

Sunnyvale City Council Elections

Comparison of Two District-Based Options

Sunnyvale currently elects its Council in “at-large” citywide elections. A change to electing council members by geographical district is being considered – to comply with a state law which prohibits voting methods that dilute the votes of minority groups. This document compares two ways to elect council members by district. How the two district systems would work is explained on this page, alongside the way we do it now. The next page gives more information on the two district options.

What is the same in the three election systems described below?

- Seven council members serve in four-year terms, with a limit of two consecutive elected terms.
- Elections are held in November every two years: 4 seats are up for election on the same ballot as the U.S. President, and 3 seats are elected at the same time as the Governor.
- The Council decides which council members serve as Mayor (2 years) and Vice Mayor (1 year).

For both district-based election systems, only voters living in a district vote on that district’s representative, and candidates must live in the district they would represent.

| | <u>Citywide Elections</u> | <u>7 District Elections</u> | <u>4+3 District Elections</u> |
|---|--|---|--|
| District Size | no districts | 14% of city | 25% or 33% of city |
| Presidential Election Years 2020, 2024, ... | <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; background-color: #fff9c4;"> Council Seats 1-2-3-4 <i>Voters may vote on four seats.</i> </div> | <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; gap: 2px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">District 1</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">District 2</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">District 3</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">District 4</div> </div> <div style="margin: 0 10px; font-size: small;"> <i>Voters in districts 5-6-7 do not vote.</i> </div> </div> | <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; gap: 2px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">District 1</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">District 2</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">District 3</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">District 4</div> </div> <div style="margin: 0 10px; font-size: small;"> <i>Voters vote on one seat.</i> </div> </div> |
| Gubernatorial Election Years 2022, 2026, ... | <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; background-color: #c8e6c9;"> Council Seats 5-6-7 <i>Voters may vote on three seats.</i> </div> | <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="margin-right: 10px; font-size: small;"> <i>Voters in districts 1-2-3-4 do not vote.</i> </div> <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; gap: 2px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">District 5</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">District 6</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">District 7</div> </div> </div> | <div style="display: flex; align-items: center; justify-content: center;"> <div style="display: flex; flex-direction: column; gap: 2px;"> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">District 5</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">District 6</div> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 2px; writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg);">District 7</div> </div> <div style="margin: 0 10px; font-size: small;"> <i>Voters vote on one seat.</i> </div> </div> |
| <i>Each box represents Sunnyvale. Districts in one box are of equal population. Shading indicates who may vote.</i> | | | |
| A Sunnyvale voter | | | |
| • lives in ... | | 1 of 7 districts | 2 of 7 districts |
| • votes on ... | all 7 council seats | 1 council seat | 2 council seats |
| • votes ... | every 2 years | every 4 years | every 2 years |
| A council candidate | | | |
| • may run for ... | any of 7 seats | 1 district | either of 2 districts |
| Campaign costs | high | low | medium |

Citywide Elections: All 7 council members are elected by all voters in the city. This voting method may be in violation of state law, and the City might be forced by court action to change to district-based voting.

7 District Elections: Sunnyvale is divided into 7 districts: 4 districts elect their council member in presidential years, and 3 districts vote on their council member in gubernatorial years. Each voter lives in one district and is represented by one council member. Voters may vote every four years. Candidates are limited to running every four years.

4+3 District Elections: A 4-district map of the city is used for 4 council elections in presidential years, and a 3-district map is used for 3 elections in gubernatorial years. Every voter lives in two districts and is represented by two council members. A voter may vote every two years. Candidates may choose to run for council in any election year.

Please share your preferences on election options: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/5SRXJXH>

| | 7 District Elections | 4+3 District Elections |
|-----------------------------|--|---|
| Legal Challenge | <i>Both options are "district-based elections", as defined in state law. If either one was implemented, Sunnyvale would no longer be at risk for lawsuits under the current California Voting Rights Act.</i> | |
| | This way of doing district elections is common. | This new option may not have been used before. |
| Minority Voices | Small voting districts make it more likely that neighborhoods or minorities will be represented on the Council. | Neighborhoods or minorities have two Council representatives, which may help with the 4-vote majority needed for most Council decisions. |
| Representation | Each voter has one representative on the Council. Each council member represents about 22,000 residents. | Each voter has two representatives on the Council. Council members represent either about 38,000 or about 51,000 residents. |
| | A voter's one council representative may serve for up to two consecutive four-year terms. | Voters' two representatives come into office at different times, so voters always have a council rep with at least two years of experience. |
| | <i>Note: In either system, voters may communicate with council members outside their district.</i> | |
| Perspective | Smaller districts allow closer communication between the council member and the people. | Larger districts are less likely to create division within the city than smaller districts. |
| | Smaller districts encourage council members to focus on representing the interests and issues of their district's voters. | Larger districts make it easier for council members to maintain a balance between their district's viewpoint and a citywide perspective. |
| Campaign Costs | Small districts make it easier to run for office: fewer doors to knock on, fewer mailers to send, and less money to raise. More people can afford to run for office. Small donations have more impact. Large donations are not needed. | Running for office in the "4+3" system would cost roughly 70% less than citywide campaigns. But, district voting won't stop spending by interested parties, outside of candidate campaigns, to support/oppose candidates. |
| Candidate Pool | With small districts, voters are motivated to identify and support qualified candidates. | Larger districts have more voters and therefore more potential qualified candidates. |
| | <i>Special Case: Two well-qualified, popular candidates live close together.</i> If they live in the same district, one will be unable to serve on Council, for up to 8 years. | They could both run two years apart, for different districts, and have overlapping terms on Council. |
| Recusal | <i>Conflict of interest rules do not allow council members to participate in discussions or decisions on development projects, if they own property or a business nearby.</i> | |
| | A district's one council rep might not be able to play a role in a project important to the district. | Having two council members lessens the likelihood of being left without representation. |
| Impact on Incumbents | <i>Four council members are currently eligible to run for a second term in 2020.</i> | |
| | Only those in districts 1-2-3-4 could run in 2020. Some may face either competing against a colleague in 2020 or waiting 4 years to run in 2024. | All four incumbents could run in 2020. Some may face either running against a colleague in 2020 or waiting 2 years to run in 2022. |
| | <i>A similar situation could occur after every census when district maps are redrawn (in 2021, 2031, ...).</i> | |
| Elected Mayor | <i>Both systems can be adapted to a directly elected mayor.</i> | |
| | 6 district elections • Mayor elected citywide | 3+3 District Elections • Mayor elected citywide |

Please share your preferences on how to elect the Sunnyvale City Council.

Survey – <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/5SRJXH>

By participating in this survey, you are helping to elucidate what is best for Sunnyvale, in time to influence what city decision-makers will propose to voters.