



Board for Registration of Voters

Tuesday, October 1, 2024, 6:00 PM,

**Sharon Bushor Conference Room, 1st Floor City Hall, 149 Church Street, Burlington, VT,
05401 OR remotely via Zoom.**

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://zoom.us/j/93712437108>

Meeting ID: 937 1243 7108

1. Agenda

1.1. Motion to amend/adopt agenda

2. Meeting Length

2.1. Set Meeting Length

3. Adopt Minutes

3.1. Motion to adopt previous meeting's minutes

File Attachments

1. Board for Registration of Voters 9_3_24 (1)

Board for Registration of Voters 9_3_24 (1).pdf

4. Public Forum

5. Clerk's Report

6. Election Prep

7. New Business

8. Adjournment

8.1. Motion to Adjourn

BOARD FOR REGISTRATION OF VOTERS

MEET: September 3rd, 2024 at 6:00pm

Where: Sharon Bushor Conference Room, 1st Floor City Hall and remotely via Zoom

Present: Alison Harte, Grace Grundhauser, Karen Rowell, Michelle Lefkowitz, Alex Demoly, Annie Schneider, Lesley Gendron, Lauren Ebersol, Olga Bravo, Colleen Montgomery, Jeanne Keller, Youth Member Will Cunningham

Absent: Mike McGarghan

Also Present: Sarah Montgomery, Assistant City Clerk

Meeting called to order by Chair Grace Grundhauser at 6:06pm

Agenda: Annie Schneider asked if meeting location could be added to the agenda and made a motion to approve the agenda as amended. Seconded by Karen Rowell. Passed unanimously.

Meeting Length: Set for one hour.

Previous Meeting Minutes: Jeanne Keller made a motion to adopt the minutes. Seconded by Colleen Montgomery. Passed unanimously.

Public Comments: Jeff Comstock, ward 7 clerk, shared that he was the concerned resident Karen Rowell mentioned at the last meeting. He is interested in learning what steps are being taken by the board to ensure someone is a citizen when they are registering to vote on the regular citizen checklist. Jeff Comstock shared that he feels one of our largest election vulnerabilities is not the voter ID issue, but is access to the checklist. His concern specifically comes from processing mail-in ballots; when doing this he has processed batches of voted ballots from what appears to be a family unit. In these situations, he has noticed that the certificate envelopes appear to be filled out by the same person, but with different signatures. His concern is about whether they are all citizens and about ballot harvesting from families or neighbors. Annie Schneider asked what makes him think these ballots are being cast by non-citizens. Jeff answered that, based on the names, they seem to be New Americans and he is questioning whether they have all obtained citizenship. Will Cunningham said that he thinks there are two issues Jeff Comstock is discussing and that the idea of ballot harvesting doesn't seem to need to be limited to New Americans and a voters' citizenship status. Jeff Comstock said that for the purposes of this conversation, he is only interested in information about citizen verification, not the larger discussion of the mail-in ballot ID verification.

Jeanne Keller said that when you take the oath saying that everything you filled out on the form is true, you are attesting to the fact that you are a citizen. Jeanne Keller is wondering why the focus is on citizenship when a voter could lie about anything on that form. She thinks it is problematic because people are being singled out about citizenship specifically based on names and without any evidence.

Grace Grundhauser asked Jeff Comstock if he can clarify what his interest is, since there seems to be confusion. Is he asking if the BRV has a method to verify someone's citizenship status?

Jeff Comstock said yes. He is also concerned about what happens at the same day registration table.

Annie Schneider said that many new Americans in our city are citizens. If, in the process of becoming a citizen, you vote in a federal election, it can jeopardize the citizenship application. This is a huge concern for people are in process of gaining citizenship.

Jeff Comstock said he is not assuming anything, but he is sharing some observed behavior that is potentially concerning. He said that any board should be willing to do an adequate risk assessment of their procedures. For example, investment managers get paid good money to do rigorous stress testing of their portfolio assessments and investment strategies. He wants to know if that same risk assessment or stress testing of our own voter registration procedures is in place.

Grace Grundhauser shared that it is the board's role to regularly go through the checklist and issue challenge letters when there is a concern about residency. She is not sure if there is a U.S. citizenship check in that process, or if there is precedent for that. If it was done, it would need to be in a systematic way, not in a way that singled people out.

Olga Bravo shared that when she has worked elections in the past (not in VT) she would see couples voting where one of them would write and the other would just sign. These would be people with typical American names, doing this for a variety of reasons (poor eyesight, etc.) so there is no way to look at people's name and accurately make assumptions. She thinks that could lead to profiling.

Jeff Comstock said he did not want the conversation to monopolize this meeting. He appreciates the time and would be happy to come back to another meeting to discuss further.

Karen Rowell said it would be helpful if these checks could be happening at the point where people are registering to vote. If ID's could be asked for or other checks could be asked for. She mentioned that would be something the state would need to address.

