

Polling Place Consolidation for 2020 Elections Town of Amherst Massachusetts July 29, 2020

In accordance with Section 11 of Chapter 115 of the Acts of 2020, the Amherst Town Council has determined that the public convenience and public health would be better served by changing the current eight polling places for our ten voting precincts to a single building within the municipality. Furthermore, the Amherst Town Council has determined to make this change permanent.

This evaluation has been made available on the Town website and at the offices of the Town Clerk not later than 3 days prior to the Town Council vote of August 3, 2020 changing the polling place.

The Town Clerk submits (see **References** for the public meeting 07-20-20), and the Town Council agrees that the public health and public convenience would be better served during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic by consolidating voting by the ten voting precincts of the Town of Amherst into one location, the Amherst-Pelham Regional High School (ARHS) located at 21 Mattoon Street, and that there is no disparate adverse impact on access to the polls on the basis of race, national origin, disability, income or age, based on the following.

Current polling locations are less optimal than one for both public convenience and public health:

There are currently ten voting precincts casting votes in eight locations on Election Day, as three of the ten voting precincts have separate stations within one of the eight locations. Other locations not used for casting votes on Election Day have been used recently for Early Voting, including a conference room at Town Hall, and a location on the campus of the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

Of the eight locations for casting ballots on Election Day, two of the public locations (meaning four of the voting precincts, as one of these holds three voting precincts – e.g. North Fire Station and the Bangs Community Center) and two of the private locations (churches) are currently closed or have limited capacity to the public due to the global pandemic, and others are in elementary schools. Prior to the global pandemic, parents have repeatedly expressed concerns about voting in the elementary schools due to the physical location of the polling site within the elementary buildings and concern about security.

Some residents live in physical proximity to one current polling place but must travel considerably further to their assigned voting precinct polling place.

One of the eight current polling places has a steep uphill climb in sometimes questionable weather from a private parking lot unless the voter has a handicapped placard for one of two handicapped spaces located at the voting site; voters with mobility impairments that do not qualify for a handicapped placard are disadvantaged by that current site.

Most of the current eight locations for casting ballots on Election Day are not well served by public transportation routes. Easy parking is a challenge at most of the current eight locations.

One retirement community offers rides to the polls to its residents, and some local organizations have also offered rides to the polls throughout the community.

Public Health and Public Convenience is improved at the new consolidated polling place:

After thorough consideration and work with a variety of Town staff, the Town Clerk is confident this one polling location will be able to provide six feet of social distancing, privacy from other voters, and be easy to clean and wipe down polling booths and all other touch points after every voter.

All voters have multiple alternatives to voting in person on Election Day: which includes in-person early voting or voting-by-mail, traditional Absentee Ballot, the fairly new option of Early Voting, and brand-new postage paid Vote by Mail. No voter actually has to appear in person on Election Day.

No matter how we locate the polling places, poll workers are frequently retired members of our community with age and health factors that will prevent some of them from working these elections during this global pandemic.

Less experienced poll workers will be well-supported by having numerous local experts on hand in one polling location. This will move voters through more quickly.

If in the unfortunate event that contact tracing becomes necessary, tracing from one location rather than multiple locations will be more accurate, especially as staff sometimes work in more than one location.

Specifically:

1. There is no disparate adverse impact on the basis of disability or age.
 - a. The Amherst-Pelham Regional High School is a centrally located, fully accessible, building that can safely house all the necessary equipment needed to properly conduct in-person voting and provide ample space for the necessary social distancing requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic. The building can accommodate persons with disabilities or any other special considerations.
 - b. Parking for those with handicapped placards is available.
 - c. Careful consideration is being given to how voters with other mobility impairments will be assisted from the parking lot into the polling place, and also accommodated with seating areas as they move through any line, a line that is not expected to be longer than that found at a grocery store during this global pandemic.
 - d. Amherst College and Hampshire College students living on those campuses have not traditionally had a polling place on campus. Their access to voting in person on Election Day is no worse with one polling place than it is currently.
 - e. University of Massachusetts Amherst students living on that campus do not currently have a polling place on campus due to low turnout when it was offered compared to

security and staffing concerns. While Early Voting has been offered on the University of Massachusetts Amherst campus in 2016 and 2018 with great success, this will not be feasible in 2020 due to the significant limitations as to who has access to campus during the global pandemic, as well as the ongoing challenge of a secure location to leave equipment overnight. Students who cannot leave campus due to global pandemic restrictions in general, or quarantine or isolation in particular, may avail themselves of Absentee or Vote by Mail. Significant outreach by the Town Clerk in partnership with the University will result in students being fully aware of their options and the associated deadlines. Unusually, UMass classes begin August 24 due to the global pandemic, and therefore students living in the dorms and throughout Town are expected to arrive in the community prior to the August 22 voter registration deadline for the September 1, 2020 primary, so we do expect higher than normal turnout for that primary.

