

**Montgomery County Board of Elections
Staff Recommendations
2020 Presidential General Election**

Due to the risks of in-person voting during the pandemic, voters are encouraged to request their ballot for the 2020 Presidential General Election by mail and return it by mail with prepaid postage provided or return it to a drop box. In addition, the Maryland State Board of Elections has directed each county to conduct in-person voting from October 26 through November 3, 2020.

The plan from the State Board of Elections is for voting to occur at existing early voting sites for the first eight days, expanding on Election Day to a number of one-day sites equal to at least the number of high schools in that county.

This plan proposes the following:

- Early voting at the existing 11 sites in Montgomery County
- Election Day vote centers at 25 high schools and 2 additional sites (total 38)
- Drop boxes at all voting sites plus:
 - Use of the Rockville City Hall drop box
 - Placement of a small drop box at Leisure World
- Limited in-person ballot pickup with a drop box at the Board of Elections

Public access to the Board of Elections office will be limited to the front lobby area, where wall-to-wall plexiglass is being installed. On Election Day, ballot pickup and drop off will be curbside only. For the safety of employees and to prevent any delays in the canvass process due to COVID-19, the building will remain closed to the public, with public observation of the canvass process available on the website, until election results are certified and transmitted to the State Board of Canvassers by December 7th.

COVID-19 Precautions

The Department of General Services has measured the lobby area of the Board of Elections office to install a wall-to-wall countertop plexiglass barrier. The building will have limited public access from October 26, 2020, through November 2, 2020, and will be closed entirely to the public on Election Day and throughout the canvass with curbside voting on Election Day and livestreaming of the canvass process available on the website.

Upon hire, temporary employees are provided with guidance from the county on health and safety measures and an onboarding packet that includes two cloth masks and hand sanitizer. Antibacterial wipes, additional cloth and surgical masks, and face shields are available to all staff and frequent hand washing is encouraged. Staff and canvassers with symptoms of respiratory illness are not permitted into the building. Employees wear gloves when handling incoming applications and ballots. Public health guidance will continue to be followed in handling materials returned from voters and ballots retrieved from a drop box will not be sorted or opened the same day that they are picked up.

All voting sites will be set up with adequate interior space for social distancing for the health and safety of all involved. Plexiglass barriers will be constructed at each check-in, ballot issuance and provisional voting station. Election Judges will be required to wear

face coverings at all times and will be provided with voluntary face shields that may also be worn. Voters will be required to wear a face covering, and surgical masks will be provided to any voter who is not wearing one upon entering the building. Voters who refuse to wear a mask will be encouraged to vote curbside at the Board of Elections or may have special arrangements made for them to vote as directed by the Board attorney. Adequate hand sanitizer will be provided for each site for regular use by Election Judges and to be offered to all voters. Voting stations will be regularly wiped down with cleaning products. Additional blue tape and rope stanchions have been ordered.

Personnel

Lead staff: Lisa Merino, Alysoun McLaughlin

The hiring freeze was lifted on August 4, 2020, for temporary positions and on August 14, 2020, for the Voter Services Manager position. Hiring is underway. The circumstances of COVID-19 require flexibility in staffing. Some duties are currently being performed via telework as well as in the office. Managers must be prepared to shift assignments to other personnel in the event that an employee is unable to report to work. Center managers and Election Judge Trainers have been cross-trained, are currently assisting to process applications until Election Judge training begins and will assist with the intake of Vote by Mail ballots upon the completion of Election Judge training. A solicitation has also been issued to county employees on administrative leave due to facility closure to volunteer for temporary transfer to the Board of Elections and a purchase order has been issued for a temporary staffing agency to provide as-needed support. Additional workstations are scheduled for installation and the department is prepared to implement shift work if needed.

Voter Registration

Lead staff: Laletta Dorsey, Margaret Jurgensen

Staff is currently working to process petitions, incoming voter registration applications, and to assist with Vote by Mail application processing. After the close of voter registration, staff will focus on Vote by Mail and provisional ballot application processing.

