

Board for Registration of Voters

The meeting was called to order at 6:00pm.

In attendance: Olga Bravo, Lesley Gendron, Alex Demoly, Mike McGarghan, Grace Grundhauser, Annie Schneider, Helen Rock, Michelle Lefkowitz, Karen Rowell, Lauren Ebersol; Youth Member: William Cunningham

Absent: Alison Harte, Thea Knight

Also Present: Sarah Montgomery (Assistant City Clerk)

Agenda: Approved as presented.

Meeting length: The meeting length was set for one hour.

Minutes: Michelle Lefkowitz commented that under the adoption of minutes section, it shows that she made a motion to accept the agenda – this should be corrected to minutes. Mike McGarghan stated that there was more conversation by the board around the section where he was called racist and bigoted. He would like this additional information included.

Mike McGarghan made a motion to have the clerk amend the minutes, and to revisit them at the next meeting. Seconded by Karen Rowell. Motion passed unanimously.

Public forum: No members of the public were present.

Clerk's Report:

Sarah Montgomery reported that the current number of voters on the checklist is 31,236. Out of those, 8,065 voters are challenged. In November: 156 new voters were registered in Burlington; 71 voters were purged; 81 voters were transferred out of town.

Sarah Montgomery reported: Clerk's office is moving into full prep mode for the March election. Nominating caucuses are currently happening and candidate forms are due in the clerk's office by January 29th. Postcard notices will be mailed out to all active registered voters in early January, alerting voters of which ward they will be in and where their polling place is. This notice will also include information stating that if a voter would like to vote by mail in the Presidential Primary, they will need to specifically request this ballot, whereas the Annual City Election ballots will automatically be mailed out to all active registered voters.

Mike McGarghan noted that there was a problem similar to this (two ballots, one mailed and one not) with the county ballot in November. How will this be better?

Sarah Montgomery answered that the city is trying to do more voter outreach about this issue for this election. The method of mailing for each (by request vs. automatic) cannot be changed. City Council has adopted a resolution to automatically mail ballots to all active registered voters for local elections. The Presidential Primary is a state election, so the state determines whether those ballot are mailed or not. Since this is a presidential primary, the voter needs to choose whether they want to receive a democratic or republican ballot, so it would not be logistically possible to automatically mail those ballots out.

Mike McGarghan asked if there is an option to add an insert to the Annual City Election ballot letting voters know that they need to request a Presidential Primary ballot.

Sarah Montgomery answered yes, something can be included on that insert, but it will likely be a little too late at that point – city election ballots go out 20 days before the elections, so by the time the voter receives that notice, requests a ballot from us, and we mail it to them, it will be very tight for them to return it to us on time. This is why the postcards are being sent out in advance.

Mike McGarghan stated that he still thinks it would be helpful to include. Sarah Montgomery agreed that it can definitely still be done, just shouldn't be the only thing that is done.

Grace Grundhauser asked if there is anything else the board can do to help with sharing this information.

Sarah Montgomery said that the board sharing the information via Front Porch Forum or any other communication venues they have access to would be helpful. Part of the messaging is just so voters know that there is another ballot available to vote in March, not just the city ballot they will receive in the mail.

Helen Rock noted that she would be willing to share the information and help make a plan for posting in community forums.

Grace Grundhauser shared that she has the Front Porch Forum account that has the ability to share city wide messages as well.

Karen Rowell said that she has been kicked off of Front Porch Forum because they do not allow conservative views to be shared.

Helen Rock asked if there are any other public printed materials or specific forums where this information could be shared.

Sarah Montgomery answered that NPAs might be another avenue to share the information.

Mike McGarghan asked if the information could also be posted where other public election notices are posted.

Lesley Gendron asked if there is something that is simplified that can be shared on social media – similar to the information that will be on the postcard.

Sarah Montgomery said she could send out this language to the board.

Mike McGarghan asked if the city uses a Facebook account, to be able to pay for a sponsored add.

Sarah Montgomery answered that the Clerk's office does not.

Grace Grundhauser noted that the board might have a Facebook account that was set up previously.

Helen Rock asked if the postcard will specifically tell voters where their polling place is.

Sarah Montgomery answered yes.

Michelle Lefkowitz said this should also be published in Seven Days.

Lesley Gendron noted that the Facebook group has 21 followers. Mike McGarghan said this is why having a sponsored message to cover a certain geographic area might be effective.

Sarah Montgomery said that election training for ward clerks and inspectors will happen in early January. Some time should be set aside to do some training with the BRV on legal resident voting procedures as well – either as part of a regular meeting, as a standalone training, or as an addition to the existing BRV pre-election training.

Grace Grundhauser noted that she would be interested in sitting in on a ward clerk training. Other members also expressed interest in attending that training.

Voter Challenges:

Grace Grundhauser shared that the agenda looks like same as it has previously. The board will discuss further how to present these challenges on the agenda at future meeting.

Alex Demoly asked if someone is selling their property, are we just editing their address or are we fully removing them from the voter list?

Grace Grundhauser answered that this process never removes voters from the list. It starts the process of making them eligible for removal if they do not respond, but that would only happen after two General Election cycles pass without them taking any affirmative action (responding to the challenge).

