

CITY OF GREENBELT, MARYLAND
BOARD OF ELECTIONS

Agenda

December 21, 2023 – 5:30 pm

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89638801207?pwd=ZDIHZ3BNekhYmFzVTRHdXFZWTNCdz09>

*Dial-in: 301-715-8592
Meeting ID: 896 3880 1207
Passcode: 680278*

1. Call to order
2. Roll Call
3. Approval of Agenda
4. Approval of Meeting Minutes
 - a. October 12, 2023
 - b. October 19, 2023
5. Post-Election Discussion
 - a. Review Draft Memo
6. New Business
7. Schedule for Next Meeting
8. Adjournment

MEETING of the Board of Elections was held on Thursday, October 12, 2023.

Steven Gilbert, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm virtually via Zoom.

Board members present were Patricia Evans, Beth Terry, Alison Gary, and Maxine Morrison.

Staff present was Bonita Anderson, City Clerk.

Others present was Bill Orleans.

Approval of Agenda: Mr. Gilbert moved to approve the agenda. Ms. Terry seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: It was moved by Ms. Terry to approve the October 3, 2023, meeting minutes as amended to include the follow-up items. Mr. Gilbert seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

2023 Election Updates: Mr. Gilbert gave an update to the Board in case there would be a runoff election if several candidates do not meet the 40% threshold, noting the procedures and timeframe if this would happen.

Ms. Terry noted that Mr. Nguyen could add a write-in line to the ballot. She indicated that she reached out to both the candidate and their treasurers concerning correcting the first interim reports.

Ms. Terry explained to the Board the workflow process using ePulse and a brief overview of the training provided by Austin Dalton, KNOWiNK. Ms. Anderson will provide Mr. Dalton with the voter file.

Approval of the Election Training Manual: Ms. Evans suggested adding additional information to the training manual, such as a flow chart and diagram of the process. She will create a page outlining Early Voting procedures. Ms. Anderson would request a training manual on ePulse from Mr. Dalton.

Review Judge & Clerk Applications: Ms. Anderson will send appointment letters to the judges and clerks tomorrow.

Follow-up items:

- Ms. Anderson to follow up on the email sent to the Information Technology Director regarding the hotspot provider.
- Ms. Anderson will purchase two additional provisional bags for the precincts without drop boxes and an automatic letter opener.

New Business: The IVS training on voter accessibility devices and scanners will be held on October 24 at 10 am in the Council Chambers.

Schedule for Next Meeting: The Board meeting will be held on Thursday, October 19, via Zoom at 5:30 pm.

Ms. Evans moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Gary seconded.

The meeting ended at approximately 7:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Bonita Anderson, City Clerk

DRAFT

MEETING of the Board of Elections was held on Thursday, October 19, 2023.

Steven Gilbert, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm virtually via Zoom.

Board members present were Patricia Evans, Beth Terry, and Maxine Morrison.

Board member absent was Alison Gary (excused).

Staff present was Bonita Anderson, City Clerk.

Approval of Agenda: Mr. Gilbert moved to approve the agenda. Ms. Terry seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

Approval of Meeting Minutes: None.

2023 Election Updates: Ms. Anderson noted that her office received the following items: ballots, envelopes, and additional election bags. She pointed out that the total number of requests for ballots submitted to Fort Orange Press was 838. Ms. Anderson said a drop box would be delivered to the community center tomorrow. She indicated she received almost 100 ballots by mail, dropbox, and hand-delivered.

The Board discussed that all ballots received be scanned into ePulse as mail-in received and that if the voter didn't sign the outer envelope, it would not be counted.

Board Staffing for Early Voting: Saturday, November 4 and Sunday, November 5, 10 am – 3 pm

Community Center – Ms. Terry and Ms. Gary

Schrom Hills Park – Ms. Evans, Ms. Anderson, and Ms. Lashley-Mullen

Springhill Lake Recreation Center – Mr. Gilbert and Ms. Morrison

Follow-up items:

- Ms. Anderson to follow up on the email sent to the Information Technology Director regarding the hotspot provider.
- Ms. Anderson will request an additional day of training with IVS and KNOWiNK.
- Ms. Anderson will order early voting signs.

New Business: The Board discussed briefly the pay scale for election workers.

Schedule for Next Meeting: The Board meeting will be held on Thursday, November 2, via Zoom at 5:30 pm.

Ms. Evans moved to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Morrison seconded.

