Counting Arrangements
Local Government postal elections 2020

Information Series

Victorian Electoral Commission

Acknowledgement of Country

The VEC pays respect to Victoria's traditional owners and their elders past and present who have been custodians of this country for many thousands of years. Their living culture and their role in the life of Victoria is acknowledged by the VEC.

Version history

Subject matter expert	Date received	Date returned
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Introduction

The Victorian Electoral Commission (VEC) is the statutory election service provider to local councils in the state. This publication provides an overview of the vote counting process. It is part of the *2020 Local Government Election Information Series* on the VEC website.

In 2020, 76 councils in Victoria will be going to an election in October.

The South Gippsland Shire Council election has been postponed until October 2021, and the Casey City Council and Whittlesea City Council elections have been postponed until October 2024.

All 76 council elections will be by postal voting, as determined by the Minister for Local Government.

Once nominations have closed (12 noon, Tuesday 22 September 2020) and the number of candidates is known, the VEC prepares a counting timeline for each council.

How are votes counted?

Postal votes can be received in the mail until 12 noon on the fifth working day after election day, *as long as* the voter voted before the close of voting on Friday 23 October 2020.

To vote correctly in a local council election you must number every box on the ballot paper in the order of your choice. Ballot papers that are not completed correctly – for example, the voter uses ticks or crosses – are declared informal and set aside to be checked.

There are two counting methods used for local council elections: preferential counting and proportional counting. The method used for each council depends on the number of vacancies to be filled. Elections involving a single vacancy use the preferential counting method, whereas elections involving multiple vacancies use the proportional counting method.

Melbourne City Council elections are different to those of other Victorian councils. During a general election for Melbourne City Council, two elections are run at the same time – one to elect the Leadership Team of Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor, and one to elect nine councillors.

Preferential counting

Preferential counting is used for single councillor wards when only one person is to be elected. These counts are usually done manually. Computerised counting may be used where there are high numbers of ballot papers and/or candidates.

To be elected, a candidate must have more than 50% of the formal first preference votes. This is known as an absolute majority.

If no candidate has an absolute majority once all the votes are counted, then a preference distribution is required. The candidate with the fewest votes is excluded and the preferences on those ballot papers are given to the voter's second choice. If there is still no candidate with an absolute majority, the process is repeated until someone is elected.

Proportional counting

Proportional counting is used when there is more than one vacancy to be filled. In local council elections, this means unsubdivided councils and multi-councillor wards. It ensures that candidates are elected in proportion to their support from voters.

Proportional counting is complex and time-consuming and is therefore done by computer. The preferences from formal ballot papers are entered into the VEC's computer count application. Results are calculated once all data has been entered and any informal ballot papers have been checked.

To be elected, candidates must receive a proportion of votes known as a quota.

The quota is calculated as follows, with any remainder disregarded:

$$\left(\frac{\text{Number of formal votes}}{\text{Number of vacancies} + 1} \right) + 1 = \text{Quota}$$

Candidates who achieve the quota are elected and any votes they receive over the quota are distributed to other candidates according to the preferences.

If no candidate achieves the quota, or if there are still vacancies to be filled once all votes over the quota have been distributed, the candidate with the fewest votes is excluded. Their votes are distributed to other candidates according to preferences. This is repeated until all vacancies are filled.

Melbourne City Council

Computer counts are used for the Melbourne City Council elections. Ballot papers for Melbourne City Council are separated into the Leadership Team and Councillors. The Councillor ballot papers are then sorted into groups and ungrouped candidates. The Leadership Team election is determined using preferential counting and the Councillor election is determined using the proportional counting method.

What if there are two candidates with the same number of votes?

If two candidates have the lowest number of votes at any exclusion, the candidate who had the fewest votes when they were last unequal will be excluded. However, if the candidates have not had an unequal number of votes at any point, the Election Manager will during a manual count conduct a draw by lot (using a bingo barrel), to determine which of the candidates will be excluded. Where this occurs during a computerised count the count application automatically chooses the candidate to be excluded.

If, on the final count, two candidates have an equal number of votes, the Election Manager conducts a draw using a bingo barrel to determine which candidate is to be excluded. The remaining candidate is declared successful. During a computerised count the system determines the successful candidate.

When are the results announced?

The Election Manager provides a provisional result when the counting has been completed. The Election Manager will review the results to determine if there are any close margins. Results will also be independently reviewed by staff in VEC Head Office. Where a sufficiently close margin is identified, or where other factors are present which may bring into question the accuracy of the results, the Election Manager will initiate a recount.