Karen Rowell asked if these voters would still receive ballots by mail.

Grace Grundhauser answered that once a voter is challenged, they will not receive a mail ballot.

Will Cunningham asked if voters will be taken off the challenge list if they vote.

Grace Grundhauser answered that they will need to resolve the challenge before they vote.

Michelle Lefkowitz asked if the voters that are on the list because of undeliverable voter registration certificates are new voters?

Sarah Montgomery answered yes.

Helen Rock asked if we are seeing anything on the voters' addresses that would cause the mail to be undeliverable – missing apartment numbers, etc.

Sarah Montgomery noted that it will sometimes be on campus addresses that are bouncing back, but she hasn't noticed any other specific trends.

Michelle Lefkowitz asked how we can help inform voters, especially student voters, that they need to provide more accurate mailing addresses. Suggested adding information to the website. Grace Grundhauser added that she could reach out to her UVM contact.

Lauren Ebersol noted that another issue on Election Day is that students often think they can register to vote here and then go back home and vote there. Should this be discussed with UVM as well?

Grace Grundhauser noted that this is probably worth a separate discussion, since it is a more complicated topic, and more of a legal question.

Mike McGarghan asked if voters would not receive a ballot once they are challenged. Grace Grundhauser answered that this is correct.

Helen Rock added that if a voter is still eligible to vote in Burlington, and responds to the challenge in time, they could still receive a ballot.

Michelle Lefkowitz made a motion to accept the challenge list. Seconded by Lesley Gendron. Unanimous.

Youth Member Responsibilities:

Grace Grundhauser read the BRV Youth Member position description document.

Mike McGarghan asked if this youth member appointment was in addition to the 12 members. Grace Grundhauser answered yes.

Mike McGarghan also noted that term length may not be relevant to a youth member.

Annie Schneider noted that there have been two youth members in the past, so there is no limit to only having a single youth member on the board. Grace Grundhauser said that this should be clarified on the document.

Helen Rock said it would be helpful to have a reference to the document (resolution, etc.) that outlines boards' abilities to have a youth member.

Alex Demoly noted that the language on the document is confusing since it refers to the lawful action a board can take, but also notes that the youth member cannot take lawful action.

Helen Rock noted that there is a "Youth on Boards" section that is on the city website – the information there should be taken into consideration when creating this job description, to ensure there is no conflict between the two.

Mike McGarghan said that he doesn't think we need to include the bullet about the spirit of cooperation, since that could limit individual viewpoints and force conformity.

Helen Rock said this is an expectation for the board as a whole. Annie Schneider said that if this expectation was removed from the youth member description, it would also need to be removed from the expectations for the whole board.

Karen Rowell added that she doesn't think a line like that would necessarily be weaponized.

Mike McGarghan added that he wants to ensure that people can have discussions and share different points of view.

Grace Grundhauser added that she doesn't think this is an extraordinary thing to have on a board or committee description. The idea is to move ahead with the work of the board without getting bogged down. She is not inclined to remove that line. It is about trying to accomplish something as a board.

Mike McGarghan asked what happens if expectations are not met, such as not attending meetings, elections, etc.?

Helen Rock made motion to look at City Council information and then revisit this document. Seconded by Annie Schneider. Passed unanimously.

Grace Grundhauser also has some edits from this discussion that she will add to it.

BRV Rules and Procedures Document Review:

Grace Grundhauser noted that this is a great document because it has live links to the statutory authority of the board. So, if there are members who want to delve more into the board's authority, this document is a good starting point.

Mike McGarghan asked if there is a definition for incapacity, negligence, or bad conduct. As the document stands it does not seem clear.

Discussion by board members about what the process would be for removal. Does this need to be determined by a 2/3 vote of the BRV then a 2/3 vote of the CC?

Lauren Ebersol suggested that the board look at other existing documents to see how things are done on other boards, since this is not unique to this board.

Michelle Lefkowitz noted that the current document reads that City Council may take action without board recommendation, if they are aware of any bad conduct, etc.

Grace Grundhauser agreed that there should be come more clarity about this in the document.

Michelle noted that the link to charter specifies where the removal language comes from.

This will be discussed again at a future meeting.

March Election Prep:

Grace Grundhauser noted that only 7 of the 8 wards will be covered by fully trained people in March. Grace Grundhauser suggested that Lesley Gendron would likely be able to work on her own, even though she hasn't received full training, because she has volunteered during past elections.

Helen Rock asked if it would be possible to use meeting time for training.

Lesley Gendron asked what happens if there are not enough members to cover all polling places? Grace Grundhauser answered that there is no good answer to that. The board may be able to tap into past board members for on the spot training on Election Day. Past members won't be able to fulfill full board duties, but they can provide support.

Mike McGarghan noted that members should make sure to get VEMs access now.

Helen Rock made a motion to use part of the January and February meeting for training. Seconded by Karen Rowell. Passed unanimously.

Mike McGarghan asked if those meetings could be kept to the standing agenda, to allow the time for training.

Motion passed unanimously.

Adjournment:

Mike McGarghan made a motion to adjourn. Seconded by Lesley Gendron. Meeting adjourned at 7:08pm

Respectfully Submitted By: Sarah Montgomery, Assistant City Clerk