

BOARD FOR REGISTRATION OF VOTERS

April 2nd, 2024

Where: Sharon Bushor Conference Room, City Hall and remotely via Zoom

Present: Lauren Ebersol, Alex Demoly , Alison Harte, Grace Grundhauser, Annie Schneider, Michelle Lefkowitz, Olga Bravo, Karen Rowell, Mike McGarghan, and Youth Member Will Cunningham

Absent: Helen Rock, Lesley Gendron

Also Present: Assistant City Clerk, Sarah Montgomery

The meeting was called to order at 6:02 p.m.

Agenda: Michelle Lefkowitz made a motion to adopt the agenda. Seconded by Lauren Ebersol. Approved unanimously.

Meeting Length: Alison Harte made a motion to set the meeting length at one hour. Seconded by Alex Demoly. Passed unanimously.

Announcements: Grace Grundhauser made an announcement that the meeting recordings will now be posted publicly along with the meeting minutes. This is a new city policy.

Grace Grundhauser announced that Thea Knight resigned from the board.

Minutes: An error was noted that the circulated minutes appeared to be for January. The board decided to wait until the May minutes to approve the February minutes. Sarah Montgomery apologized and will circulate the correct minutes after the meeting.

Mike McGarghan asked Grace Grundhauser if she could provide follow-up on a few issues that he had brought up at a previous meeting. Grace Grundhauser said she would circle back to him with the information he was looking for.

Public Comment: No members of the public present.

Clerk's Report: Sarah Montgomery reported that there are currently 32,839 citizen voters and 115 legal resident voters. 7,534 of these voters are currently challenged. In February, there were 591 new registrations, 153 voters were transferred out of town, 19 voters were purged from the checklist, and 362 voters made revisions to their registrations. In March, there were 1,159 new registrations (848 of which were on Election Day), 238 voters were transferred out of town, 31 voters were purged from the checklist, and 1,118 voters made revisions to their registrations.

For the Annual City Election, 14,963 ballots were cast. Out of these 97 were cast by legal resident voters. 7,970 of these ballots were cast absentee.

For the Presidential Primary, 8,611 ballots were cast. 1,618 of these ballots were cast absentee.

Election Day Review: Alison Harte shared that the updates to the manual were really clear. Everything went smoothly. She loved her volunteers.

Michelle Lefkowitz (in Ward 3) said that it was so busy.

Alison Harte (in Ward 6), Karen Rowell (in Ward 7), in Lauren Ebersol (in Ward 2) all said it was moderately busy in their wards. Alex Demoly said there were lines when he was in wards 3 and 8.

Michelle Lefkowitz said that it helped to only search a piece of the first name/last name instead of the voter's entire name. This was a time saver.

Grace Grundhauser said that in Ward 8 they had waves of business, and the volunteer was really helpful in helping direct and manage traffic.

Annie Schneider (in Ward 5) said that due to the redistricting she had a lot of people in the ward that should have been elsewhere. Lauren Ebersol said that in ward 2 the greeters were really good at directing people who were in the wrong ward at the end of the day. Grace Grundhauser shared that she also had people in the wrong ward due to the redistricting. Michelle Lefkowitz said that someone was accidentally sent to her ward (3) from ward 2 when they actually belonged in ward 2. They ended up unable to vote because the polls were nearly closing – this was difficult.

Alex Demoly said there were some issues with the online ward/district lookup tool. Michelle Lefkowitz and Lauren Ebersol mentioned that they also had similar experiences.

Lauren Ebersol said there were some issues with apartment numbers being entered incorrectly in VEMS and because of this, they were assigned to the wrong ward (assigned to ward 3 when they should have been ward 2). This happened with 3 voters. Olga Bravo mentioned that she also had difficulty with something similar. Also, she said that there were a lot of voters who had registered to vote online after the early registration cut off that needed to fill out paper applications in person.

Lauren Ebersol said that sometimes voters who were resident voters were being sent to the BRV even though they were already registered because the checklist workers weren't finding them in the list. Grace Grundhauser said that it might be helpful for the BRV member to remind the election workers to check the blue sheets. Mike McGarghan suggested that voters could also show their IDs.

Grace Grundhauser shared that she had a non-citizen resident that was uncomfortable with registering to vote (as a legal resident voter) because of potential concerns about immigration law. Grace shared information that was provided by the city attorney's office with the resident, who ultimately did not end up registering. It might be helpful to have the city attorneys provide more clear FAQ information for voters. Grace reached out to the other clerks in VT who have implemented resident voting and one suggestion was the resident voter could be issued a certified letter stating that they had not cast a federal ballot. Olga Bravo stated that she doesn't think that would have helped this particular voter. Grace Grundhauser noted that the term indefinite in the definition of residency in VT statute can be interpreted in different ways.

Mike McGarghan stated that he thinks we should be spending more discussion time on citizen voters and keeping our voter checklist clean by addressing challenged voters rather than wasting time on outreach to non-citizen voters. Grace Grundhauser said that we are discussing this because it is a new charter change in Burlington and the board wants to make sure it is being done right. She believes that this is a good use of our time. Mike McGarghan asked: isn't this a trial period to see how this process works? Grace Grundhauser answered no but she will pivot the conversation now.

Annie Schneider asked how people did with their volunteers. All members answered that they had really positive experiences with their volunteers. Ward 3 was very busy, but Michelle Lefkowitz said she isn't sure if additional volunteers would have made it go more quickly or not. Annie Schneider said it was hard to get volunteers to go to ward 3.

Annie Schneider would like to pass volunteer recruitment over to another board member. Grace Grundhauser suggested there might be a better way to do it – by sharing the load and by better utilizing technology. She added that all members should always feel free to recruit helpers.

A volunteer, David, suggested having sticky notes in the BRV folders. This made it so the volunteer could start helping the voter and hand off relevant information to the BRV member.

Grace Grundhauser suggested adding some information about parking in the manual, and also wondered if board members might be able to get parking permits.

Grace Grundhauser noted that punctuation in the checklist can throw off the order of names in the checklist. Sarah Montgomery added that city staff will work on cleaning this up (removing punctuation) prior to the next election, to hopefully minimize confusion around this.

Grace Grundhauser shared that it seemed like some registered voters were being sent to the same day voter registration table even though they were already registered. This might be worth checking in with election officials to make sure these voters go to BRV first.

Grace Grundhauser shared how to register a homeless voter. They can register by selecting a ward/district instead of a physical legal address. The voter does need to list a mailing address (if they don't have a specific mailing address, a voter can use general delivery as the mailing address).

Grace Grundhauser mentioned that election officials at the polling place were asking all newly registering voters if they were a U.S. Citizen. This allowed them to give them the correct form to the voter and register them appropriately. Annie Schneider agreed that this seemed to work very well. Alison Harte mentioned that might sound a little jarring to some residents – it might be helpful to give the voter additional context as well. For example, saying the reason the question is being asked is so the election official knows which form to give them.

Alex Demoly asked if all entrance checklist lines were uneven, with one line being much longer. Everyone agreed that the checklist lines were uneven. Jim Radar was the one who initially implemented the alphabet split in the checklists. Alex Demoly said that maybe the point of the split should be adjusted.

New Business:

No new business.

Adjournment: On a motion by Annie Schneider, seconded by Karen Rowell, and approved unanimously, the meeting was adjourned at 6:56 pm.

Respectfully Submitted By: Sarah Montgomery, Assistant City Clerk