



MINUTES

A TASK FORCE TO STUDY THE CITY MUNICIPAL ELECTION LAWS

VIRTUAL MEETING

Wednesday, April 26, 2023 6:00 PM

Task Force Members Present: Faye Gaskin, John Michael Gudger, Andrew Miller, and The Honorable Ian Pfeiffer (chair). Eileen Leahy, an *ex officio* member, was also present.

Others Present:

- Mark Hildebrand, City of Annapolis TV
- Regina Watkins-Eldridge, City of Annapolis, City Clerk and Elections Administrator
- David Garreis, Director, Anne Arundel County Board of Elections

Having a quorum of Task Force members, the chair called the meeting to order at 6:01 PM.

The chair introduced Mr. Garreis and explained that it will be helpful to hear from him prior to the Task Force moving forward on action items.

Among other points, Mr. Garreis highlighted the following in his opening statement:

- There are many differences between the City of Annapolis election code and Anne Arundel County election code. Starting with the 2017 mayoral election, these differences became clear as the city and county developed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). The city code is very specific but has not been updated. The county created a document that identified the discrepancies between city and state election law.
- There are two major ways to solve the discrepancies: (1) align the city election timeline with the state election timeline. The off-year elections do not get very much turnout and the city would pick up some functionality in that the county infrastructure is in place. Baltimore City did this in their jurisdiction. (2) Or, write into the city code that Annapolis will use Maryland election laws to conduct their own elections. Either of these solutions would be the easiest and simplest way to solve these problems.
 - Examples of increased functionality from working with the county include having the ability to email ballots and receiving a bulk rate for mailing materials.



Upon completing his opening statement, Mr. Garreis took questions from Task Force members. In response to the questions, Mr. Garreis highlighted the following:

- Federal legislation states that ballots to military and overseas voters must be sent 45 days before elections.
- If Annapolis aligns with the state, it means the city would be using the state's equipment and procedures. The county would not be able to implement ranked choice voting unless the state does as well.
- The county would hire judges and identify polling places. The precinct lines would be such that city and county residents would be placed in separate precincts.
- The city could not run its own primary and then have the county run the general. It would get too complicated.
- The county is inclined to pay election costs for the city, because city citizens are also county taxpayers.
- There are no plans to implement voting centers because the state legislature does not support them. At least for the next four years, voting will be done in precincts.
- The city election code should be more general, because it cannot be updated quickly enough. The code currently discusses file cards.
- It may be possible to have the city races on a separate ballot even if administered by the county but need to check on that possibility.
- As of now, the city pays for election judges, but if the city holds elections through the county, the county would pay for the judges.
- The county would likely not facilitate an open primary, because it would require a new set of regulations. The county board would probably push back on doing so, although they could say yes. A blanket non-partisan primary may be possible. (Mr. Gudger pointed out that some down ballot races are currently non-partisan.)
- The county board has the authority to sign an MOU with the city. The board has said no to MOUs with the city in the past.
- The county board does not have a "dog in the fight" on whether the electorate should be expanded to those aged 16+ and non-citizens. More research will be necessary to verify if non-citizens and those aged 16+ are on the state registration rolls or separate ones for the municipalities that allow them to register.
- The governor has appointed new county election board members.

Ms. Leahy emphasized that working with the county board worked well for the city. They were very responsive and professional.



Upon completing the discussion with Mr. Garreis, the Task Force discussed administrative matters and next steps:

- Assistant City Attorney Ms. Ashley Leonard has been invited to the next Task Force meeting and the Task Force's second meeting in May will be a public hearing.
- Mr. Hildebrand explained the procedures for holding a public hearing: (1) the Task Force makes an announcement; (2) those who would like to participate register, preferably at least 24 hours before the meeting; and, (3) the link for the meeting will be sent to those registered. People can also watch live on YouTube. Ms. Watkins-Eldridge mentioned that Michelle Stephenson has many streams to send out information.
- Ms. Watkins-Eldridge stated that she would talk to Ms. Stephenson about facilitating written feedback and would share with Task Force members the public comment portal the Task Force will use. Mr. Miller suggested that the form should include a question prompt such as "how would you like to see Annapolis city elections improved?"
- Ms. Leahy noted that the Board of Supervisors of Elections (BOSE) has not had the opportunity to discuss the latest set of recommendations sent to the Task Force.
- Ms. Watkins-Eldridge expressed her agreement with the recommendation from Mr. Garreis to align Annapolis city election code with the state.
- Ms. Gaskin asked about Task Force members raising their priorities for consideration. The chair noted that the Task Force will distill its priorities after the public hearing scheduled for May 24, 2023.
- Ms. Watkins-Eldridge noted that the Annapolis City Council postponed indefinitely the charter amendment to enlarge the BOSE from three to five members.

On the motion duly made by Mr. Miller and seconded by Mr. Gudger, the minutes of the April 13, 2023 meeting were approved unanimously.

Mr. Gudger asked for a breakdown of the costs of prior elections, which Ms. Leahy agreed to share with the Task Force.

There being no further business, the Task Force voted unanimously to adjourn at 7:05 PM (motion by Ms. Leahy and seconded by Mr. Miller). The next meeting will be held virtually on May 10, 2023.

A video of the meeting is posted on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/live/qIFKbOnAI_A.

Respectfully submitted,
Andrew Miller, Task Force Member