

BOARD FOR REGISTRATION OF VOTERS

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

Where: Police Station Community Room, 1 North Ave, and remotely via Zoom

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

Absent: Olga Bravo

Also Present: Sarah Montgomery, Assistant City Clerk

Meeting called to order by Vice Chair Michelle Lefkowitz at 6:02pm

Agenda: Jeanne Keller made a motion to amend the agenda to add discussion about the Election Day scenario flowchart during new business. Seconded by Lauren Ebersol. The amended agenda passed unanimously.

Meeting Length: The meeting length was set to 1 hour to end at 7:05.

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

Public Comments: No members of the public were present.

Clerk's Report: Sarah Montgomery reported that 20,880 voters participated in the recent election. Out of these votes, 12,029 votes were cast absentee and 8,851 were cast in person. Out of the absentee ballots cast, 1,422 were received at the polling places on Election Day. Sarah Montgomery reported that the current total number of registered voters is 33,525. Out of those voters, a total of 7,330 are challenged. Sarah reported that in October, there were 886 new registrations, 609 voters were transferred out of town, and 86 voters were removed from the checklist. In November, there were 1,206 new registrations, 513 voters were transferred to other Vermont towns, and 130 voters were removed from the checklist.

Alison Harte asked how the turnout from the election compared to the last presidential election. Sarah Montgomery said that the turnout in 2020 was around 22,500, and the turnout in 2016 was around 19,000.

Approval of Voter Challenges

Sarah Montgomery shared that the voter challenge approval list for the month includes individuals who had ballots mailed to them for the November election, but were returned to the clerk's office as undeliverable. Anyone who voted or edited their voter registration since the mailing data was initially pulled was removed from the list. The list also includes a handful of people that sold their property in

Burlington that is their legal address in their voter registration. She shared the full list (which contains 1,322 voters) with the board prior to the meeting.

Michelle Lefkowitz made a motion to accept the challenges as proposed. Seconded by Karen Rowell. Passed unanimously.

Approval of Removal of Inactive Challenged Voter Registrations

Sarah Montgomery said that the proposed list of voters to remove from the checklist (shared with the board prior to the meeting) includes voters who have remained challenged for the past two General Elections. Per statute, the board can now remove these voters from the checklist. These voters never responded to the challenge letter or took any other affirmative action since they were initially challenged. 4,561 challenged voters are on this list.

Colleen Montgomery said that she noticed some voters who had a registration date that came after the last date they participated. She wondered how that was possible. She gave a few examples of voters on the list. Sarah Montgomery said she was unsure without looking further, but her best guess would be that the voters were registered in Burlington, removed their Burlington registration, and then re-registered in Burlington. Since the same voter ID is always used for an individual, previous participation activity would still be on their record, but with a new registration date from when they reregistered. Grace Grundhauser asked if those voters could be removed from the list until we had further information.

Karen Rowell noted that even if someone was purged who is still eligible to vote, they can always re-register easily.

Sarah Montgomery pulled up one of the specific voters (whose last participation date was prior to their registration date) in VEMS to look at the specifics. This voter had registered in Burlington, had then switched her registration to South Burlington, but then transferred back to Burlington without participating again. She was then challenged. The registration date shown on the spreadsheet showed the date she registered in Burlington for the 2nd time, but was showing the participation date from when she was registered the first time.

Mike McGarghan said it seems to be advantageous to purge the people on the purge list because they are not participating in voting. There is also same day voter registration so it is not precluding anyone from voting. Karen Rowell added that removing these voters makes it so we aren't mailing ballots to voters who are likely not at the address on their registration.

Colleen Montgomery noted that there were also some voters on the list that had no challenge date listed. Lesley Gendron said that everyone who does not have a specific challenge date on the spreadsheet has an old registration date so they have clearly been inactive for a while. Sarah Montgomery looked at one of the voters (with no challenge date listed on the spreadsheet) and shared that the voter was challenged in VEMS with a challenge date from 2021. She wasn't sure why that data

wasn't showing on the spreadsheet, which was a report automatically generated from VEMS to show challenged voters who were eligible to be removed.

Annie Schneider clarified that challenged voters do not get mailed ballots automatically.

Colleen Montgomery asked about voters on the list who have a challenge date that is very close to their registration date. Sarah Montgomery said that voters are sometimes challenged based on undeliverable voter registration letters, which could cause those two dates to be very close.

Grace Grundhauser shared that the number of challenged voters that were purged after the 2022 General Election was 4,594. She said that the last batch of voters the board challenged was at the June meeting – if those voters don't respond to the challenge, they will be subject to this purge process after the 2026 General Election. In addition, anyone who was challenged after the 2022 General Election will be subject to the purge process at that same time (after the 2026 General Election). She noted that the challenged voters that the board is voting to purge today were sent challenge letters between December of 2020 and summer of 2022. She explained that the shortest amount of time a voter can be challenged before being purged is 2 ½ years and the longest a voter can be challenged before being purged is 4 years.

Annie Schneider said that it is really good that the board understands this process because there were a lot of challenged voters on Election Day.

