

MINUTES

CITY OF WESTMINSTER Board of Elections August 27, 2019 at 10 am

CALL TO ORDER

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

MINUTES

Board member Thomas moved to approve the minutes of the June 26, 2019 Board of Elections meeting. Board member Poole seconded; the motion was approved unanimously.

NEW BUSINESS

None.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Ms. Visocsky reported that she e-mailed members of the Maryland Municipal Clerk's Association for feedback and general guidance. She suggested that the Board review the information that she received from the other municipalities over the course of future meetings.

The Board discussed § 14.1. Declarations of Candidacy with regard to:

- Exploring other means of verification in the length of residency when determining if a potential candidate meets the required qualifications per City Charter § 3. Qualifications for and Election of Mayor and Common Council;
- Updating Notification to those Elected;
- Amending the charter to state that the City Clerk receives the Declaration of Intent, and the Board reviews each candidate application for approval;
- Having declaration of intent forms and candidate finance packets available to interested candidates 180 days prior to an election date, with a submission deadline of 60 days prior to an election date;

The Board reviewed feedback and forms shared by the clerks of other municipalities regarding the Campaign Finance Statements. As reviewed during the Board of Elections meeting on June 26, 2019, Ms. Visocsky highlighted the due dates of each of the campaign finance statement forms. The current language in § 14-2.1. Campaign Finances regarding filing of the statements has been considered confusing. The Board agreed that having more defined language would be beneficial.

Concerning the management of campaign contributions, the Board suggested requiring a candidate to have a separate bank account, which needed to be zeroed out and closed within a certain time period following the election. The Board suggested that a candidate elect a treasurer to manage their campaign finances.

While reviewing the information, the Board also reviewed the City's campaign finance statements and compared them to other municipalities. Ms. Visocky informed the Board of the current practice, that if a candidate does not receive contributions exceeding \$50, they are required to provide a notarized declaration of lack of campaign contributions and expenditures form. The Board suggested the City remove this requirement, and only have the required campaign finance statement forms. Amending the current statements was also suggested by adding a required notary section.

Additionally, the Board reviewed City Code § 14-2.1 (J) and (K) regarding the penalties of the candidates who do not file or are late in filing their campaign finance statements. The Board agreed that this section should be amended. Before determining the details of the proposed amendments, the Board suggested that this be reviewed in more detail at a later time.

Finally, the Board reviewed absentee ballots. The City Charter states:

§ 3.1 - An absentee resident shall be entitled to be sent an absentee ballot as hereinabove provided only if the application therefor is received by said municipality at least ten days before the date of an election.

The Board discussed amending the deadline to receive an absentee ballot application, stating that if the City amended the City Code to require an earlier submission date for the Declaration of Intent, this would allow more time for registered voters to submit a request for an absentee ballot; therefore, amending the current deadline would not be necessary. Alternatively, if the City extended the date to submit an absentee ballot application, it would allow for unforeseen situations such as medical emergencies and those who are deployed for military leave.

When considering how the City could potentially increase voter turnout, while accommodating emergency situations, the Board discussed optional early voting. Concern was shared if this would be beneficial for the City, as it would require election judges to work in addition to the election day. Board member Towle stated that he would be attending the American Political Science Association conference and could inquire on the studies for municipal early voting.

The Board members also suggested providing a map on the City's Election website where residents could determine their voting location and qualification of a candidate living in the City by entering their address. For example, a layer could be added into the existing GIS Zoning map. Ms. Visocky stated she would ask the City's GIS Department if this was possible.

In conclusion, the Board directed Ms. Visocky to include the Campaign Financial Statements in the next meeting agenda packet. The Board agreed to continue its discussion of the content for the Declaration of Intent and the Campaign Contribution Statements during the next Board of Elections meeting.

OTHER MATTERS

The Board members inquired about conflicts of interest in circumstances where a Board member may share a certain relationship with a candidate and/or an elected official. Ms. Visocky replied that while the City's Code does not specifically address this situation, she highlighted that a Board member is not able to campaign for a candidate and on the day of an election, an election judge is prohibited to campaign for a candidate; therefore, from the City's perspective, this should not become a conflict of interest. The Board suggested that in the

event that a decision is made that may affect an individual candidate and/or elected official, that a Board member recuse themselves from discussion and vote of that matter.

Ms. Visocsky inquired about adding Reports from Board Members to its meeting agenda. The Board unanimously agreed to add Reports from Board Members to future meeting agendas.

ADJOURNMENT

The Board of Elections meeting adjourned at 12:36 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Shannon Visocsky