2. There is no disparate adverse impact on the basis of race or national origin.
 - a. The Amherst-Pelham Regional High School is a public school building that educates students of many races and national origins. Amherst is a diverse community and this is reflected in the standards and practices of our Regional and Elementary School Systems as well as our Elections. No voter should feel unwelcome or uncomfortable entering and voting within the High School
 - b. Voters who speak languages other than English will be accommodated at the single polling place just as they have been at the eight polling places.

3. There is no disparate adverse impact on the basis of income.
 - a. The major economic factor is transportation. The Amherst-Pelham Regional High School is within 2.5 miles of all eight existing polling locations. This distance should not adversely impact the majority of voters.
 - b. There are 2 major PVTA bus stops within 1/4 and 1/3 of a mile of the high school. Those bus stops serve every PVTA route in Amherst, including UMass circulator routes, and routes serving Amherst's large apartment complexes.
 - c. The Town Clerk will be offering shuttles from the various locations to the High School. This will be open to all voters who may need transportation.
 - d. If transportation issues are irresolvable for certain voters there will be early voting widely available at the centrally located Bangs Community Center, which is also on major bus routes, prior to each election and mail in early voting with all postage costs prepaid will be available to all voters.
 - e. Substantial outreach is being developed by the Town Clerk in partnership with various agencies to ensure all voters are aware of their voting options well prior to actual in-person voting on Election Day. This includes extensive use of the popular Town website including News & Announcements on the front page, Twitter, Facebook, email notifications to subscribers, use of the subscriber emergency notification phone system (sometimes referred to as reverse 911 call), notices in Senior Center publications, notices to parents via school publications, notices in

community rooms of apartment complexes, notices through college and university email lists, etc.

Based on the information above and the information provided by Town Clerk, the Town Council reports that the consolidation of polling places in accordance with Section 11 of Chapter 115 of the Acts of 2020 will have no disparate adverse impact on the basis of race, national origin, disability, income, or age.

DRAFT MOTION FOR TOWN COUNCIL 08-03-20: VOTED (roll call Zoom) 08-03-20 to locate in-person voting on September 1, 2020 and November 3, 2020 and for all elections going forward for all ten voting precincts at Amherst-Pelham Regional High School, 21 Mattoon Street, as this will have no disparate adverse impact on access to the polls on the basis of race, national origin, disability, income or age.

On behalf of the Amherst Town Council, August 3, 2020

Lynn Griesemer, President
Amherst Town Council

References:

Town Clerk presentation to the Town Council 07-20-20

<https://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/52156/7b-Election-Polling-Locations-07-20-2020-PB>

<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2020/Chapter115>

AN ACT RELATIVE TO VOTING OPTIONS IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19

SECTION 11. Notwithstanding section 24 of chapter 54 of the General Laws or any other general or special law to the contrary, the select board, board of selectmen, town council or city council may, by recorded and public vote, change any polling place to be used at the primary election or the general election at least 20 days prior to the date of the primary election or general election if it is determined that the public convenience or public health would be better served. If the select board, board of selectmen or town council determines that the public convenience or public health would be better served, they may house all polling places in a single building within the municipality, if such building is suitably equipped; provided, however, that alcoholic beverages shall not be served or consumed in that portion of a building used as a polling place, during voting hours or while ballots are being counted therein. In cities, the city council may designate polling places in non-adjacent precincts if they determine the public convenience or public health would be better served. In making a decision to change a polling place, the select board, board of selectmen, town council or city council shall evaluate and report on whether such change would have a disparate adverse impact on access to the polls on the basis of race, national origin, disability, income or age, and not later than 3 days prior to changing a polling place, shall make publicly available on its website and at the office of the town or city clerk a report on its evaluation. When the polling places have been designated pursuant to this section, the board of registrars shall post on the municipal website and at other such places as it may determine, a description of the polling places and shall notify voters by using an electronic means, to the extent available, such as via email or reverse 911 call.