Mike McGarghan called the question. Seconded by Lesley Gendron. The vote passed unanimously.

Election Day Review:

Grace Grundhauser suggested doing a round robin so everyone could share their election experience.

Mike McGarghan said it caused confusion to have local questions on the ballot, since legal residents were eligible to vote on the local items, while federal or state items were also being voted on. Grace Grundhauser asked if there is a law restricting local issues to town meeting day. Mike said it is common sense and it just makes the election more complicated; he said he thinks the city does it because so many student voters come out in November while the turnout is lower in March. Jeanne Keller shared that her understanding is that the city might want to add charter questions to the November ballot so they could get to the legislature in the new biennium.

Mike McGarghan also suggested that in the Elks club, the new ward 4 polling place, the check-in tables might want to be pushed in further for better voter efficiency.

Karen Rowell said that it was not as busy as she thought it would be. She didn't have any issues with forms or VEMS.

Lauren Ebersol agreed that it was not as busy as she expected. She appreciated having two volunteers. It would have been helpful to have someone else who could access VEMS at certain points. She had some

voters come to her for general help about where they should be and she had to redirect them. She thinks the setup with the greeters in ward 2 does help with voter flow within the polling place.

Grace Grundhauser asked about voters who were bounced between wards. Where was this miscommunication coming from? Lauren Ebersol wondered if it was the happening with the greeters or at the checklist. Grace shared that sometimes the BRV members have more information than the checklist workers, since they have access to VEMS.

Mike McGarghan said there were a significant number of people that came to him who were just in the wrong district line. Lesley Gendron agreed that voters were getting confused about which district they were in and were being sent to her. It would be helpful if there was more clear communication coming from the ward clerks and the entrance checklist workers. Some members noted that they had no issues with this, others said it was common. Each polling place had slightly different greeting/ check-in set ups.

Lesley Gendron added that in ward 1 they were asking for ID documents for new registrations, which is not allowed. Lesley checked in with Sarah Montgomery, spoke to the ward clerk and same day registration folks, and the process was corrected. She said that a few voters did get sent away to get documentation, but they all came back to vote. Grace Grundhauser clarified that only first time VT registrants, when applying by mail or online, need to provide a copy of an ID. This does not apply to in person registrations.

Lesley Gendron also recommends that volunteers have some level of computer literacy.

Michelle Lefkowitz said she was busy all day. Other members reminded her to take time to take care of herself during the day.

Will Cunningham said that he saw a lot of NVS (not verified social security number). He said when verifying the social security numbers, they were almost always correct. He wondered why VEMS was flagging it as an issue. Grace Grundhauser said it is because the two databases are trying to talk to each other (VEMS and the social security database) and if one digit is different between the two, the social security number does not verify. When this happens, the voter just needs to confirm the name, date of birth, and last 4 of the social security number are correct. They can also reach out to the Secretary of State's office to fix the issue permanently. Michelle Lefkowitz also suggested asking if the voter has a VT ID number to include instead of the social security number. Sarah Montgomery added that often it is not an issue of the data being incorrect, but is in issue with the timing. Since the two databases do not automatically sync, there is just a time lag from the registration to the verification. Sometimes the printed checklist with even still have the NVS on it, but it will show up as verified in VEMS because it verified in the system after the checklist was printed.

Will Cunningham added that sometimes they (at the BRV table) were filling out forms in one ward for voters that were being redirected to another ward. Grace Grundhauser said that is fine. Michelle Lefkowitz said she was adding her phone number on the form when she did that in case someone needed to contact her for verification.

Grace Grundhauser heard that a voter got towed near the ward 3 polling place. Some members wondered if the person was parked illegally.

Annie Schneider said that she was very busy. She said she had a few voters that were really aggressive about trying to vote in a ward they were not eligible to vote in. She felt this happened more than usual. She also saw a lot of name changes (due to marriage and gender transitioning) which reminded her to be very gender neutral and inclusive about her language.

Jeanne Keller shared that she found a process that helped her better understand the forms and streamline the processes.

Colleen Montgomery was training. She said that all four wards that she trained at were a little different, and none were as busy as she expected.

Alison said it was not busy. She gave a shout out to VEMS! She had no problems with the system, and noticed improvements. She didn't have any other issues throughout the day.

Alex Demoly was unable to be there on Election Day, but thanked the board for all the work they put into it.

New Business

The discussion about the flow chart will happen at another meeting due to the time.

Colleen Montgomery reported that she did some research about social security numbers and learned that you cannot tell citizenship status from a social security number. There are situations where non-citizens need social security numbers, so there is no way to use that number to determine whether a person is a citizen from the number.

Jeanne Keller encouraged people to look at the flow chart before the next meeting and welcomed feedback from the other board members. Lesley Gendron said that she thinks it could be expanded upon to include scenarios for each specific form. Grace Grundhauser encouraged anyone to contribute similar ideas about the guide.

Adjournment

On a motion by Lesley Gendron, seconded by Karen Rowell, the meeting was adjourned at 7:05pm.

Respectfully Submitted By: Sarah Montgomery, Assistant City Clerk