



November 2, 2017

Beverly Anthes, Chairwoman
Joseph W. Mullen
Thomas F. O'Brien
Thel Sar

City Manager Kevin J. Murphy
Mayor Edward J. Kennedy, Jr.
Members of the City Council

Dear Mr. Manager, Mayor Kennedy and Members of the City Council:

I write in response to the request to provide a report on polling locations and discuss confusion regarding polling locations prior to the preliminary election.

Objective

The Election Commission commenced a review of all polling locations within the City of Lowell in 2013. At the time, the City of Lowell had approximately 55,000 registered voters voting at twenty polling locations. As many of the polling locations were non-compliant with state regulations or were not handicap accessible, the Election Commission implemented a plan to review and relocate non-compliant polling locations as well as polling locations that no longer fit the needs of voters and neighborhoods.

As the number of registered voters within the City of Lowell continues to grow, finding adequate polling locations that fulfill accessibility and regulatory requirements is more of a challenge in some neighborhoods. Inconsistent voter turnout makes determining the functionality of a polling location an ongoing topic. Some spaces that are sufficient for the turnout during a Primary Election are not sufficient for a State or Presidential Election.

The Election Commission, in collaboration with the Elections Division of the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, has reviewed and certified our current polling locations to ensure they are compliant with the requirements of 950 CMR §51 and are convenient, community-centric spaces.

Public Review Process

Following a report to the City Council on July 12, 2016 outlining the proposed changes to polling locations, a public meeting was held on Thursday, July 14, 2016 at the Lowell Senior Center and the public had the opportunity to provide feedback on proposed changes to polling

locations for the State Primary and Presidential Election in 2016. Following the public hearing, the Election Commission met to review community feedback and the location assessment reports provided by Elections Division of the Office of the Secretary of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. On Tuesday, July 26, 2016, fourteen polling locations were voted on by the Election Commission for the 2016 election season. After receiving positive community feedback in 2016, the Election Commission voted on Tuesday, August 15, 2017 to continue to vote in the same fourteen locations. Therefore, no polling locations were changed for the City Preliminary and City Biennial Election.

Signage Updates and Polling Location Visibility

Additional signage has been acquired for both the exterior and interior of polling locations throughout the City. Starting in 2015, with collaboration of the Solid Waste & Recycling Office, signage advertising upcoming elections has been deployed to major intersections throughout the City. Additionally, "Vote Here on Election Day" signs are installed at all polling locations the week prior to an election. Inside each polling location, large ward and precinct banners direct voters to the appropriate check-in table and new check-in and check-out signage clarify each table's use. New inserts for our existing A-frames have been printed for all current polling locations and will be deployed on Tuesday, November 7, 2017. Additionally, parking and directional signage has been acquired and will be used on Election Day to increase visibility.

Pre Preliminary Confusion

Prior to the City Preliminary on Tuesday, September 26, 2017, two precinct locations appeared on the Election Division's webpage, as well as in the Sunday, September 24, 2017 edition of the Lowell Sun, incorrectly stating that voting for Ward 6, Precincts 2 and 3, was at the Saint Louis School Hall. The correct information is that Ward 6, Precincts 2 and 3, vote at the Pawtucketville Memorial Elementary School Gymnasium.

On Monday, September 25, 2017, the webpage was corrected, directing voters of Ward 6, Precincts 2 and 3 to the Pawtucketville Memorial Elementary School Gymnasium. This is consistent with the voting information residents received on their Census Form, the non-respondent confirmation cards, and their previous voting locations.

In addition to correcting the webpage, the newspaper was contacted that same morning and it corrected the error. Similarly, the City Council and all neighborhood groups were notified via email that voting for Ward 6, Precincts 2 and 3 would be at the Pawtucketville Memorial Elementary School Gymnasium. Additional signage was prepared for both Saint Louis School Hall and the Pawtucketville Memorial Elementary School Gymnasium confirming the voting location for Ward 6, Precincts 2 and 3.

Provisional ballots were made available at all precincts for those that are unable to go to their assigned location. We received no reports that the misinformation, which was limited to the webpage and the newspaper, negatively affected anybody's ability to vote in the correct location.

Conclusion

Finding adequate polling locations that fulfil accessibility and regulatory requirements is difficult in some neighborhoods. The Commission appreciates the ongoing support of our community partners, and the many City departments that it takes to make an election happen. In preparation for future elections, the Commission will proactively continue to analyze and assess all polling locations in addition to Election Day policies and procedures.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eda Matchak". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "E" and a long, sweeping tail.

Eda Matchak
Director of Elections/Municipal Hearing Officer

cc: City of Lowell Election Commission