

BOARD FOR REGISTRATION OF VOTERS

MEET: January 7th, 2025 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 Chair Grace Grundhauser at 6:03pm

Agenda: Passed unanimously.

Meeting Length: The meeting length was set to one hour.

Previous Meeting Minutes: Jeanne Keller made a motion to accept the minutes. Seconded by Michelle Lefkowitz. Passed unanimously.

Public Comments:

No members of the public present.

Clerk's Report Sarah Montgomery reported that there are currently 28,756 registered voters. Out of these voters, 3,894 are challenged. In December, there were 85 new voter registrations, 83 voters were transferred to other Vermont towns, and 4,595 voters were removed from the checklist.

Sarah Montgomery shared that the new election management system will be launched in April, so March will be the last election using the current system. Alison Harte asked if the monthly meetings would be used to provide training for the new system. Grace Grundhauser agreed that would be a good idea.

Sarah Montgomery shared updates about the upcoming Annual City Election being held on March 4th. This is the only scheduled election for 2025. For this election ballots will automatically be mailed out to all active registered voters no later than February 12th. The positions on the ballot include district City Councilors, District School Commissioners, Ward Clerks, and Inspectors of Election. There will also be three proposed charter changes and other potential questions on the ballot as well. Final questions and candidates will be finalized by January 27th.

Mike McGarghan asked if the board needed to take any action to remove challenged voters who are eligible to be removed from the checklist. Sarah Montgomery answered that the board took that action last month, and those voters have been removed.

Mike McGarghan asked if there was any further information on why local questions are appearing on the November ballot; he thought that this should only happen in rare exceptions, but it seems to be more common. Grace Grundhauser said that she doesn't think that is something that is up to the board. Mike McGarghan said it does affect the board since the members support voters on Election Days. Grace Grundhauser answered that there are plenty of things that affect the board that they have no control over. Jeanne Keller shared that it would be appropriate for Mike to reach out to his councilors if he has a concern.

Grace Grundhauser added that it would be helpful and fun if we could do a mock election with the new election management system as a way to learn it.

Approval of Voter Challenges

Grace Grundhauser asked the board if they had the chance to review the list of proposed voters sent to the board by Sarah Montgomery. Colleen Montgomery said she wasn't exactly sure what she should be looking out for on these lists.

Sarah Montgomery shared that she added the reason each voter registration letter was not able to be delivered by the post office to the spreadsheet. The majority of them were just not valid USPS addresses. Jeanne Keller noticed that most of them were from Election Day registrations. She suggested that the person assisting with same day voter registration could ask voters to verify that they had provided a valid address. Grace Grundhauser asked if there were any patterns among the undeliverable letters; ex: were they mostly student housing? She noted it might be helpful to clarify to voters that their mailing address does not need to match their legal address. Grace Grundhauser noted that if these voters were not able to receive the letter at the listed address, they will not be able to receive a mailed ballot, so there is no issue in challenging them from that perspective. Lesley Gendron noted that these voters would still be able to vote at the polling place.

Grace Grundhauser called the question of whether the listed voters should be challenged. The board unanimously agreed to challenge the voters.

BRV Rules and Procedures Document Review

Grace Grundhauser shared that the board reviews this document annually. She stated that while the board agrees on these rules and guidelines on how they will work together, the guidelines are not law. The mandated work of the board is outlined by charter.

Grace Grundhauser gave an overview of the document.

Mike McGarghan asked if there had ever been resolution by the board about what constitutes adequate participation with the board. Grace Grundhauser shared that the previous discussion by the board about this was in regards to a member who worked elections diligently, but did not attend meetings. That particular situation resolved itself because the specific member had a life change and resigned from the board. Mike McGarghan asked why the language about membership removal should be included in the document if it is not something that the board will actually take action on. Grace Grundhauser noted

that this section about membership has been in the guidelines at least since 2021 – it is not something new that is being proposed. Colleen Montgomery said that just because the board has never taken action, does not mean that they never will take action. Mike McGarghan said that the board was not willing to take action previously. Jeanne Keller noted that new people are constantly coming on to the board and may have different ideas. Grace Grundhauser said that she thinks the board would have discussed the previous situation further if it had not resolved itself. She said that if someone is proposing a change to the existing guidelines, they can make a motion to do so.

