single shot” for one candidate only, and ensures that more voter voices result in majority choices



# ORIGINAL INTENT FOR AT-LARGE SEATS

## Two Charter Amendments adopted, one later struck down

- **1968:** Voters approved two key election changes:
  - ✓ Amendment 3: Expanded City Council from 9 to 13 seats, adding two at-large seats
  - ✓ Amendment 4: Changed from nonpartisan to partisan elections, with party caucuses and primaries preceding the municipal general election
  - ✓ Both were meant to work together in the 1971 municipal election



# ORIGINAL INTENT, CONTINUED

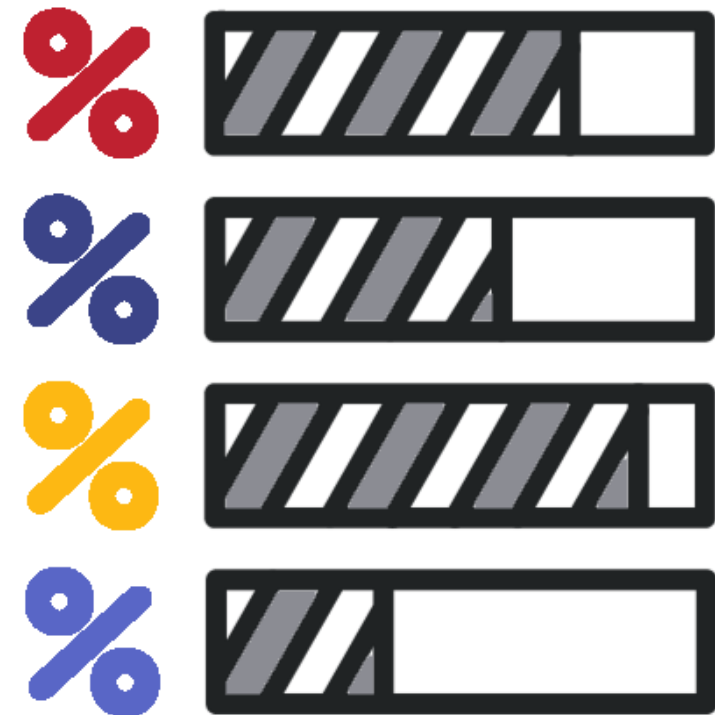
- **Legal Challenges:** In June 1970, three residents sued, arguing partisan elections and ballot title violated the state constitution
  - ✓ In January 1971, Colorado Supreme Court struck down Amendment 4 (partisan elections) over the ballot title, leaving Amendment 3 to work without the new voting system
- **Result:** Lacking clear rules in the charter for filling the new at-large seats, the court in a second lawsuit applied state law, allowing plurality winners
  - ✓ This court decision resulted in today's dual-voting system, which this amendment aims to bring back into alignment



# ACHIEVE A MAJORITY OF THE VOTE

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

- This amendment ensures majority winners
- It honors the founding principle that at-large seats go through a more rigorous electoral process
- In the nine elections since 1991, at-large winners have won with vote percentages ranging from 16.6% to 38.9%
  - ✓ The average winning percentage for the first-place candidate was 32.77%, and the average for the second-place candidate was 24.41%



# REDUCE UNDERVOTING

## Strengthening the voices of the voters

- Since 1991, undervoting in the citywide mayoral race averaged 2.51%
- During the same time, undervoting in the citywide at-large race averaged 31.59% — more than 12 times the rate of mayoral undervoting
- Electors should not be incentivized to throw away their votes
- Separate ballots for each seat will minimize undervoting, bringing more voter voice to the results

| 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%             |

# UNDERVOTING IN THE 2023 ELECTION

## Strengthening the voices of the voters

- In 2023, council districts with competitive races saw more than double to more than quadruple the rate of undervoting in the at-large race compared with the district council races
- Intentionally leaving votes blank as a strategy is not good for democracy
- Separate races for the two at-large seats will help voters confidently pick candidates for both seats

| District* | Mayoral | At-Large | District |
|-----------|---------|----------|----------|
| 1         | 1.00%   | 25.89%   | 11.31%   |
| 2         | 1.43%   | 29.62%   | 7.18%    |
| 4         | 1.26%   | 27.24%   | 11.31%   |
| 5         | 1.03%   | 25.93%   | 11.69%   |
| 7         | 0.95%   | 25.89%   | 10.36%   |
| 8         | 1.12%   | 28.51%   | 11.14%   |
| 9         | 1.12%   | 25.31%   | 7.46%    |
| 10        | 1.05%   | 24.29%   | 8.79%    |