Hiring for additional temporary employees has begun and a purchase order has been issued for a temporary staffing agency to provide as-needed support. County employees on administrative leave will be assigned as available and as needed to assist with duties such as answering phones and processing applications. Shift work will be implemented if needed, using all available workspace. Onsite Election Judge training has been moved offsite, allowing for additional workspaces in the training rooms. Telephones will be shifted to the State Board of Elections call center from August 24, 2020, through October 30, 2020 to maximize the availability of county staff for escalated calls and for data processing.

Vote by Mail Applications

Lead staff: Michelle Gonda, Barbara Payne

Staff is currently processing Vote by Mail applications via telework and in the office. Center managers and Election Judge Trainers have also been cross-trained and are currently assisting to process applications until Election Judge training begins. Hiring for additional temporary employees has begun, additional workstations are being installed in training rooms, and labor needs will be supplemented as described above through a temporary staffing agency, through the use of county employees on loan from other departments as available, and through shift work if needed.

The State Board of Elections has confirmed that **Runbeck Election Services** is the vendor for the mailing of Vote by Mail applications, with mailing to begin on August 24 to voters who had not yet had a ballot application processed when the data file was pulled on August 5, 2020. Applications will continue to be mailed through the end of August and the department expects to receive a high volume of requests beginning in early September.

Approximately 20,000 of the voters who affirmatively requested a Vote by Mail ballot for the primary election also requested a ballot for the general election. Voters can confirm whether they have an application on file at <https://elections.maryland.gov/voting/absentee.html>.

Voters are encouraged to use the online method of requesting a ballot, but prepaid postage is provided for return by mail, with the cost anticipated to be split 50/50 between the state and county government. The county will continue to use Qualified Business Reply Mail, which is a First Class Mail service at a lower rate due to a volume discount. The county is paying the cost of prepaid postage up front, with a credit to be applied to a future invoice from the State Board of Elections. Voters are encouraged to choose the by mail option for receiving their ballot.

Outreach to nursing homes to facilitate delivery and return of ballots to residents began on July 31, 2020. Nursing home personnel are being trained in how to assist residents in casting their ballot. Election Judge assistance will not be provided.

The deadline to register to vote is October 13, 2020. The deadline to request a ballot by mail or using web delivery is October 20, 2020. After that date, staff of the Board of Elections will continue to assist voters in obtaining a ballot using every method that is available, but options will generally be limited to picking up a ballot in person at the Board of Elections or voting in person at a vote center.

Vote by Mail Fulfillment

The State Board of Elections has confirmed that **SeaChange Election Services** is the vendor for mailing ballots. Design and inserts are not available at this time but will include a privacy panel with a tear-off strip to conceal the voter signature. Additional envelopes with the new design have been requested for in-house fulfillment as needed. Ballots will be mailed first to military and overseas voters on September 18, 2020, and mailing to domestic voters will begin on September 24, 2020, for voters who requested their ballot prior to September 3, 2020. Data files will be pulled and mailed multiple times a week through the request deadline. Voters can confirm whether a ballot has been issued to them at <https://voterservices.elections.maryland.gov/VoterSearch>.

Web delivery ballots will be emailed to voters by the State Board of Elections on the same timetable as voters who requested their ballot by mail. Voters who inadvertently request a web delivery ballot or are unable to print and return it can request a new ballot by mail.

Sample Ballot and Voter Outreach

Lead staff: Gilberto Zelaya, Alysoun McLaughlin

Although traditional outreach events have been discontinued, Board staff continues an aggressive outreach effort to community groups through the use of videoconferencing

technology and social media, including statewide use of the county-developed text response system (text CHECK, SERVE, VBM, or VOTE to 77788). Leaflets have also been developed and are being circulated at events such as food distribution by community groups and the county.

The sample ballot booklet is scheduled to be printed during the weekend of September 19 and will be mailed to all voters in late September, arriving to households at approximately the same time as voters who have requested a ballot will receive it. The information in the sample ballot will encourage voters to request and return a Vote by Mail ballot if they have not already done so but will also provide information about in-person voting options and what to expect.

The emphasis of the Board's messaging is to "Vote Safe, Vote at Home" although messaging will shift somewhat over the election calendar, introducing messages related to voter registration and ballot application deadlines, in-person voting, and same-day registration.