Town of Amherst website Voter Information:

<https://www.amherstma.gov/81/Voter-Information>

<https://www.amherstma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/52156/7b-Election-Polling-Locations-07-20-2020-PB>

<https://www.amherstma.gov/CivicAlerts.aspx?AID=2683>

Posted on: July 21, 2020

Vote by Mail Applications



Voting by mail is available to all registered Massachusetts voters for all elections in 2020. You do not need an excuse to vote by mail this year. In-person voting will still be available.

To vote by mail, all you need to do is:

1. **Complete** a [Vote by Mail Application](#); or use the pre-addressed paper application card that you may have received in the mail.
2. **Deliver** your application to Amherst Town Clerk, 4 Boltwood Avenue, Amherst, MA 01002 or drop in the drop box on the Main St. side of Town Hall. Or return the pre-addressed paper application card that you may have received in the mail.
3. **Vote** when your ballot arrives;
4. **Return** your ballot.

Applications must reach The Amherst Town Clerk's office by **August 26** for the State Primary. Applications must reach the Amherst Town Clerk's Office by **October 28** for the State Election.

Apply early, in order to have enough time to return your ballot.

For more information on voting by mail, see the Secretary of Commonwealth's page on [Voting by Mail FAQs](#).

To contact the Amherst Town Clerk, email vote@amherstma.gov or call 413-259-3050 or visit www.amherstma.gov/vote



2020 Elections:

Schedule Locations Pandemic

Shavena Martin
Town Clerk

07-20-2020

2020 Elections Schedule

September 1st

- ▶ Primary Election
(U.S. Senate, Kennedy vs. Markey)
- ▶ Registration Deadline:
August 22, 2020
- ▶ Early Voting:
August 22 -28, 2020
(Bangs Community Center)

November 3rd

- ▶ General Election
(U.S. President, Biden vs. Trump)
- ▶ Registration Deadline:
October 24, 2020
- ▶ Early Voting:
October 17- 30, 2020
(Location to be determined)



Current Polling Locations

- Precinct 1: North Zion Church
- Precinct 2: North Fire Station
- Precinct 3: Immanuel Lutheran Church
- Precinct 4: Bangs Comm. Center
- Precinct 5: Bangs Comm. Center
- Precinct 6: Fort River School
- Precinct 7: Crocker Farm School
- Precinct 8: Munson Memorial Library
- Precinct 9: Wildwood School
- Precinct 10: Bangs Comm. Center



Current Polling Locations Pandemic Impact

The ten precincts are operated at seven different locations consisting of two churches, two elementary schools, a fire station, a library, and the Bangs Community Center.

Limited alternative buildings available for use in Town.

One of the ten sites is unavailable:

- Fire station: locked-down facility

Four of the ten sites present concerns/questions:

- Schools: worry about bringing the public into elementary school buildings
- Immanuel Lutheran Church and North Zion Churches: closed for services, possibly available for voting
- Bangs Community Center: currently closed to the public



Current Polling Locations Pandemic Impact

- Town Clerk identified concerns
- Town Manager assembled a team led by the Town Clerk that includes: Fire Chief, Facilities Maintenance Manager, and Superintendent of Public Works
- Cooperation and support from School Superintendent and School Facilities Manager
- Team developed alternatives and recommendations



Recommendation: Locate all 10 precincts at Amherst-Pelham Regional High School

Proposal:

- Creates one controlled environment for in-person voting on Election Day.
- Ten precincts vote at one location.
- Ample space to accommodate all ten precincts.
- Sufficient spacing for social distancing.
- Ability to create a single entrance/exit traffic pattern.
- No travel inside the school building.
- Plenty of parking for staff and voters.



Recommendation: Locate all 10 precincts at Amherst-Pelham Regional High School

Advantages:

- Creates one controlled environment for in-person voting on Election Day.
- Eliminates confusion as to where to vote.
- Provides greater and consistent oversight by Elections Officials.
- Creates staffing efficiencies.
- Cost savings (eliminate building rental fees, reduce number of constables and police officers).
- Limits exposure to possible COVID-19.
- Centralizes contact tracing protocols.
- Resolves on-going concerns about several polling locations including accessibility, disruption, parking (Wildwood School, Crocker Farm School, Fort River School and North Zion Church).
- 2020 election dates align School schedule of no classes.
- Proximity to Town Hall.



