



REPORT TO VILLAGE BOARD

ITEM NAME:	Kronenwetter Ballot Drop Box Installation
MEETING DATE:	July 13, 2026
PRESENTING COMMITTEE:	
COMMITTEE CONTACT:	President Dan Joling
STAFF CONTACT:	Clerk Jennifer Poyer
PREPARED BY:	Clerk Jennifer Poyer

ISSUE:

Whether the Village should reinstall a secure absentee ballot drop box for the August 11, 2026 Partisan Primary and November 3, 2026 General Election, in light of mail-delivery uncertainty and a request from the Marathon County Clerk that municipalities consider offering this option.

OBJECTIVES:

Give voters a secure, convenient, no-cost option to return absentee ballots that does not depend on U.S. Postal Service delivery timelines.

Respond to the Marathon County Clerk's July 7, 2026 request that municipalities indicate whether they will offer a drop box, for inclusion on the county's public list of participating communities.

Make use of equipment the Village already owns, minimizing cost to taxpayers.

ISSUE BACKGROUND/PREVIOUS ACTIONS:

The Village operated a ballot drop box during the 2020 and 2021 COVID-era elections. It was mounted outside the Municipal Center; was promoted to residents through a Village Facebook post; and was used without any reported security incidents (see attached photos).

In 2022, the Wisconsin Supreme Court (Teigen v. WEC) ruled that unstaffed ballot drop boxes were not authorized under state law, and the Village's box was taken out of service.

On July 5, 2024, the Wisconsin Supreme Court reversed course in *Priorities USA v. WEC*, holding that state law permits municipal clerks, in their discretion, to use secure drop boxes as a valid method of absentee ballot return. Use of a drop box remains optional and is not mandated by any statute.

The Wisconsin Elections Commission (WEC) has issued non-binding best-practice guidance (consistent with U.S. Election Assistance Commission and CISA recommendations) recommending that any drop box be securely affixed to the ground or a building, weatherproof, equipped with a unique lock or seal, placed in a well-lit and visible location, and emptied on a documented schedule with a chain-of-custody log.

A bill currently before the Legislature, 2025 Assembly Bill 560 / Senate Bill 554, would ban absentee ballot drop boxes statewide. As of this writing the bill remains in committee and has not been enacted; existing law continues to allow drop boxes at clerk discretion.

On June 24, 2026, Postmaster General David Steiner testified to the Senate Homeland Security Committee that, under a rule USPS has proposed, the Postal Service would not deliver absentee ballots in states that decline to share their absentee-voter lists with the federal government. Wisconsin has not turned over this data, and the proposed rule has not been finalized; a federal executive order tied to the proposal is also being challenged in court. Marathon County Clerk Kim Trueblood cited this uncertainty, along with recent slow mail service, in a July 7, 2026 email to municipal clerks encouraging

early return of absentee ballots and asking municipalities to consider offering a drop box this fall (email attached).

PROPOSAL:

Reinstall the Village's existing drop box (previously used in 2020–2021) in front of the Municipal Center, mounted and secured per WEC best-practice guidance, with updated signage clearly identifying it as an official ballot drop box.

Establish a documented retrieval schedule and chain-of-custody log (date, time, number of ballots, and staff present) for each collection, consistent with WEC/EAC/CISA recommendations.

Have the box operational in time for the August 11, 2026 Partisan Primary and again for the November 3, 2026 General Election.

Notify the Marathon County Clerk's office so the Village is included on the county's published list of municipalities offering a drop box.

ADVANTAGES:

Gives residents an additional secure return option that does not depend on USPS delivery timing, which is a live concern given the Postmaster General's June 2026 testimony and recent slow mail service.

Reuses equipment the Village already owns; the primary cost is staff time, not a new purchase.

The Village previously operated this box without a reported security incident.

Supports accessibility for voters who have difficulty getting to the polls or clerk's office during business hours, including some voters with disabilities.

Aligns the Village with the county-wide effort the Clerk's office is coordinating this fall.

DISADVANTAGES:

Drop boxes remain a politically contested topic in Wisconsin, and some residents may raise concerns or objections regardless of the security measures used.

Pending state legislation (AB 560/SB 554) could ban drop boxes in the future; if enacted, the Village's investment of staff time would need to be discontinued.

No Wisconsin statute defines drop box specifications, so the Village bears responsibility for determining and documenting that its security measures are adequate.

Requires ongoing staff time for retrieval, logging, and monitoring, particularly in the final weeks before each election.

Any perceived tampering or damage to the box, even if unfounded, could generate public concern that requires a response from the Village.

ITEMIZE ALL ANTICIPATED COSTS (Direct or Indirect, Start-Up/One-Time, Capital, Ongoing & Annual, Debt Service, etc.)

Direct/one-time: Staff labor to remount, secure, and re-sign the Village's existing drop box (no new equipment purchase anticipated).

Direct/one-time (optional): Updated signage/labeling identifying the box as an official ballot drop box, estimated low cost (materials only).

Ongoing: Staff time to empty, log, and transport ballots on a documented schedule during each absentee voting period.

Optional/at Board discretion: Security camera or additional lighting if not already present at the proposed location.

No new capital expenditure is anticipated if the Village's existing box is reused; costs are primarily staff time within the current elections budget.

RECOMMENDED ACTION:

Staff recommends that the Village Board authorize reinstallation of the Village's existing secure ballot drop box in front of the Municipal Center, in accordance with WEC best-practice guidance, in time for the August 11, 2026 Partisan Primary, and that staff notify the Marathon County Clerk's office for inclusion on the county's list of participating municipalities.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED:**TIMING REQUIREMENTS/CONSTRAINTS:**

To be useful to voters, the box should be reinstalled and operational before absentee ballots are mailed out for the August 11, 2026 Partisan Primary, and remain in service through the November 3, 2026 General Election.

FUNDING SOURCE(s) – Must include Account Number/Description/Budgeted Amt CFY/% Used CFY/\$ Remaining CFY

Account Number:

Description:

Budgeted Amount:

Spent to Date:

Percentage Used:

Remaining:

ATTACHMENTS (describe briefly):

Photographs of the Village's ballot drop box and the Village's 2020/2021 Facebook post announcing its availability.