Vote by Mail Return

Lead staff: Mary Beth Habel, Chris Rzeszut

Voters who request a ballot by mail will be able to return it in any mailbox using prepaid postage. Voters can also choose not to return their ballot using the Postal Service and can bring their ballot to any drop box, including one at each vote center.

Voters using the web delivery method will not receive a postage paid envelope, so the voter will need to provide their own envelope and apply postage to return it by mail or drop it off at one of the drop box locations. The locations will be advertised in the information sent out with the ballot, in the Board's sample ballot mailing, and through a variety of other media and outreach efforts.

Board staff have ordered sufficient drop boxes to have one at every vote center, both during early voting and on Election Day. The City of Rockville has also made its ballot drop box available and a small drop box has been ordered for Leisure World. The installation schedule for drop boxes is managed by the State Board of Elections and depends on vendor capacity, but target dates for installation are in late September.

The U.S. Postal Service confirms that all ballots will receive a postmark if placed into the mail stream by the last pickup time posted at a pickup location. However, once early voting begins, Board staff will encourage all voters to bring their ballot to a drop box.

Drop boxes will be placed in accordance with State Board Regulations requiring 24 hour camera surveillance, which will be coordinated with the Police Department, and ballots will be picked up from each box at least two times a day. On the last day of voting, drop boxes will be sealed promptly when the polls close at 8:00 p.m., or when the last voter in line for the drop box casts their ballot. A traffic control plan will be established for each site, including working the line of cars when necessary and feasible to establish separate lines of voters waiting to get into the parking lot to go inside and vote and those just dropping off voted ballots.

Voters can track whether their returned ballot has been received at <https://voterservices.elections.maryland.gov/VoterSearch>.

Vote by Mail Receiving and Canvassing

Lead staff: Michelle Gonda, Margaret Jurgensen

Intake in Training Room 1. Ballots will be segregated in Training Room 1 by the date and time of delivery from USPS with a separate area for drop box bins. The room is equipped with steel cages with padlocks with nightly lock-up procedures. Security seals will be used daily with a log sheet. For staff safety, gloves and masks are provided to staff handling the mail.

Batching in Training Room 2. The room is laid out for mandatory social distancing to ensure six feet of distance between each workstation. Gloves and masks are provided to staff processing ballots. In this room, ballots are sorted into batches of 100 by ballot style and are timestamped and examined for signature and postmark. Imperfect ballots – undeliverable or with missing signatures or other defects – are escalated to a specialist for further review and to initiate contact with the voter to obtain any missing information needed. Nightly lockup procedures will be followed with security seals used daily.

Canvass Preparation in Absentee Warehouse and Training Room 3. Batches of 100 ballots will be scanned using bar codes as received. Data from MDVOTERS will be uploaded nightly to the online voter lookup tool at elections.maryland.gov so that voters can see the status of their ballot as received once this step has been completed. Each batch will receive a header cover sheet with a batch number assigned via the voter registration system. Batch sheets will include the voter identification number of each voter within the batch. This record is maintained for audit purposes and to allow an envelope to be retrieved from the batch when required. Prepared batches will be placed in ballot cages for transfer to the canvassing area in the lower level warehouse. Batches will be sealed in cages until canvassing begins.

Information Technology

Lead staff: Lisa Jones, Jerry Quarshie, Janet Ross

A combination of high-speed scanners and DS200 precinct scanner units will be used to scan ballots. The scanners at each vote center will be programmed to accept all ballot styles and report all results to the correct precinct. Test decks have been ordered to begin to prepare the scanners. Staff are onsite with masks, gloves and social distancing measures in place.

Timetables for equipment preparation are dependent on finalizing the ballot layout and on preliminary steps that must be performed by the State Board of Elections. The public test of the voting equipment will occur during the logic and accuracy process and will be livestreamed on the Board's website.

The warehouse is being reconfigured to allow for an expansion of the canvass area and for public observation of an overflow area for duplication of web delivery ballots. Information technology staff also provide a wide range of support to the IT requirements of the entire department, including setup of vote centers and providing support for laptop computers and iPads for staff who are teleworking and for Board members to participate in public meetings. At the vote centers, information technology staff will ensure that pollbooks and equipment are ready for polls to be opened through a combination of onsite and videoconference support. IT staff will also oversee the process of closing the

scanners and returning equipment to the Board of Elections and the tabulation of votes cast during each day of the canvass.