Grace Grundhauser said part of the registration process is to put in a VT ID number or a Social Security number. She said that citizens wouldn't have these ID numbers. Jeff Comstock shared that the non-citizens can obtain social security number for a variety of reasons. Will Cunningham asked if citizenship status was disclosed in the social security number. Colleen Montgomery said yes, but you wouldn't be able to see that from just the last 4 digits of the number. Jeff Comstock will email Grace with follow-up info.

Clerk's Report

Sarah Montgomery reported that the checklist currently has 32,250 voters. 8,606 of these voters are currently challenged. In August, there were 397 new registrations, 279 voters were transferred out of Burlington into other VT towns, 81 voters were removed from the checklist, and 411 voter records were revised. For the August 13th State Primary Election, 5,335 voters participated. This is 16.58% of our

registered voters. For the ward 3 Special Election, 456 voters participated. This is 10.51% of the registered voters in ward 3. For the November election, ballots will be mailed to all active registered voters between 9/23 and 10/1. Early voting in the Clerk's office will start on 9/23. The November ballot will include local and state/federal questions. The local questions will be printed on the main ballots for citizen voters, but there will also be local only ballots for non-citizen resident voters.

Election Review

Everyone agreed that it was a quiet day – good for training.

Grace Grundhauser shared some ideas she had from Election Day. One of the ideas was to have a short hand-out that said the definition of residency.

Karen Rowell asked if it is helpful to make notes on the forms if something odd or hard to decipher is being requested on the form. Sarah Montgomery answered yes. Karen shared that one of the strange issues was to note the punctuation included in a voter's name. Sarah Montgomery shared that as a rule, punctuation is not entered in people's voter registration to simplify the alphabetization in the printed checklist. Michelle Lefkowitz noted that this can sometimes cause issues with social security numbers not verifying.

Grace Grundhauser noted that it also seemed like recruitment for election workers, not just BRV volunteers, was challenging. Maybe ideas for recruitment can be revisited.

Olga Bravo asked if there will be more volunteers for the November election, since it will be a much busier election. Grace Grundhauser agreed that would be a good idea.

Jeanne Keller said it would be helpful if, rather than needing to figure out which form to use, could all the options be on one form? This would be helpful to simplify before the November election. Olga Bravo said she thinks that might cause issues about who keeps the copies of the form.

Karen Rowell said that the BRV guidebook was invaluable.

Jeff Comstock shared that the new voter registration form caused some confusion because the form is only in duplicate now, not in triplicate.

Grace Grundhauser mentioned that the board will review their purpose document next meeting and this discussion will include expectations about political discussions at the polling place.

Proposed Resolution

Jeanne Keller apologized for writing it in such a legal fashion, but wanted to craft a resolution that would recognize the two fundamental principles outlined. She feels it is important to have something on the record that states the board's agreement to follow the law, regardless of any pending lawsuit.

Karen Rowell said she will not be signing this because it should be a given that the board is going to follow the law. There should not need to be a resolution to state that.

Jeanne Keller said it is just putting it on the record. It gives credibility and documentation to the current issue.

Grace Grundhauser gave other members the opportunity to speak.

Lauren Ebersol said that she can see both points, but acknowledges that there is conversation around this specific topic (legal resident voting in general and the lawsuit in particular) and this provides the board with something concrete and succinct to point to.

Colleen Montgomery added that the lawsuit came to her attention when she was just joining the board, and she was confused about how someone taking place in this lawsuit could serve on this board. She appreciates that this resolution clearly lays out that there is no conflict.

Michelle Lefkowitz made a motion to accept the resolution as written. Seconded By Jeanne Keller.

Annie Schneider asked if this is passed as a board, is it binding for the board? Grace Grundhauser answered yes. It is not up to individuals to sign the document, but all members can vote and the vote will be recorded in the minutes.

Will Cunningham said that he agrees that there could be an implication with this document that it is not always the expectation that the law is being followed, but due to the current events he thinks it makes sense in this specific situation.

Annie Schneider made a motion to call the question. Seconded by Colleen Montgomery. Karen Rowell abstained from voting. All others voted yes to calling the question.

Question called.

Aye: Alison Harte, Michelle Lefkowitz, Alex Demoly, Annie Schneider, Lesley Gendron, Lauren Ebersol, Olga Bravo, Colleen Montgomery, Jeanne Keller

Nay: Karen Rowell

Abstain: Grace Grundhauser

The resolution was approved as proposed.

New Business

Annie Schneider asked if Sarah could research an alternate meeting space: DPW, BED. Miller Center, O.N.E Community Center, and Water Department were suggestions that were offered. Sarah Montgomery will research.

Will Cunningham shared that there will be very few high school students (7 between BHS and Rice) that will be 18 prior to the November election. He recommended that the posters instead be posted at CCV. Annie Schneider asked if he could also share the information with CCV faculty so they could share it with their online students. Lesley Betts will share the .jpg of the poster with the whole board.

Adjournment

On a motion by Jeanne Keller, seconded by Lesley Gendron, the meeting was adjourned at 7:12pm.

Respectfully Submitted By: Sarah Montgomery, Assistant City Clerk