Between the provisional result and the declaration of final results (usually a minimum of two hours), a candidate may also request a recount. If the Election Manager is satisfied that the reasons provided by the candidate may have affected the election result, a recount will be required. Depending on the circumstances, a recount may involve some or all of the ballot papers from the initial count. In some cases, it may be deemed necessary to only review the informal ballot papers again. In other cases, it may be deemed necessary to only review ballot papers for particular candidates. If the result is not clear following recount activities, further recounting will occur.

The result of the recount (or partial recount) replaces the original count. The Election Manager then publicly declares the result. Results are published on the VEC's website as they become available.

Victoria's local council structures – effective from October 2020

PD = Preference Distribution (if required)

PR = Proportional Representation

Council	No. of Councillors	Electoral structure	Count type	Election Type
Alpine	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Ararat	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Ballarat	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Banyule	9	9 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal
Bass Coast	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Baw Baw	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Bayside	7	7 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal
Benalla	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Boroondara	11	11 Single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal
Brimbank	11	3 three-Cr wards, 1 two-Cr ward	Computer PR	Postal
Buloke	7	1 three-Cr ward, 2 two-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Campaspe	9	2 three-Cr wards, 3 single-Cr wards	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Cardinia	9	9 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal
Casey	No election—next election scheduled for October 2024			
Central Goldfields	7	1 four-Cr ward, 3 single-Cr wards	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Colac Otway	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal

Council	No. of Councillors	Electoral structure	Count type	Election Type
Corangamite	7	1 three-Cr wards, 4 single-Cr wards	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Darebin	9	9 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal
East Gippsland	9	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Frankston	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Gannawarra	7	1 three-Cr ward, 1 two-Cr ward, 2 single-Cr wards	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Glen Eira	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Glenelg	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Golden Plains	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Greater Bendigo	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Greater Dandenong	11	11 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal
Greater Geelong	11	3 three-Cr wards, 1 two-Cr ward	Computer PR	Postal
Greater Shepparton	9	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Hepburn	7	2 two-Cr wards, 3 single-Cr wards	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Hindmarsh	6	3 two-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Hobsons Bay	7	1 three-Cr ward, 2 two-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Horsham	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Hume	11	2 four-Cr wards, 1 three-Cr ward	Computer PR	Postal
Indigo	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Kingston	11	11 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal

Council	No. of Councillors	Electoral structure	Count type	Election Type
Knox	9	9 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal
Latrobe	9	1 four-Cr ward, 2 two-Cr wards, 1 single-Cr ward	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Loddon	5	5 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal
Macedon Ranges	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Manningham	9	9 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal
Mansfield	5	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Maribyrnong	7	1 three-Cr ward, 2 two-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Maroondah	9	9 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal
Melbourne	2 + 9	1 vacancy (for Lord Mayor and Deputy Lord Mayor) and nine-Cr (unsubdivided)	Computer PD and Computer PR	Postal
Melton	9	1 four-Cr ward, 1 three-Cr ward, 1 two-Cr ward	Computer PR	Postal
Mildura	9	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Mitchell	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Moira	9	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Monash	11	3 three-Cr wards, 1 two-Cr ward	Computer PR	Postal
Moonee Valley	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Moorabool	7	1 four-Cr ward, 3 single-Cr wards	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Moreland	11	2 four-Cr wards, 1 three-Cr ward	Computer PR	Postal
Mornington Peninsula	11	2 three-Cr wards, 1 two-Cr ward, 3 single-Cr wards	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal

Council	No. of Councillors	Electoral structure	Count type	Election Type
Mount Alexander	7	1 three-Cr ward, 4 single-Cr wards	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Moyne	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Murrindindi	7	7 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal
Nillumbik	7	7 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal
Northern Grampians	7	1 three-Cr ward, 1 two-Cr ward, 2 single-Cr wards	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Port Phillip	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Pyrenees	5	5 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal
Queenscliffe	5	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
South Gippsland	No election—next election scheduled for October 2021			
Southern Grampians	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Stonnington	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Strathbogie	7	2 two-Cr wards, 3 single-Cr wards	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Surf Coast	9	1 four-Cr ward, 2 two-Cr wards, 1 single-Cr ward	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Swan Hill	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Towong	5	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Wangaratta	7	1 four-Cr ward, 3 single-Cr wards	Computer PR and Manual PD	Postal
Warrnambool	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Wellington	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
West Wimmera	5	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal

Council	No. of Councillors	Electoral structure	Count type	Election Type
Whitehorse	11	11 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal
Whittlesea	No election—next election scheduled for October 2024			
Wodonga	7	Unsubdivided	Computer PR	Postal
Wyndham	11	2 four-Cr wards, 1 three-Cr ward	Computer PR	Postal
Yarra	9	3 three-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal
Yarra Ranges	9	9 single-Cr wards	Manual PD	Postal
Yarriambiack	7	1 three-Cr ward, 2 two-Cr wards	Computer PR	Postal

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