



Election Modernization Committee

Date: June 29, 2021.

Time: 7:30 PM - 9:00 PM.

Location: Conducted by Remote Participation.

Minutes

Attendance: Greg Dennis, Juli Brazile, Juhan Sonin, Walter Horn, Paul Parravano, Adam Badik, Maxwell Palmer, Giovanna DeStefanis, Len Diggins, Lesley Waxman, Rebecca Gruber, Bill Logan

1. Executive Order on Remote Participation

Greg took attendance and confirmed we would continue to meet remotely under the extended Governor's order.

2. Draft Minutes for Review, Edits, and Approval - Tue, May 25, 2021

Minutes approved unanimously.

3. Letter to Secretary of State about AutoMARK terminals

Paul reported that he spoke to the Watertown Disability Commission, the Arlington Disability Commission, and the past president of American Council for the Blind and learned that the Disability Law Center in Boston last year developed a computer based ballot that was tested in November and was not a huge success. They would like to unite a few more groups to do a larger push, including the Cambridge Disability Commission, and do a meeting with all groups prior to writing a joint letter to the Secretary of the Commonwealth. Juhan would like to test the Automark machines. Juli will ask ES&S what's involved. Can we arrange a comparison with reps from multiple companies? Paul says there is a summer convention very soon. Newer speech based options have been developed so AutoMark could be very old technology. Adam suggests a simpler letter just on behalf of Arlington voters, too. Paul will draft that letter and circulate.

4. Status of Reprecincting

Juli Towns draw lines first and then the state uses those precincts to draw the state lines and US congressional lines. Election Commission and Waltham City Council have drafted letters against the House proposal for the House to draw

their districts first. Senate has a different version that Cindy Friedman sent to Lesley. Reform groups argue that state lines should worry about minority representation and feel stuck with town lines. Speaking to Juli's proposal to reduce the number of Arlington precincts from 21 to 16, Walter thinks more precincts is easier for the state lines. Paul distrusts when the state is drawing lines for minority voters; he has bad memories of politicians who did this for personal gain. Lesley notes that Reps need to live in their precinct for a year so it's tough for them to not know. Bill asked about town meeting members - Juli said we would go from 252 to 240 (16 precincts of 15 members each). Len concerned about the ranked election because it guarantees that the strongest candidates (highest vote getters) are grouped into one cohort creating a cycle where it's very hard for new people to challenge. However, the process is fixed in state law so can't be avoided.

5. Status of Home Rule Petitions

Juli reports Town Counsel has to review the wording and then the Select Board will submit the Ranked Choice Voting article from the recent Annual Town Meeting. Greg reports that Article regarding Town Meeting elections from the November STM was heard by the Joint Committee on Election Law last week and there was no opposition, so very likely to be enacted in time for our next Annual Town Election.

6. Cost Breakdown of Elections

Len would recommend that all elections be exclusively Vote By Mail (VBM) in the hope of reducing the cost of staffing polling places. Adam was concerned about the differences between no excuse VBM and Absentee Voting. Adam believes that the Committee should recommend the election practices that it believes are best without regard to the current laws. That would put the next step in the Select Board and our Legislators.

Adam would like to report back to the Select Board on the costs of the modes we used. Walter thinks Arlington should undertake a study on the costs/budgets. In response to Juli's comment that the Town Clerk does not manage the entire election budget, Greg asked if the Clerk should control the entire election budget. Juli does not think that's workable but it can be explored. Discussing costs for expanding in-person early voting to local elections, Juli thinks she could use her staff and minimal overtime. Len thinks we should study using VBM exclusively; Greg reports that Al Tosti likes the idea. Juli laid some of the costs for VBM: print and mail application postcards, possible pay for return postage, staffing to process the applications and mailing and receiving voted ballots. Lesley notes that costs and budgets are often split up because so many departments (from DPW to Police) are involved so a cost study is complex. Rebecca asked if there is a cost if people use a drop box when the Town has printed the postage paid number on the return envelope; Lesley said she thought no. Currently, Absentee voters in Arlington pay their own postage. Juhan wants to know the cost of voting. Town should pay for a study. Mail in voting is usually lower cost. Juli will ask Doug Heim if or how

donations could be used to offset costs for an election. Greg will talk to Al Tosti and maybe some Finance Committee people can help with a cost study. Paul wants to know about extending in person early voting hours beyond a few extra hours, but Juli notes that the cost benefit rarely favors more hours.

7. Early Voting and Mail-in Ballots

The previous section covered both costs and the details of early voting and vote by mail. It is interesting to note that voting by mail can be harder for transient populations, so election day polling locations have important benefits.

8. Public Comment and/or Questions

There were no questions or comments.

9. New Business

Juhan will review Town Survey questions for ones we didn't use last time and new topics for a future EMC discussion so we can prioritize. Paul notes that Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) has been in the news and he has heard more negative comments recently after the NYC election. Greg says there are lots of articles and opinions about NYC; exit polls indicate voters liked RCV. so talking heads raised more issues than voters. Next meeting we can talk more after we know the results and can read some of the commentary. Walter would like copies of the reprecincting legislation the Senate is reviewing. Lesley can email it to Greg who will share it with everyone along with links to articles on RCV in NYC. Rebecca asked to be included on the email chain.

Next meeting: July 20th at 7:30

10. Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 9:06