The meeting ended at approximately 7:01 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Bonita Anderson, City Clerk

DRAFT

DRAFT 21 DECEMBER 2023

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January ____, 2024
TO: City Council, City of Greenbelt
FROM: Board of Elections
RE: Review of November 2023 Election

The Board of Elections submits this as its report on proceedings for the election held 7 November 2023.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Board has concluded that the 2023 election, even with some logistical issues, went reasonably well. From vendor selection and contracting through the obtaining of printed ballots and private election services, we were able to run the election largely within budget restrictions, without major demands on permanent staff or more than the usual complement of poll workers. Campaign finance reporting was greatly improved, in both candidate compliance and timely Board review. Moreover, though vote totals only marginally improved, compared to prior elections, we found that voters better understood the process, were more informed in casting their ballots, and filed many fewer complaints.

USE OF SINGLE PRINTED BALLOT

In City elections before 2023, mail-in and early voters marked printed ballots while election-day voting was by machine. This practice was thought to make for efficiency, but it did leave a gap, for purposes of possible later review, between ballots cast prior to and on election day. The Board also found, after research and discussion, that the trend in

local and state elections elsewhere – including in Maryland – is to return voting to paper ballots that can be readily preserved. Consequently the Board agreed that ballot preparation and distribution, as well as post-vote scanning and counting, should employ a single form of paper ballot. We found a reliable and reasonably priced vendor for printing, preparation, and (where requested by individual voters) mailing of ballots, and those same ballots were used for early and election-day voting. Paper ballots worked well for different means of voting, and we plan to use them in future elections.

E-POLL BOOKS AND COUNTY VOTER REGISTRATION

City voter lists before 2023 were on paper, provided by the County Board of Supervisors of Elections. This system, though workable, was somewhat cumbersome, and limited voters on election day to voting at the precinct locations assigned them by the County.

In 2023 for the first time we took advantage of the availability of electronic, or “e-poll” books, and determined that their modest increased cost was justified. Where before voters in early or election-day balloting were given a paper card to review and sign, before they voted, this time their names and addresses were checked against e-poll listings from the County. This allowed voters on election day to vote in any precinct, and we found that about 268 voters (not counting provisional votes) took advantage of the opportunity. Moreover, the new electronic system allowed our clerks to instantly update County records, where a voter’s name, address, or other information changed.

SELECTION AND USE OF CONTRACT VENDORS

Our experience with the vendor in 2021, when we used a single contractor for all election services, from ballot preparation to furnishing of machines to tabulating votes, was discouraging: Mail-in ballots were often mailed late to voters, final counts were delayed, and many residents lodged complaints about the election process. With that

background we made extra efforts in 2023 to find and reach agreement with reliable vendors. We consulted nearby municipalities about the vendors they used, and the three we selected and reached agreement with performed well.

A crucial selection was the firm used for ballot preparation, printing, and mail-in voting. With considerable back-and-forth between Greenbelt and Albany, New York, we were able to design and have printed the ballots and the envelopes, with instructions, for our election, including what we hoped would be expanded mail-in voting. We were satisfied with the performance of the Albany vendor, and hope to take advantage of this experience – even if not the identical vendor – in future elections.

Our two other vendors were retained to provide e-poll book services, access machines for voters with disabilities, and scanners for vote tabulation the afternoon and evening of election day. They also did their jobs adequately, and we will keep them in mind in and after 2025.

The access machines for disabled-voter use were somewhat costly, but we were advised that such access is now required for all voters and that the cost cannot be legally avoided. Several voters with visual impairments used the machine at the Community Center polling place.

The firm that provided scanners was able to supply machines and instructions – as well as same-day support – for their use. In future elections we will have experience with these scanners, which we need for reading and tabulating votes late on election day.

PRE-ELECTION CANDIDATE ISSUES: EARLY CAMPAIGNING, FILLING OF SINGLE COUNCIL VACANCY AFTER ONE MEMBER'S RESIGNATION

In 2023, the only campaign issue that arose involved early campaigning, chiefly in online advertising and collection of petition signatures, by one of the eleven candidates. When other candidates brought to Board

attention the online ads and signature-collecting before new candidate packets were ready, we reviewed the City Charter and Election Code but could not say that early campaigning was prohibited – in any form. Once that issue was resolved, Council candidates proceeded as usual to obtain voter signatures for petitions, open (or continue) campaign finance accounts, appoint campaign treasurers, file signed petitions and acceptance forms, submit financial disclosures, and place advertising and signage for their campaigns.