Mike McGarghan made a motion to remove the section regarding membership. Alison Harte asked if it would make sense to clarify what it meant to be negligent or have bad conduct. Mike McGarghan said no, he would like to remove it entirely, then revisit it if the board wants something about it included. Motion seconded by Karen Rowell.

Jeanne Keller asked for clarification on the motion. Clarification was made that Mike McGarghan's motion was to remove the 3rd paragraph under the membership section.

Jeanne Keller stated that the board is appointed by the City Council, acting as the Board of Civil Authority, and it is the board's duty to police themselves and ensure members are fulfilling obligations. It is the responsibility of the board to report to City Council if there is a concern that someone on the board is not fulfilling their duty.

Will Cunningham asked Mike McGarghan if the issue with the section was that it is not clear about what constitutes someone's removal? He asked if there was a certain number of missed meetings that should trigger the board to recommend removal. Mike McGarghan answered that he has been on boards and organizations where the rule was if an individual had not been in touch or made efforts to address an absence it was considered that they had abandoned their position after missing 3 meetings. He thinks this should be written out more clearly. Will Cunningham said he feels that the issue with the 3 meeting rule is that it leaves no room for other circumstances. Mike McGarghan said that the board does not have the authority to remove members; it is the prerogative of the City Council. He thinks the document should be streamlined to only include necessary information.

Michelle Lefkowitz made a motion to call the question. Seconded by Jeanne Keller. The board agreed unanimously to call the question. The question was called.

Vote on motion to remove 3rd paragraph of membership section.

In Favor: Mike McGarghan

Opposed: Alison Harte, Grace Grundhauser, Karen Rowell, Michelle Lefkowitz, Alex Demoly, Annie Schneider, Lesley Gendron, Lauren Ebersol, Colleen Montgomery, Jeanne Keller

The motion failed.

Grace Grundhauser noted the document outlines that any changes to the document need to be discussed at two meetings prior to the meeting that the change is voted on.

Election Day Guide and Proposed Flowchart

Michelle asked for clarification about the 17 days rule. There some confusion about the greater than/ less than symbols. Lesley Gendron suggested removing the symbols and just adding words instead.

Alison Harte suggested that looking at the ward map might be the better first step to determine if a voter is in the correct ward. Annie Schneider agreed that she likes this as a first step. Lesley Gendron said she would be happy to help work on the visualization to make this work in the flowchart.

Lesley Gendron added that it would be helpful to have an option for what to do for voters who do not appear in VEMS. She also added that it would be helpful to add images of the actual forms to help volunteers easily locate the correct form.

Sarah Montgomery added that voters who are challenged and are changing their addresses do not need to complete both the affirmation and the checklist revision form. The affirmation with their new address is enough.

Grace Grundhauser asked how people want to move forward working on the guide. Previously there was discussion about having a working group to work on the guide. Lesley Gendron suggested waiting until after the new VEMS is launched prior to working on the guide further, but does like the idea of a working group.

New Business

Annie Schneider asked what the plan for recruiting volunteers is moving forward. Grace Grundhauser said that the recruitment can be shared between the board members using a shared document. Lesley Gendron said that less volunteers will be needed for the upcoming election. She said she will only need a volunteer during the peak hours. Other members agreed that just one volunteer/ BRV trainee is needed at any given time. Alex Demoly is the only member that is training still. He has worked one election so far, and members usually work two elections before being on their own. Mike McGarghan and Lesley Gendron will both not be available to work at the upcoming election. Lauren Ebersol will update the volunteer spreadsheet in advance of the board's recruitment efforts.

Adjournment

On a motion by Lesley Gendron, seconded by Allison Harte, the meeting was adjourned at 7:03 pm.

Respectfully Submitted By: Sarah Montgomery, Assistant City Clerk