

MINUTES

CITY OF WESTMINSTER Board of Elections June 26, 2019 at 9 am

CALL TO ORDER

Board members in attendance were Chair Wendy Raith, Co-Chair Suzanne Albert, Mary Louise Poole, Susan Thomas, and Michael Towle. Staff present was City Clerk Shannon Visocsky.

MINUTES

Board member Towle moved and Co-Chair Albert seconded that the minutes of the May 1, 2019 Board of Election meeting be approved. The motion was approved unanimously.

2019 ELECTION

Feedback/Overview of the Election

Ms. Visocsky stated that on May 14, 2019, during the City's Municipal Election, there were a few instances of residents not found on the voter registration. Unfortunately, this occurred after the close of business for the Carroll County Election Board; therefore, the City Clerk and Chief Election Judges were unable to verify voter registration.

For this reason, the Election Judges suggested that the City consider approaching the County Board of Elections to remain open during the municipal election poll times. Chair Raith informed the Board members that she recently visited the County Election Board to learn more about the election process. During her meeting, she learned that the Board had considered remaining open during the polling hours for all of the municipal elections within the County.

Another suggestion raised on election day was for the City to provide provisional ballots. Ms. Visocsky stated that she received feedback from other municipal clerks who shared that provisional ballots were not recommended because it delays the final vote count two days at a minimum. As an alternative, it was recommended to have a discussion with the County about extending its hours on election day. Ms. Visocsky suggested that the Board delay further discussion until the City receives confirmation of whether or not the County Board of Elections would remain open during polling hours. By unanimous consent, the Board members agreed to table the discussion.

Chair Raith, Board member Poole, and Board member Towle of Precinct 1, John Street Quarters, suggested rearranging its set up for this polling location. The flow of voters was of concern when stopping to have conversations with others. It was also suggested that the City provide vote here mats to signify where voters should stand while waiting for their turn at the voting machines.

The Board members and Ms. Visocsky raised concerns regarding the total voter turnout for this year's election. Following further discussion, it was agreed that the City would benefit from a mass-mailing to City residents that includes relevant information about the election day, absentee ballots, and information regarding candidates. Additionally, it was recommended to have more roadside signage prior to the election day.

Carroll County Voter Registration Books

The Board members discussed other alternatives for the voter registration list. The discussion included the following:

- Containing the registration list in a three-ring binder;
- Dividing the voter registration list into three sections at each precinct, which would provide a better flow for those in line; and,
- Creating an electronic voter registration list that would allow voters to also electronically sign in.

Ms. Visocsky informed the Board members that Electec, supplier of the voting machines, offered the electronic sign in option as a consideration for Election 2021. She stated that this was something the City could review and determine if it was compatible and reasonable to meet the City's needs.

Ms. Visocsky stated that she provides a deadline to the County for voter registration. The County prints the voter registration list based on the deadline provided by the City Clerk. Ms. Visocsky suggested further discussion of this procedure later in the agenda, when the members reviewed the City Charter and Code.

NEW BUSINESS

Ballot Format for Future Elections

During the 2019 Election, some voters chose to not vote on the voting machines. Ms. Visocsky learned that voters who sign in, but do not vote, are only seeking credit to maintain their voter registration. Ms. Visocsky shared this concern with Electec, who suggested adding a "no vote" option in the future. Board members agreed with adding this option for Election 2021.

The Board members also discussed updating the deadline for absentee ballots that would provide more time for voters to apply and directed Ms. Visocsky to inquire into other municipalities' deadlines, as well as how the absentee ballots are sent and received. The discussion also included modifying the City Code to have the Board of Elections review the Absentee Ballot Application Requests.

In conclusion, Board members mentioned considering early voting as another alternative for those who are unable to vote on election day, and also miss the deadline for an absentee ballot request.

Campaign Finance Forms and Due Dates

Ms. Visocsky informed the Board members that the current language of § 14-2.1 of the City Code pertaining to the campaign finance forms was confusing for her and the City Attorney when calculating the due dates to provide the candidates. She also expressed interest in updating the current forms.

After review of § 14-2.1 of City Code and the applicable forms, the Board members agreed that the language and the forms should be updated. The members authorized Ms. Visocsky to reach out to other municipal clerks to inquire of their procedures.

Following further discussion, the Board members authorized Ms. Visocsky to include in her inquiries to other clerks, language requiring candidates to have a treasurer for their campaign finances as well as a separate bank account. This would include a donation of the remaining funds to a non-profit organization.

In conclusion, Ms. Visocsky stated that the Code specifies that it is the duty of the City Clerk to receive, review, and penalize a candidate who fails submit their campaign finance forms by the required deadline. The Board Members agreed that this language should be updated to remove the City Clerk and insert the Board of Elections for review and imposing penalties to candidates who do not submit information by the required deadline.

Declaration of Intent Submission Dates

Ms. Visocsky stated that during Maryland Clerk's Association conferences, she learned that some municipalities provide a date for candidacy declaration of intent. She informed the Board members that an opening date is not included in the City Code. Ms. Visocsky suggested that an earlier submission deadline should be considered instead. Board members authorized Ms. Visocsky to reach out to other municipal clerks to inquire of their declaration of intent submission deadlines. In conclusion, if the City required earlier submission dates of its Declaration of Intent, this would then allow more time for absentee ballots and for voters to learn more about the candidates.

Furthermore, the Board members suggested announcing the candidates as they file their declaration of intent and for Ms. Visocsky to inquire if other municipalities do the same.

Other Proposed Charter/Code Changes to Update Language

Ms. Visocsky and the Board members reviewed each section of the City Charter and Code. In addition to the proposed changes stated above, the members suggested that Ms. Visocsky recommend to the City Attorney and elected officials to revise and update the language of the charter and the code.

Ms. Visocsky stated that she would send an e-mail to the Maryland Municipal Clerk's Association, requesting detailed information as authorized above.

OTHER MATTERS

Ms. Visocsky stated that Co-Chair Albert currently has her home for sale and plans to move out of the City limits once it is sold. For this reason, the Board members began to discuss receiving applications for a new member and request that the Mayor appoint an alternate member in the meantime. Ms. Visocsky will inquire guidance from the City Attorney before proceeding.

ADJOURNMENT

The Board of Elections meeting adjourned at 11:42 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Shannon Visocsky