

Wait Times During the 2018 General Election
Executive Summary
Board Meeting – January 28, 2019

The 2018 General Election saw a significant uptick in voter turnout over recent, similar Gubernatorial General Elections. An overall turnout of 64% of registered voters in Montgomery County was a large increase from the 39% turnout of the 2014 General Election. Voters also chose to use alternative voting methods to Election Day in high numbers. Roughly 37% of those that voted during the 2018 General Election did so via absentee or early voting. This was a sharp increase from the only 20% that used these methods in 2014.

The Board staff examined how these changes in turnout and preparations for the election impacted wait times on Election Day. The goal defined by the Presidential Commission on Election Administration is to have voters wait a maximum of 30 minutes. The Board successfully served 76% of the voters during peak voting within the goal.

By using wait time cards recorded by voters at the polling places, surveys of Chief Judges, and data provided by the state, the Board created a representation of the average and longest wait times for voters at all 236 polling places on Election Day. Since a long ballot caused logistical issues and lines at voting booths and scanners in some places, wait times reported in this summary factor in ALL waits at the polling place – the check-in line, receiving a ballot, the wait for a voting booth, and any wait for a ballot scanner. Many studies of this nature examine only the check-in line.

Overall, the Board succeeded in minimizing wait times at most polling places, though some improvements can still be made. Approximately 76% of polling places never exceeded a wait time of 30 minutes at their peak volume of voters. The average wait time for a voter was 7 minutes while the average “peak” wait time at polling places was 20 minutes. A total of 12 polling places (*see below) did have excessively long wait times with the peak wait time being 1-2 hours during the busiest times of the day. Even at these 12 polling places, the average wait time for most of the day was typically about 30 minutes. Peak voting time varied

across the county. The PowerPoint presentation will identify the characteristic of these precinct challenges.

No one factor can explain the long waits at this small group of precincts. Factors which contributed to long lines included

- rain and high humidity impact to paper ballots scanning
- fail-safe message to voter for blank ballots, equipment misfeeds or malfunctions,
- high numbers of provisional voters in the reporting to wrong polling place, perceived shortages of voting booths and scanners
- need for additional election workers in select precincts
- poor line management within the precinct
- voting rooms that were too small, and some cases, an increase number of overall voters in that polling place
- pollbook issues

These 12 polling places typically had 2-3 of these factors at work which caused the longer lines to form, but the combination of factors varied by location and was rarely the same. The Voter Satisfaction Survey strongest complaints were the Silver Spring Library expressing the room was too small and the Tilden Middle School serving two precincts in different parts of the building.

Overall, adjustments to equipment allocations, the rental of additional equipment, fine tuning the allocation process, expanding staffing at busy locations, improvements to polling place layouts, and better polling place signage are suggested solutions to improve wait time performance in the future.

All these “fixes” have a budgetary impact that requires the support of the County administration and Council.

**Polling places with a long wait included: 02-06 Hallie Wells Middle School, 04-03 Carver Educational Services Center, 04-08/04-33 Garrett Park Elementary School, 04-10 Tilden Middle School, 04-14 College Gardens Middle School, 05-04 Riderwood Village, 05-06 White Oak Middle School, 05-23 Praisner Community Recreation Center, 07-15 Thomas W. Pyle Middle School, 07-19 Wyngate Elementary School, 13-05 Silver Spring Library, and 13-38 Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church.*