

Board of Elections, City of Takoma Park
November, 3 2020 City Election Update (October 21, 2020)

The Board of Elections and city staff continue to prepare for the November 3 elections. The elections are primarily being conducted by mail to reduce the number of people voting in-person on Election Day.

Communications

Notification mail: All households in the city were mailed a postcard with information about the upcoming election in September. The October city newsletter contained an election insert with information about the candidates and the election process. All residents were also mailed a one-page information sheet about the elections immediately prior to the ballot mailing. The city continues to publicize the election on its social media platforms and website. Takoma Park residents can contact elections@takomaparkmd.gov or call 301-891-7267 if they have questions. There have been several inquiries already and we continue to respond.

Mail ballots

Ballot mailing: The city's vendor, Fort Orange Press, delivered ballots to the Gaithersburg mail facility on Wednesday, October 14. The board had intended for ballots to be sent earlier (around October 9), but there were some delays in the preparation of final materials to accompany ballots.

Mail ballot returns: The city has set up a business reply mail account to cover postage for all ballots returned by mail. The city also has two ballot drop boxes where residents can return ballots at any time up until 8pm on November 3. The drop boxes are at the Takoma Park Community Center and the Takoma Park Recreation Center on New Hampshire Avenue.

Ballot intake: City staff will regularly collect mail ballots from the post office and from the two drop boxes. If voters have made a mistake that needs to be corrected, the city will attempt to contact the voter.

Voter Assistance Days

Beginning tomorrow (October 22), staff and volunteers will be available from 9 am to 5 pm to provide any type of voter assistance. The location for this service has been changed from the rear parking lot to the vicinity of the ballot boxes in the front parking lot.

Election Day

Drive through voting: The Board encourages all voters to use their mail-in ballots to avoid long lines on Election Day. For those voters who need to vote in person on Election Day, there will be drive-through voting in the parking lot behind the community center. Board members and city staff have met twice to review the layout and traffic flow for Election Day. Pedestrians will also be able to vote in the parking lot. The current plan is for vehicles to enter from Philadelphia Avenue and exit onto Maple Avenue. Election Day voting will be available from 7am - 8pm and provide all services, such as same day registration, the use of a ballot marking device, and provisional voting.

Election equipment and results

Electronic pollbooks: The city has received eight Poll Pads from its vendor, KnowInk, as part of a pilot program for use in this election. The Poll Pads are modified iPads that are used to check-in voters against the register and track who has voted. The Poll Pads will also be used to scan ballot barcodes when ballots envelopes are received and also to check-in voters on Election Day. The Board has had two training sessions with KnowInk staff on using the pollbooks and setting them up for receiving mail ballots and on Election Day.

Ballot marking device: The city has already received the ballot marking device equipment, which will be available on Election Day and during voter assistance hours with the City Clerk. The ballot marking device allows voters to mark their ballot on a computer using a touchscreen or by listening to audio prompts. A paper copy of their ballot is then printed with their selections.

Scanners: The city also received two high speed scanners to scan ballots after they are processed. Staff and board members viewed a demonstration of the scanners with the vendor and have undertaken subsequent testing. During the testing, the Board scanned 832 different ballots representing all possible combinations of votes on a ballot. The testing verified that the scanners counted all ballots correctly. The Board used two different electronic tabulators to calculate a ranked choice voting outcome. Both tabulators provided the same result and matched the correct result. The Board also tested incorrectly marked ballots to ensure the scanners recognize errors.

Results: The Board will provide regular updates on the number of ballots received once ballot intake begins. Starting on November 3, the board will release daily updates of the vote count in each election as ballots arrive and are scanned. These results will be posted on the city website.

Staffing: There are two main items that require election workers, the processing of mail in ballots and the staffing of Election Day. The board plans to begin processing received ballots in the next few days as people have already started to return their ballots. Staffing will primarily consist of Board of Elections members, city staff, and a small number of election workers who volunteered to serve for this election. On Election Day, the Board will need approximately 12-15 workers to manage the process. The board continues to recruit election workers for Election Day. The first training for two volunteers to assist with mail in ballots took place this past Saturday, October 17. Additional training sessions will be conducted in the next two weeks.

Health and safety precautions

COVID-19: The city adopted an all mail election earlier this year as a safety precaution for voters and election workers. The Board is planning other election processes with safety in mind, such as limiting the number of people in a given space for ballot counting and conducting Election Day outdoors in the parking lot.