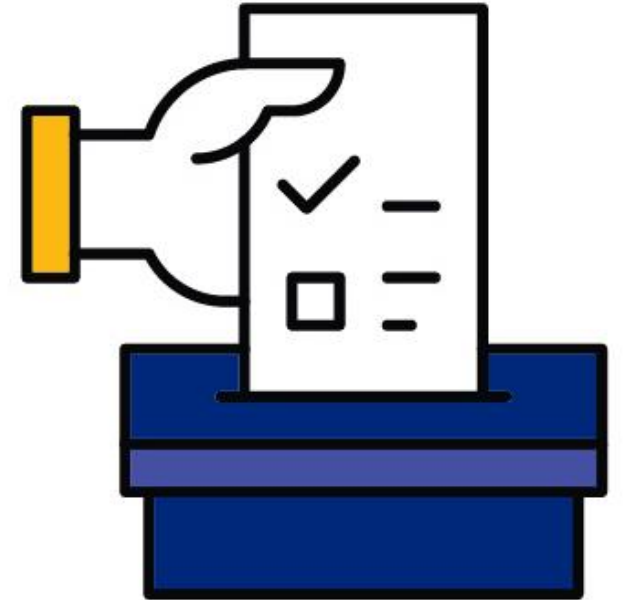
\* Districts with contested races only



# PEER CITIES REVIEW OF ELECTION METHODS

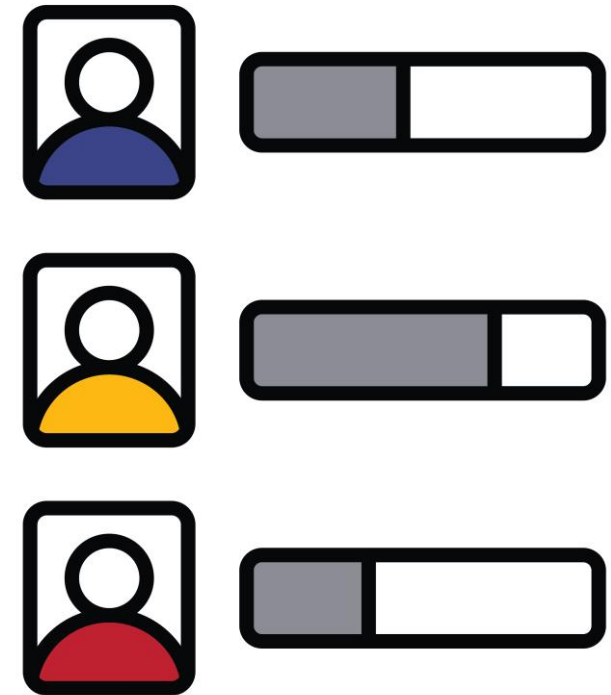
## 33 of the 100 largest U.S. cities have at-large members

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



# AT-LARGE SEATS BY THE NUMBERS

- **14** Elections since 1971
- **100** candidates have run (78 individuals, 12 ran multiple times)
- **7.14** Average number of candidates in each election
- **13** Individuals have served in the at-large seats over 14 terms
- **13** Highest number of candidates (1971, inaugural year)
- **3** Lowest number of candidates (2007)
- **3** Won with majority of ballots cast
  - ✓ Cathy Reynolds 1999
  - ✓ Doug Linkhart 2007
  - ✓ Debbie Ortega 2019



# DRAFT ORDINANCE

Available on Legistar  
and on proposal website

1  
2 **BY AUTHORITY**  
3 ORDINANCE NO. COUNCIL BILL NO. \_\_\_\_\_  
4 SERIES OF 2025 COMMITTEE OF REFERENCE:  
5  
6  
7 **A BILL**  
8  
9 For an ordinance submitting to a vote of the qualified and registered electors of the  
10 City and County of Denver at the general municipal election on November 4, 2025, a  
11 proposed amendment to the Charter of the City and County of Denver concerning the  
12 manner in which at-large council members are elected.  
13  
14 BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY AND COUNTY OF DENVER:  
15  
16 **Section 1.** There is hereby submitted to the properly qualified and registered electors of  
17 the City and County of Denver for their approval or rejection at a special municipal election to be  
18 conducted at the same time and in conjunction with the \_\_\_\_\_ election to be held in  
19 the City and County of Denver on November 4, 2025, a proposed amendment to the Charter of  
20 the City and County of Denver, as follows:  
21  
22 **Effective upon publication and filing with the Secretary of State in accordance with**  
23 **the Constitution and laws of the State of Colorado, the following sections of the**  
24 **Charter of the City and County of Denver are amended to read as follows:**  
25  
26 **§ 3.1.1 - Composition of City Council; terms.**  
27 There shall be elected one Councilmember by the voters of each of the eleven Council  
28 Districts, and two to be elected at-large by the qualified electors of the City and County of Denver,  
29 designated as Councilmember at-large Seat A and a Councilmember at-large Seat B, by all voters  
30 of the City and County of Denver, all for a term of four (4) years or until their successors are duly  
31 qualified as in the Charter provided.  
32  
33 **§ 3.1.7 - Vacancies in the Office of District Councilmember and Councilmember-at-**  
34 **large.**  
35 When any District Councilmember is unable, by reason of resignation, unexcused absence

# OUTREACH AND ENGAGEMENT

**April - May:** Meetings with Clerk and Recorder's Elections Division

**May 19:** Presentation to League of Women Voters Colorado's Alternative Voting Methods Task Force

**May 20:** Information sent to 19 stakeholder groups on the Clerk's engagement list, with invitation for more detailed briefings

**May 20:** Press release sent

**June 13:** Virtual town hall, 6:30 to 8 p.m. [Webinar Registration – Zoom](#)

**June 24:** In-person town hall, 6 to 7 p.m., Carla Madison Recreation Center, 2401 E. Colfax Ave.

**Proposal website:** [Proposed charter amendment - City and County of Denver](#)

# TIMELINE

- **May and June:** Individual Council Member briefings
- **June 2:** Budget and Policy Committee presentation
- **June 10:** Finance and Governance Committee presentation
- **June 17:** Mayor-Council
- **June 23:** First reading at City Council
- **July 7:** Second reading at City Council
- **Nov. 4:** Election



# Questions and Discussion