One additional circumstance not involving the Board concerned the August resignation of a sitting Council member. Council applied Section 32 of Charter to select, shortly after the resignation, a former Council member to fill the position until the November election.

CANDIDATE CAMPAIGNS, FINANCIAL REPORTS

The Board’s monitoring of candidate campaigns in the fall of 2023, through the election on November 7th, did not disclose significant issues or problems. We received a number of questions from a first-time candidate, whose campaign’s direction was at times unclear, but candidates generally proceeded well enough on their own.

All candidates were able to comply with campaign financial reporting requirements in the Election Code. Board member Beth Terry contacted all campaign treasurers and secured necessary corrections to initial filings. By the time of final reports all campaigns were in compliance, and all met the transparency and disclosure purposes of the Code.

MAIL-IN VOTING

One area where the Board sought substantial improvement, mail-in voting, did see progress. In 2021 our vendor did not timely mail ballots to all voters who requested them, and many residents who sought the convenience (or in some cases necessity) of voting by mail were

disappointed. For 2023 we tried hard to reverse voters' perceptions of unreliability, and for the most part we succeeded.

Our vendor this time was able to prepare printed ballots well in time for the mail-in process. An issue arose, however, regarding prepaid postage. We thought that was taken care of by prior arrangements with the U.S. Postal Service but were informed, late in the mail-out process, that we did not have permission for the prepaid mailing of ballots *to* voters. (Our existing permit applied only to mail-in postage.) We were able to resolve the issue only with assistance from Congressman Glenn Ivey's office, who followed up for us with USPS personnel in Greenbelt.

A small number of voters who mailed ballots in did not follow instructions to sign and date their envelopes, and those ballots could not legally be counted.

A minor surprise was the relative non-use of mail-in ballots by residents who ordered them. In our process, all registered voters receive an application by mail, and those who wish to vote by mail submit their applications by late October. Our Albany vendor received 1,042 applications and mailed ballots out to those residents, but the Clerk's office received only 811 mail-in ballots. We're not sure why that was. Perhaps some who submitted applications put their mail-ins off until they decided it was too late or otherwise not feasible to submit them – by mail, in a drop box, or in person at the Clerk's office.

EARLY AND ELECTION-DAY VOTING

Early voting this year was curtailed in length of time, as Council agreed with the Board that the month-long early voting periods in prior elections were unnecessary and not cost-effective. Residents who voted early did so only on the weekend before election day, and those proceedings, using e-poll books, paper ballots (with submission envelopes), and limited Board and City personnel, proceeded without

difficulties. Three polling places were available for early voting, and on election day all five precinct polling places were open.

No major issues arose on election day, and the judges and clerks at the polling places were able to complete their work readily and on time. Some voters whose information did not precisely match e-poll book listings were required to submit provisional ballots, but all provisionals, 22 in number, were ultimately counted. Poll workers collected the paper ballots, delivered them to the Board at the Municipal Building, and certified their complete collections. We then over several hours scanned and tabulated all ballots, reporting out preliminary results late on election day, November 7th. Final results were certified two days later.

Although mail-in voting was greatly improved, early voting went smoothly, and election-day voting did not raise significant issues, we did not see significant improvement in voter participation. In 2021 we found that 17.8 % of registered voters cast ballots, a total of 2,675, and the votes this time, 2,685, showed the same level of participation.

We were quite disappointed by the low level of participation by voters under age 18. The number of registered 16- and 17-year-old voters is just 112 – far below our population in that age range, and in 2023 we found that only six actually cast ballots.

We will have to see, as the City offers voting rights to noncitizen residents, how well those residents participate in future elections.

The Board believes that in 2025 and later elections, the City should make efforts to reach out to residents early in the year. We can publicize the pendency of each election several times before November; we can encourage high school teachers and administrators to inform and encourage students to register for and participate in City elections; we can advertise – in bilingual notices – the availability of voting rights to noncitizens; and we can generally try to “talk up” resident involvement in the selection of City officials.

BALLOT ACCESS FOR VOTERS WITH DISABILITIES

As noted, the Board was required to and did provide machines for ballot access to persons with disabilities. A machine was available at each polling place, and residents with visual impairments were able to use the machine at the Community Center. They submitted their choices by listening with headphones to an oral rendering of the ballot and using a keypad to indicate their ballot selections.