BOARD FOR REGISTRATION OF VOTERS

June 4th, 2024 at 6:00pm

Called to order at 6:00pm

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

Present: Lauren Ebersol, Helen Rock, Grace Grundhauser, Michelle Lefkowitz, Olga Bravo, Lesley Gendron, Alex Demoly

Absent: Alison Harte, Annie Schneider, Karen Rowell, Mike McGarghan, and Youth Member Will Cunningham.

Also Present: Assistant City Clerk, Sarah Montgomery

Agenda: Lesley Gendron made a motion to adopt the agenda. Seconded by Helen Rock. Passed unanimously.

Meeting Length: Set for one hour.

Minutes: Michelle Lefkowitz made a motion to adopt the minutes from May. Seconded by Lauren Ebersol. Passed unanimously.

Public Comment: Chris Haessly (ward 3 resident, serves on wards 2/3 NPA and on the Church Street Commission) spoke. He said he wasn't clear on what the ERIC data referred to in the previous meeting minutes was in reference to. Clarification would be helpful. He also wanted to touch base about the Board for Registration of Voters including an informational insert about the NPAs in the voter registration letters that are sent out to newly registered voters.

Discussion: Grace Grundhauser shared information about what ERIC is, saying it is the electronic registration information center. It is a non-profit collection of participating Secretary of State's across the country. It is an effort to keep voter registration lists clean.

Sarah Montgomery added that it allows the states to share information with each other to identify duplicate registrations across the country.

Grace Grundhauser said that this was mentioned in the last meeting because a portion of the proposed voter challenges were based on ERIC data.

Lauren Ebersol spoke more about the proposed NPA informational insert. The information would include general language about all of the NPAs and how residents could become involved.

Grace Grundhauser asked if Sarah could share information about what the voter registration letter currently looks like.

Sarah Montgomery answered that it is a confirmation letter for new voters, alerting them of their ward/ district and polling place. Helen Rock also added it asks the voter to reach out if any corrections need to be made to their registration information as it is printed on the letter.

Grace Grundhauser said including information about the NPAs sounds great. She isn't sure if the board needs to approve this since this is a process the clerk handles, but she thinks it would be appropriate for the board to issue support for the idea.

Michelle Lefkowitz made a motion to issue board support to include a mailing with NPA information with the registration letters. Seconded by Helen Rock.

Discussion: Olga Bravo asked if it would create a conflict or would it appear that the BRV was endorsing the NPAs.

Grace Grundhauser said she feels comfortable with this because it is one part of the city endorsing another part of the city, and because the NPAs are non-partisan.

Helen Rock said that she likes the idea of sharing this information on how folks can get involved. Her only concern would be mixing extra information with the official communication letter.

Lauren Ebersol said she thinks this is in line with the board's missions – encouraging civic engagement.

Grace Grundhauser shared that the board encourages voter registration so residents can be involved in the City and encouraging residents to be involved in their NPAs is another way to be involved.

Lesley Gendron amended the motion to support the efforts of adding NPA information to the voter registration mailing, as a separate additive (not on the letter) pending approval from the clerk's office.

Lauren Ebersol abstained from the vote. The remainder of the members voted affirmatively. The motion as amended passed.

Clerk's Report: Sarah Montgomery reported that, in May, there were 152 new registrations, 144 voters were transferred out of town, and 466 voters were purged from the checklist. There are currently 32,380 registered voters in Burlington, 9,249 of which are challenged. After the challenges approved by the board at the May meeting, there were 9,958 challenged voters. 709 of those challenges have since been resolved. These challenge resolutions are due to a combination of efforts by the Clerk's office and the Secretary of State. The Clerk's office sent challenge letters to all of the newly challenged voters. The Secretary of State's Office was able to re-send challenge letters to approximately 2,500 previously challenged voters, because they identified a current address for those voters using the ERIC data.

Sarah Montgomery also reported updates for the upcoming August 13th Election:

First, the Ward 2 polling place will be temporarily moved for the next 3 elections (August State Primary, November General Election, and the 2025 Annual City Election). For these elections, the Ward 2 polling place will be the Old North End Community Center on 20 Allen Street. The clerk's office will send letters out to notify the voters in the ward of this change and will post a notice at Integrated Arts for if voters still show up there to vote. She will also ask the Ward 2/3 NPA to help share this information with residents.

Next, there will be a special election in ward 3 on August 13th, held in conjunction with the State Primary, to fill a vacant school commissioner seat. The impact for the board is that legal residents will be eligible to vote in this special election only in this ward. Helen Rock asked if there are multiple candidates running for the position. Sarah Montgomery answered that no submissions have been received yet, but the deadline is not until 6/17.

Grace Grundhauser asked if the ballots in August would be automatically sent out to all voters. Sarah answered no, not for the State Primary Election. Ballots will automatically mailed out to voters for the November General Election. Generally, in Burlington, ballots are not automatically mailed out for primary elections, but are automatically mailed out for all others. Helen Rock asked if communication goes out to voter about this, through NPAs or other avenues. Sarah Montgomery answered that she posts it on Front Porch Forum and also on the website. She can work more with NPAS as well to share this information.

