

LEGISLATIVE DIGEST

[Charter Amendment - Mayoral Run-Off Election Following Ranked-Choice Voting; Filling Mayoral and Supervisorial Vacancies]

Describing and setting forth a proposal to the voters at an election to be held on June 7, 2016, to amend the Charter of the City and County of San Francisco to provide for a run-off election for Mayor between the top two candidates selected through ranked-choice voting unless one candidate receives a majority of first-place choices; require the Department of Elections to hold a special election when there is a vacancy in the Office of Mayor or Member of the Board of Supervisors, unless a regularly scheduled election will be held within 180 days of the vacancy; provide that the President of the Board of Supervisors serves as Acting Mayor until an election is held to fill a mayoral vacancy; and provide that the Board of Supervisors shall appoint an interim Supervisor to fill a supervisorial vacancy until an election is held to fill that vacancy, with the interim Supervisor being ineligible to compete in that election.

Existing Law

1. Ranked-Choice Voting Elections

The City uses ranked-choice voting, also referred to as instant-runoff voting, to elect its Mayor, City Attorney, District Attorney, Public Defender, Sheriff, Assessor-Recorder, Treasurer, and members of the Board of Supervisors. In ranked-choice voting, voters may select up to the three candidates for a single office in order of preference. Under ranked-choice voting, the winning candidate is the one who receives the highest-level of support from the greatest number of voters.

The City's ranked-choice voting system does not employ run-off elections.

2. Vacancy Appointments and Elections

When a seat on the Board of Supervisors becomes vacant because of the death, resignation, recall, permanent disability, or the inability of the officer to otherwise carry out the responsibilities of the office, the Mayor has the authority to appoint a successor to fill the vacancy until an election is held. When the Office of Mayor becomes vacant, the President of the Board of Supervisors serves as Acting Mayor, and the Board of Supervisors may appoint a successor fill the vacancy until an election is held.

The Charter provides three possible dates for these vacancy elections depending on the upcoming election schedule. First, if an election for the vacant office is scheduled to occur less than one year after the vacancy, then the voters would choose the successor at that

election. Second, if an election for any other seat on the Board of Supervisors is scheduled to occur between 120 days and one year after the vacancy, then the voters would choose the successor at that election. Third, in any other case—for example, if the nearest election for the office or the Board of Supervisors is less than 120 days away or more than one year away—then the voters would choose the successor at the next election, as long as that election is scheduled to occur at least 120 days after the vacancy.

Amendments to Current Law

1. Ranked-Choice Voting Elections

The proposed Charter amendment would replace the City's single-stage, ranked-choice voting system for Mayor with a two-stage, run-off election system that incorporates ranked-choice voting. The proposal would not affect other offices currently subject to ranked-choice voting elections.

In the first stage, all mayoral candidates would participate in a ranked-choice voting election, generally to be held on the Tuesday immediately following the first Monday in November. If a candidate receives a majority of the first-choice selections at that election, that candidate shall be declared the winner of the election. If not, the City will use ranked-choice voting to determine which two candidates received the greatest level of support. Those two candidates will then proceed to the second stage of the process.

At the second stage, the two remaining candidates will proceed to a run-off election, generally to be held on the second Tuesday of the following December. The candidate that receives the majority of votes cast at the run-off will be declared the winner of the election.

The proposal provides that in any potential run-offs, voters may not cast votes for write-in candidates for Mayor. The proposal also specifies that ballot measures may not be submitted to the voters at a run-off election.

2. Vacancy Appointments and Elections

Under the proposed Charter amendment, when a vacancy occurs in the office of Mayor, the President of the Board of Supervisors would serve as the Acting Mayor until the City holds a special election to fill the vacancy. And when a seat on the Board of Supervisors becomes vacant, the Board of Supervisors itself would, by a two-thirds vote, appoint an interim Supervisor to temporarily fill the vacant office, until the City holds a special election to permanently fill the vacancy. The Board of Supervisors would be required to make this appointment within 14 days of the date of the vacancy. The interim Supervisor would not be eligible to run for office in the special election held to permanently fill the vacancy, but would be able to run in any subsequent election for the office.

The Director of Elections would call the date of these special elections within 14 days of a mayoral or supervisorial vacancy. Under this proposal, the Director of Elections would have to hold the special election on a Tuesday falling between 126 and 140 days from the date of its calling. But if a regularly scheduled election would occur within 180 days of the vacancy, the Director of Elections would consolidate the special election with the regularly scheduled election. However, the City may hold a special election more than 180 days from the date of the vacancy, for the purposes of consolidation with a regularly scheduled election, if (1) the Director of Elections submits such a request to the Board of Supervisors and (2) the Board of Supervisors and Mayor approve the request by resolution.

The proposal also specifies that any person elected to fill a vacancy shall take office when the Director of Elections has issued the certified statement of election results for that election.

If the special election is not consolidated with a regularly scheduled election, the Director of Elections may not place any ballot measure on the special election ballot.

Lastly, if either a mayoral or supervisorial vacancy occurs after the June 7, 2016 election but before the effective date of this Charter amendment, and the City filled the vacancy in accordance with the prior version of Charter, any such appointee would be required to leave office on the effective date of this Charter amendment. Such a vacancy would then be filled through the special election process set forth in this proposal.

Background Information

On March 5, 2002, the voters approved Proposition A, establishing a ranked-choice voting system to elect the City's Mayor, City Attorney, District Attorney, Public Defender, Sheriff, Assessor-Recorder, Treasurer, and members of the Board of Supervisors. The City first used ranked-choice voting to elect its local officials in November 2004.

Proposition A also eliminated the prior, two-stage voting system for City elective offices. Before November 2004, if a candidate for Mayor, Sheriff, District Attorney, City Attorney, Treasurer, Assessor-Recorder, Public Defender or member of the Board of Supervisors failed to receive a majority of the votes at a general municipal election, the two candidates receiving the most votes would proceed to a runoff election. Any run-off election held for Mayor, Sheriff, District Attorney, City Attorney, Treasurer or member of the Board of Supervisors was held the second Tuesday of December. And any run-off election held for Assessor-Recorder and Public Defender was held at the next general election.