Recommendation: Locate all 10 precincts at Amherst-Pelham Regional High School

Concerns:

- Question if relocation of polling sites might inhibit turnout, inadvertent voter suppression.
- Change of location may confuse long-time voters.
- Access to new polling location by public transportation.
- Polling locations removed from neighborhoods.
- Adding distance to travel for people to vote.



2020 Elections Town Clerk's Pledge

“To ensure that voters are able to exercise their right to vote safely and efficiently.”

- Encourage and facilitate vote-by-mail.
- Prioritize safety and security.
- Extensive effort to educate the public of the new polling location.
- Special outreach to students and those who aren't regular voters.
- Increase voter turnout!



Recommendation: Next Steps

I. New legislation “Chapter 115 of the Acts of 2020”

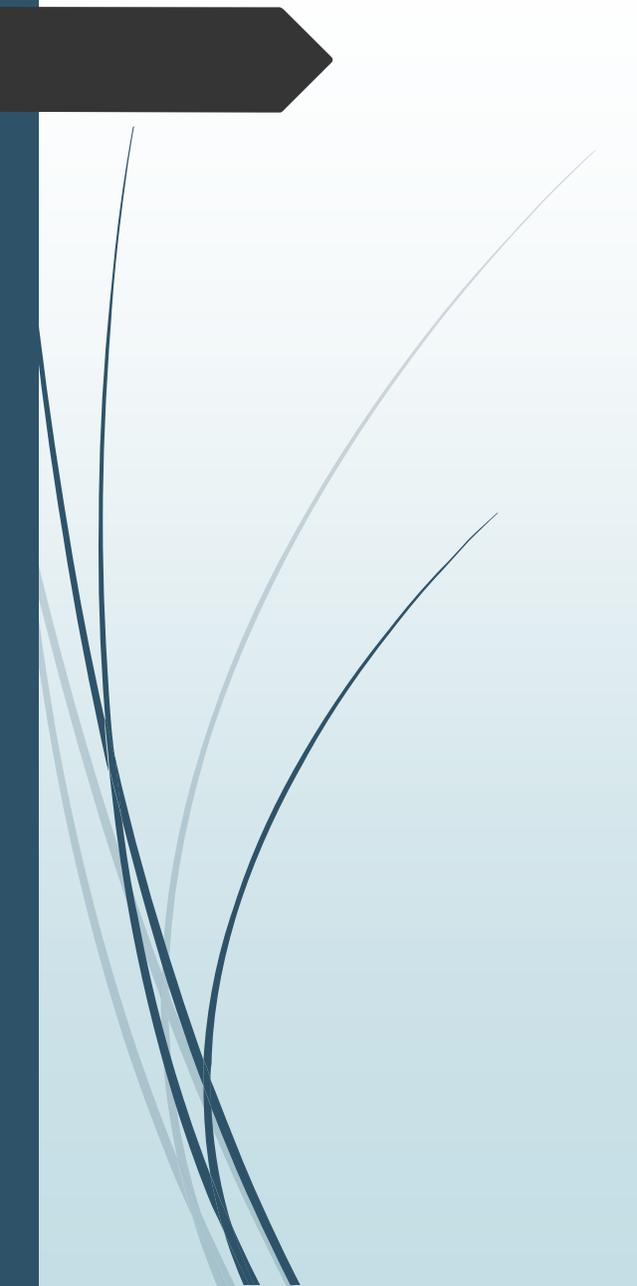
<https://malegislature.gov/Laws/SessionLaws/Acts/2020/Chapter115>

- ❖ Town Council may change polling locations if it is “determined that the public convenience or public health would be better served”
- ❖ Town Council shall evaluate and report on “whether such change would have a disparate adverse impact on the basis of race, national origin, disability, income, or age”
- ❖ Report shall be posted on the Town’s website and in Town Clerk’s office
- ❖ Change must be posted at least three days prior to vote of Town Council
- ❖ If voted by the Town Council, change must be published on the Town’s website and notify voters by electronic means (in addition, the Town Clerk recommends physical mailing)

