



To: Town Council

Fr: Paul Bockelman
Town Manager

Dt: September 11, 2020

Re: Report on Voter Turnout for September 1, 2020 Election

Executive Summary

The Town Clerk's office conducted a very successful primary election. It was an unprecedented election that had a highly contested primary contest that generated intense interest, new election protocols with the introduction of Vote-by-Mail voting, and major modifications due to the concerns over COVID-19.

The Town Clerk and her staff did a tremendous job in pulling this off under very trying conditions. I also want to acknowledge the important work by other Town staff, especially the Town's Facilities Director, in making the election work as well as it did on Election Day.

There was a very large turnout for this primary election with 7,180 votes cast, which equates to 42.9% of registered voters submitting a ballot. This compares to 27.1% for the 2018 primary and 24.2% for the 2016 primary election.

Staff is also already busily preparing for heavy turnout in the November 3rd election. Here I will update you on several topics related to the fall 2020 elections; more details can be provided next time upon request.

Election Results

For the September 1, 2020 State Primary, 7,180 ballots were cast representing 42.94% of the voters. Of these:

- There were 440 (AV) absentee ballot requests, and 225 voters returned their AV ballots.
- There were 6,420 (EV) early ballot requests, and 4,747 people returned their EV ballots.
- There were 409 people who voted early in person from 8/22 to 8/28. Their ballots were included in the EV number above.

Election results were published on the Town website in a timely fashion. As always, our staff does a terrific job of publishing local results and turnout on the Town website in a timely fashion, despite our pandemic working conditions:

<https://www.amherstma.gov/81/Voter-Information>
<https://www.amherstma.gov/650/Upcoming-and-Past-Election-Information>
<https://www.amherstma.gov/3553/Vote-By-Mail>

<https://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/52731/September-1-2020-State-Primary-Results---FINAL>
<https://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/52757/OFFICIAL-RESULTS---State-Primary-September-1-2020-Town-Wide-Turnout>

You may have seen newspaper headlines about both increased voter turnout and the new use of the new fall 2020 Vote-by-Mail voting system. Attached please find a new report of how many of those ballots were cast by mail via traditional absentee in person or by mail or the new "no excuses" Vote-by-Mail voting, by Early Voting in person, and in person on Election Day. Note that Absentee ballots are included in the Vote-by-Mail voting numbers as the ballots are identical even though they are tracked separately.

Voting Schedule and Deadlines

The deadlines for the November 3, 2020 election are established by the State:

Voter registration or update deadline for Election	Saturday October 24, 2020
Early Voting for Election	October 17-30, 2020
Election	Tuesday, November 3, 2020

Deadline to submit an *application* for Vote-by-Mail ballot: Wednesday October 28 at 5:00 pm

Deadline to submit the actual completed and signed Vote-by-Mail ballot via the USPS or the drop box at Town Hall:

Drop box: Tuesday November 3 by 8:00 pm

USPS: must be postmarked on or before November 3rd AND delivered by USPS to the Town Hall by Friday November 6th.

Details: <https://www.amherstma.gov/3553/Vote-By-Mail>

Note that the Town Clerk has already received many applications for Vote-by-Mail ballots for the November 3 election as many people selected both when they completed the application postcard sent to every registered voter by the Secretary of the Commonwealth.

Voting Location Decision Deadlines

As you will recall, the Town Council voted on August 10th to replace the traditional eight polling locations for ten voting precincts with a slightly different set of eight polling locations:

<https://www.amherstma.gov/ArchiveCenter/ViewFile/Item/12249>

That vote applied to all remaining 2020 elections. That vote included the following statement:

Furthermore, this will have no disparate adverse impact on access to the polls on the basis of race, national origin, disability, income, or age. This change shall be in place for 2020. The Town shall study the election results and patterns by mail or in-person with an assessment of any disparate patterns by neighborhood, race, national origin, disability, income, or age and the results of new mail-voting and report back to inform possible future changes in 2021.

If the Town Council chooses to change the in person polling places it voted August 10th for the November 3rd election, the Town Council needs to have completed that vote twenty days prior to the November 3rd election, which is Wednesday, October 14, 2020.

Staff is meeting with election wardens this coming week to hear concerns, comments, and suggestions for the November 3rd general election. Subsequently, the Temporary Town Clerk will be meeting with the Town Council to provide a thorough update on the Town Council's decision to relocate some polling locations to the high school. Pending these discussions with election wardens, staff does not anticipate any changes to the polling locations that were used in the September 1, 2020 election.

There are currently Town Council meetings scheduled for Mondays September 14, September 21, October 5, and October 19. As last time, any proposed change for in person polling locations on November 3 would need to be noticed -- including a report on disparate impact -- on the Town Bulletin Board 3 days in advance of the vote, meaning Wednesday September 16 for a Monday September 21 vote, or Wednesday September 30 for a Monday October 5 vote.

Early Voting

All in person Early Voting for the September 1, 2020 election took place at the Bangs Community Center as follows:

- Saturday August 22, 2020: 2:00 pm to 8:00 pm
- Sunday, August 23, 2020: 11:00 am to 3:00 pm
- Monday August 24, 2020 to Friday, August 28, 2020 8:00 am to 4:30 pm

As you will recall, the Town Council does not vote on Early Voting locations or times. Based on feedback from poll workers and the public, the Town Clerk's office intends to continue early voting at the Bangs Center. This decision must be finalized by October 2nd and communicated to the Secretary of State's office by October 9th.

<https://www.amherstma.gov/2280/Early-Voting>

- Saturday 10/17 & Sunday 10/18 10:00 am - 2:00 pm
- Monday 10/19 - Friday 10/23 8:00 am - 4:30 pm
- Saturday 10/24 2:00 pm - 8:00 pm
 - NOTE: 10/24 is the last day to register to vote. In-person voter registration will be available from 2:00 – 8:00 pm.
- Sunday 10/25 10:00 am - 2:00 pm
- Monday 10/26 - Friday 10/30 8:00 am - 4:30 pm

Drop off ballot box

Given the media attention to possible USPS delivery delays, many residents commented on their appreciation of the all-hours drop box located on the Main St side of Town Hall.

Although we have had some requests to have such boxes at each of the in person polling places either before and/or during election day, this is not feasible as the box needs to be both anchored and under video surveillance.