

MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 12, 2023

TO: City Council, City of Greenbelt

FR: Board of Elections

RE: Proposed Election Code and Charter Amendments:
Early Voting and Date of Election Day

The Board of Elections, in meetings in October, November, and December, has reviewed several issues raised this year by citizens and Council members. This memorandum addresses Early Voting and possible changes to the date of Election Day.

EARLY VOTING

As the Board has advised, and as Council members have noted, Greenbelt is open for early voting for essentially the entire month of October, but city voters use the early voting procedure far less often than other methods. The majority of voters in 2021 voted on Election Day, but almost as many used the mail-in procedure. Early voting came in a distant third. For many days in October 2021, only a handful of voters used the early voting procedure.

It was suggested by several Council members that we consider compressing the early voting days, from four weeks to one, and opening more polling places during the early voting period.

To begin that discussion, the Board of Elections offers Attachment A, which amends Section 8-13 of the Code to provide for one weekend and the following five weekdays for Early Voting, at all (with one exception, in Center City) polling places. It is hoped that this suggested amendment may allow more Early Voting, for more citizens, at more convenient times and places. One issue to address is staffing during the seven days of Early Voting.

ELECTION DAY DATE AND TIME

Citizens and Board members discussed the possibility of changing the voting date from Tuesday to Sunday. If Election Day is on a Sunday and the polls are open from mid-morning until mid-evening, fewer citizens will have to take time off from their employment, and traffic congestion at and around polling places should be eased. Also, the five polling places – for precincts 3, 6, 8, 13, and 18 – should be more readily available, and it will perhaps be easier to recruit elections clerks and judges to serve at the polling places.

However, many voters are accustomed to voting on Tuesday. Also, we have received feedback that some residents would not want to devote a weekend day to an official activity like voting. Sunday, of course, is a religious day for many residents.

Attachment A: Amendment to Section 8-13, Early Voting

ATTACHMENT A:

GREENBELT ELECTION CODE AMENDMENT:
EARLY VOTING PROCEDURES

Sec. 8-13. Early voting.

(a) Residents of the city who are qualified voters registered with the Prince George's County Board of Elections have the right to vote by early voting in municipal elections, as provided in this section.

(b) For purposes of this Code, an "early voting ballot" is a ballot not used in a polling place on election day nor for "[absentee] *mail-in* voting," and "election day" means the day of a municipal election.

(c) Voting by early voting in municipal elections shall be as follows:

(1) Early voting will begin on the [third] *second* Saturday prior to the election and end on the [first] Friday prior to the election[on the following schedule: Third Saturday (9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.) and third Sunday (11 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.) prior to the election in Greenbelt East; second Saturday (9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.) and second Sunday (11 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.) prior to the election in Greenbelt West; and Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays (9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.) and Tuesdays (9:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.) in the municipal building throughout this period]. *On the Saturday and Sunday that begin the early voting period, all polling places that are open on election day shall be open for early voting, from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. On the Monday through Friday during the early voting period, all polling places open on election day shall be open for early voting, from 8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., except that the office of the clerk of the council shall be open in place of the community center polling place.*

(2) To cast an early voting ballot, the voter must complete the ballot on the premises, place it in a blank, sealed envelope, and then place the sealed envelope in the early voting envelope on which are written the voter's name as registered and signature. The voter shall place the early voting envelope in the designated early voting ballot box. Early voting envelopes that contain more than one blank, sealed envelope shall be kept by the city clerk, [and] *but* those early voting ballots shall not be counted. If a ballot is submitted in a properly signed and sealed early voting envelope without being contained in a blank, sealed envelope, then the board shall determine by majority vote whether a violation of the voter's privacy has occurred [or] *and* whether the ballot may be counted. If a determination is made to count the ballot, then a member of the board shall place the ballot in a blank, sealed envelope.

(3) The city clerk shall deliver the ballot box containing the early voting sealed, blank envelopes to the early voting clerks appointed by the board of elections for the counting of early voting ballots. The city clerk shall advise the early voting clerks of the numbers of early voting ballots cast, and shall keep the same record of the early voting ballots as is kept by the clerks of election at their polling places.

(4) Upon receipt of the ballot box containing the early voting sealed, blank envelopes, the early voting clerks shall open the sealed envelopes and determine that no envelope contains more than one (1) ballot. Ballots in sealed envelopes that contain more than one (1) ballot shall not be counted.

(5) If an early voting ballot is challenged by the city clerk or an early voting ballot clerk for noncompliance with this section, it may not be counted until the board of elections determines that it is valid. [Early voting ballot validity shall be determined by rules adopted by the board.] (Ord. No. 1302, 8-10-09) Secs. 8-14--8-20. Reserved.

KEY:

[Brackets] indicate deletions from existing law.

Italics indicate additions to existing law.