II. MGL Chapter 54, Section 24: Designation of Polling Places

<https://malegislature.gov/laws/generallaws/parti/titleviii/chapter54/section24>

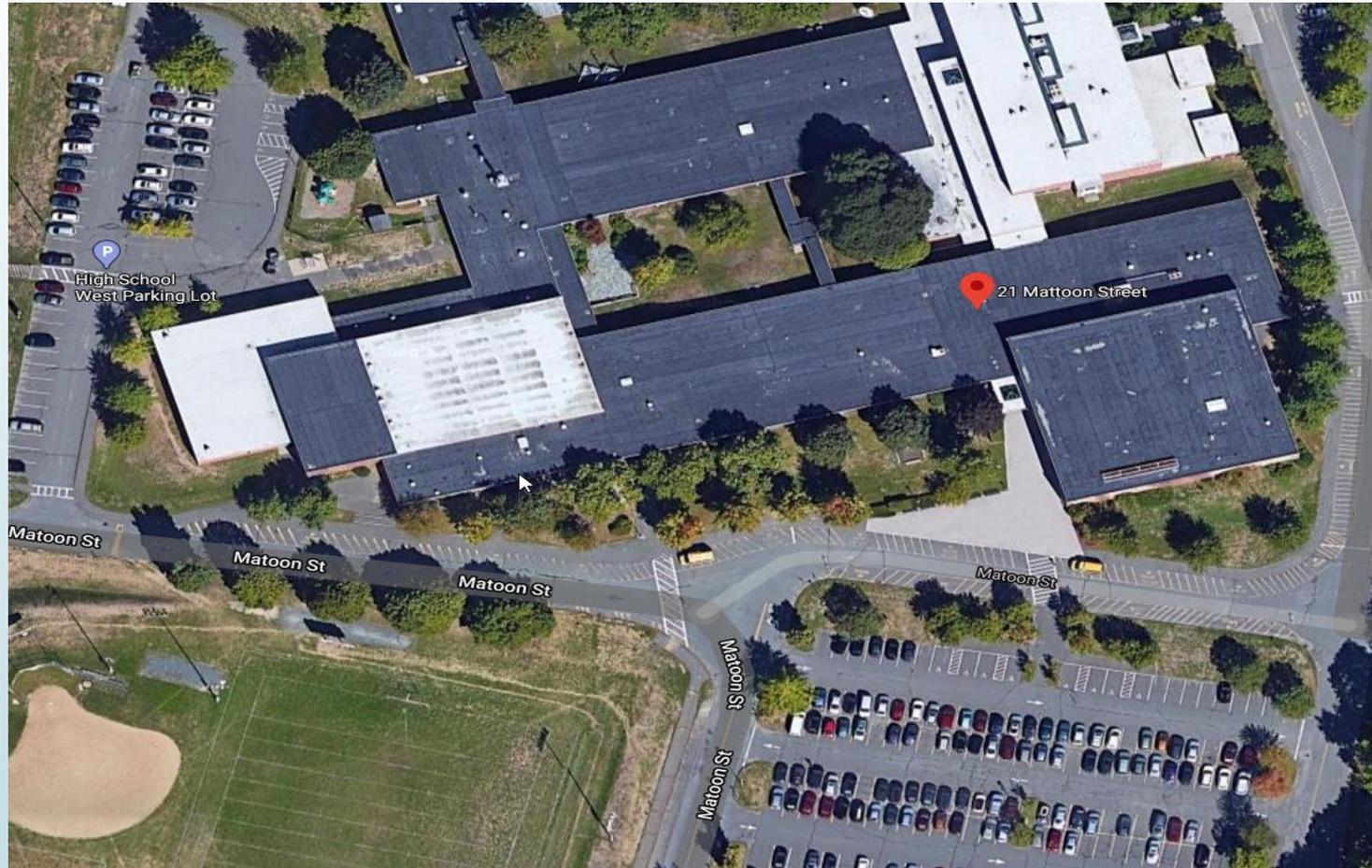
- ❖ Town Council must vote “twenty days at least before the biennial state...election” (August 11, 2020)

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Recommendation: Next Steps

- ❖ July 28, 2020: Town Council prepares and reviews report documenting “disparate adverse impact on the basis of race, national origin, disability, income, or age” which shall be posted on the Town’s website and in the Town Clerk’s office
- ❖ July 30, 2020: Post proposed change (at least three days prior to the vote of the Town Council)
- ❖ August 3, 2020: Town Council votes to approve proposed change. (Town Council must vote “twenty days at least before the biennial state...election”, i.e. by August 11, 2020)

Amherst Regional High School





Single entrance and exit.



Side walk for social distancing single-file line



Inside gym1 – Staging Area



Entrance into polling area.



Gym 2 – Space for all ten precincts.



Exit from polling location.



Exit back into Gym 1.



Exit from Gym 1 to Weight Room



Exit via weight room to sidewalk.

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2020 Elections

Questions and Comments
Next Steps?