Approval of Voter Challenges Sarah Montgomery shared a list of 46 voters with the board that the Clerk's office has identified as potentially no longer being eligible to be registered to vote at the address where they are registered.

Michelle Lefkowitz shared the reasons for proposed challenges on the list as: undeliverable ballots, undeliverable voter registration letters, and properties sold.

Helen Rock asked Sarah if she wouldn't mail a letter if she saw that it didn't have a valid mailing address, such as General Delivery. Sarah Montgomery answered that residents could register for General Delivery at the post office and can receive mail that way. All mailing addresses listed should be valid, so all letters are sent.

Michelle Lefkowitz noted that voters also need to list a legal address, not just a mailing address.

Michelle Lefkowitz made a motion to challenge the proposed voters. Seconded by Lesley Gendron.

Discussion: Grace Grundhauser asked if we could email challenge letters. Sarah Montgomery answered that she believes that mailing them is required by statute, but there likely isn't anything preventing an email as well. She can look into it further.

Olga Bravo mentioned that the board is not giving voters an opportunity to update their voter registration information after moving before challenging them.

Grace Grundhauser said that fortunately it is very easy for a voter to resolve a challenge in Vermont if they are still eligible to vote.

The vote was called. Motion passed unanimously.

Annual Board Report to City Council:

Grace Grundhauser shared the final draft report, minus the final voter registration numbers for FY24 and the new members that will be appointed by City Council.

Michelle Lefkowitz said she thinks it would be helpful to include the total number of registered voters in Burlington.

Grace Grundhauser said it would also be helpful to include the specific date that the number of registered voters and challenged voters was from since it fluctuates throughout the year, rather than the "currently" reflected in the draft. The board agreed on that date being the end of the fiscal year 2024 (June 30th, 2024).

Grace called for a board vote on the letter, noting that the final registration numbers and names of newly appointed board members would need to be inserted by Sarah before submission. All members voted affirmatively.

Voter Outreach

Grace Grundhauser and Lesley Gendron worked with Will Cunningham to further discuss voter registration outreach in schools. They worked on creating a poster, but didn't finish it in time to get it out to the high schools this year.

Helen Rock suggested working with the League of Women Voters to get some ideas about what they do for voter registration outreach.

Grace Grundhauser said that the poster was the attempt at getting something out quickly, but Will's initial idea was to have someone come in to classes to speak. This could be revisited now that there is not such a rush.

Lauren Ebersol said this could tie into some Civics classes prior to the General Election.

Michelle asked when the board is trying to get this work done. Grace Grundhauser said she hopes to get something done in the school before November.

Helen Rock said that it could be part of a Front Porch Forum post – including information about needing to request the August Primary and reminding residents that 17 year olds can vote in the primary if they will be 18 before the General Election. Lauren Ebersol volunteered to draft a notice that Grace Grundhauser will post to Front Porch Forum.

Michelle Lefkowitz made a motion to meet in July and August. Seconded by Lesley Gendron.

Discussion: Lesley Gendron noted that if the July meeting was skipped, it would feel tight to prep right before the August election.

Lauren Ebersol agreed that the July meeting could focus more on the board's work and welcoming new members, then the August meeting could focus more on the election prep and training.

The vote was called. Helen Rock abstained from voting. All other members voted affirmatively, deciding the board would meet in July and August.

Lesley Gendron said she thinks the poster should be posted in schools prior to the November election. She will make some small edits and share the draft with the board.

Olga Bravo shared that it could be posted more widely than just in schools.

Grace Grundhauser said she is interested in partnering with AALV (African Americans living in Vermont). She has talked to them previously about advertising for open seats on the board and also about doing voter registration activities with them. Lauren Ebersol said she thinks it would be helpful to meet with them in their space if they are open to it. Grace Grundhauser asked if it would be legally okay for the board to meet in their location. Sarah Montgomery answered that she believes it would be fine, as long as the meeting was still properly warned.

Helen Rock shared that the Vermont Language Justice Project makes huge efforts to create informational videos for residents, which are helpful for people who are not literate. She recommended that they would be another good group to work with that could help with outreach, since they have a state-wide reach. She noted she has seen positive changes since the pandemic, with group and media outlets really focusing on sharing more information with the public.

Olga Bravo asked: are citizens and non-citizens both eligible to vote in the upcoming elections? Grace Grundhauser answered no. For city elections, non-citizen resident voters are eligible to vote, but in state or federal election, only citizens are eligible to vote.

Grace Grundhauser said it might be helpful to clearly differentiate in outreach materials which elections are city only vs. state and federal, to make it very clear which elections non-citizen legal residents can or cannot vote in.

Olga Bravo said that we might want to think differently about what resources are translated depending who the targeted audience is (citizens or non-citizens), since in her experience the vast majority of people who become citizens do know English.

Helen Rock made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Seconded by Michelle Lefkowitz. Passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:59pm.

Respectfully Submitted By: Sarah Montgomery, Assistant City Clerk