Canvass

Lead staff: Michelle Gonda, Margaret Jurgensen

Board members will need to be sworn in as the Board of Canvassers by Circuit Court Clerk Barbara Meiklejohn on or before September 21, 2020. Staff and Election Judges will be sworn in during training prior to the start of the canvass.

Public observation will be virtual only. The canvass layout will be similar to that used for the primary election, with an expanded area for duplication of web delivery ballots.

The Board of Canvassers will meet by videoconference at the direction of the Board Attorney. Board members are provided with iPads to communicate with staff and the Board Attorney and to review and vote on ballots referred by the Board.

Batches will be distributed to canvassers by runners who will bring one batch at a time to each canvasser. Canvassers will be supervised at a distance and all documents will be retained for audit.

Each canvasser will remove ballots from envelopes, separate each ballot from the envelope, remove the assistance oath or other documentation contained in the envelope for examination, and reinsert documents other than ballots into the envelope.

Canvassers will duplicate ballots as needed. Duplicated ballots will be reviewed by another individual. The original and duplicated ballots will be marked for identification purposes. When each pair in the batch is completed and verified the original, duplicated ballots will be separated by colored sheets underneath the ballots prepared for tabulation.

Ballots suitable for tabulation will be placed in a folder. Each ballot folder with the accompanying header sheet will be picked up by a runner. Canvassers will flag Board referrals to a runner. Ballots and cover sheets will be compiled and considered by the Board when the Board attorney calls a teleconference for the purpose. Envelopes will be banded together with the batch sheet and placed in the designated cart.

The work area will be designed for social distancing and masks and gloves will be available for canvassers. Work areas will be wiped down during breaks between batches. Empty envelopes that have had the ballot removed will be staged in Training Room 3 for audit.

Ballots will be tabulated according to the same procedures that have generally been used for the absentee ballot canvass in the past. Tabulation of ballots will occur for eight hours daily until completed. Election results will be posted beginning at 8:00 pm on November 3, 2020 or when permission is given for the release of results by the State Board of Elections. IT staff will then follow daily procedures for uploading results until the end of the canvass.

Review of batch sheets, referrals and ballot scanner reports will be monitored by the IT Manager to ensure the accuracy of workflow and tabulation. The post-election audit will be overseen by the Director and the Deputy Director.

Election Judges

Lead staff: Deborah Hamer, Julia Douglass, Chris Rzeszut, Janet Ross

Active volunteers in the Election Judge database have been contacted multiple times and the staff are currently following up on new applications. Weekly updates will be provided every Friday to the Director and members of the Board.

Election Judges who serve will receive an additional hazard pay stipend of \$100 per day worked for each position. Staff will be submitting a formal recommendation to the County Executive through Acting Chief Administrative Officer Richard Madaleno for the county to offer administrative leave as well as a full Election Judge stipend to all county employees who serve on Election Day.

To minimize the risk of COVID-19 exposure, in-person training will include only the hands-on part of the training for this election. Election Judges will take the existing quiz in the Election Judge module and will then take an online, interactive training that has been developed as a replacement for the videos and lectures previously provided in training.

Due to the expanded volume of Vote by Mail for this election, and the additional workstations needed to perform data entry on Vote by Mail ballot applications, all training rooms have been repurposed and are not available. Hands-on training classes are scheduled to begin on August 31, 2020 and will be conducted primarily at the Montgomery County Division of Fleet Management Equipment Maintenance and Transit Operation Center.

In addition, a limited number of classes are planned at the following locations: Praisner Recreation Center; Silver Spring Recreation Center; Dacek/North Potomac Recreation Center; and the Upper County Regional Services Center.

Operations, Logistics and Supply

Lead Staff: Ryan White, Christine Rzeszut

The distribution of ballot styles to vote centers for every precinct, to allow for election results to be reported by precinct, requires ordering significantly more ballots and other materials and distributing and staging them at each site. Site plans for each facility and the supplies and number of ballots needed are currently being reviewed and a calendar developed for packaging and verifying supplies. Logistics for delivering materials are being coordinated with the State Board of Elections and the Department of General Services.