

Memorandum

To: Common Council
From: Heather Boehm, City Clerk
Re: Feasibility of a Centralized Polling Location for August Primary Elections
Date: September 9, 2026

1. Issue / Question Before Council

Council requested that staff evaluate whether the City can feasibly conduct future **August Primary Elections** at one centralized polling location and what facility, staffing, equipment, voter service, legal, and financial conditions would be necessary to do so. Currently the August Primary Elections are only held at the Armory per the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that was signed with the University on July 25, 2024. August Elections typically have lower voter turnout than November General Elections and Spring elections.

This analysis therefore addresses two related questions: (1) whether an August-only centralized polling model is legally and operationally feasible, and (2) how the Whitewater Armory, Starin Park Community Building, and Whitewater Public Library compare as potential locations for that model.

2. Current Election Structure

The City's polling-place structure varies by election type. For the August 11, 2026, Partisan Primary, Wards 1–13 voted at a single location, the Whitewater Armory. The August 2026 Armory arrangement was governed by an MOU signed July 25, 2024.

August primaries are operationally different from presidential and gubernatorial elections because turnout is generally lower and the University student population is typically reduced in August. See below for voter turnout.

Election / Model	Polling locations	Wards	Known in-person turnout	Registered Voters	Absentee	Total Turnout	Election Inspectors
August 11, 2026 Partisan Primary	Whitewater Armory	Wards 1–13 (Citywide)	975	6542	579	1558	12 plus 1 staff person
August 13, 2024 Partisan Primary	Whitewater Armory	Wards 1–13 (Citywide)	1196	4899	634	1830	12 plus 1 staff person
August 16, 2022 Partisan Primary	Whitewater Armory	Wards 1–13 (Citywide)	945	4852	583	1524	29 per payroll

3. Legal Authority / Requirements

Wisconsin law permits consolidation of wards at a common polling place. Under Wis. Stat. § 5.25(2), the governing body establishes polling places in cities of Whitewater's size. Section 5.25(3) requires polling places to be established for each election at least 30 days before the election. Section 5.25(5)(c) permits electors from more than one ward in the same municipality to vote at a single polling place. Wis. Stat. § 5.15(6)(b) separately

allows the governing body, by resolution and no later than 30 days before an election, to combine two or more wards for voting purposes to facilitate use of a common polling place; original ward numbers remain in use for official purposes.

Polling places must be accessible to individuals with disabilities, and the voting system used must allow voters with disabilities to vote with the same degree of privacy afforded other voters. A facility change therefore requires both a legal designation by Council and a practical accessibility review before use.

Wis. Stat. § 5.25(3)(c) also provides that, after an election and more than 30 days before the next election, a polling-place location may not be discontinued without governing-body approval after a public hearing at which the public may provide testimony. The timing and form of any Council action should therefore be coordinated with the City Attorney and the election calendar. The next August Primary is August 15, 2028.

MOU impact: The existing MOU states that elections that take place from September 1st through May 15th annually for Wards 8,9,10, and 13 are to be held on the UW Whitewater Campus. Other elections will be held at the Downtown Armory unless otherwise directed by the Common Council. This MOU was signed July 25, 2024. This would have no impact on the current MOU since we are not changing the elections held on the UW Campus. Only the August election location is being considered in this memo.

4. Operational Feasibility of Consolidation

A centralized August election is operationally feasible only if one site can handle all required election functions without creating unreasonable lines, accessibility barriers, ballot-control concerns, or single points of failure. The operational model should be sized to peak demand rather than daily turnout alone.

Conceptual staffing and equipment model

- One central greeter/traffic-control area to function at the public entrance to confirm that voters are at the correct location and direct them to check-in or registration.
- Six Badger Book check-in/registration stations, with enough capacity to separate or flex between wards as demand changes. These can change throughout the day as demand is needed. Check ins and registrations can be done at any Badger Book at any time.
- Another Badger Book dedicated for voter-registration/change-of-address station positioned so registration transactions do not block the normal check-in line. These can change throughout the day as demand is needed. Check ins and registrations can be done at any Badger Book at any time.
- Ballot issuance and ballot-control table or tables that preserve correct ballot style/ward handling even when all wards are in one facility.
- Twenty voting booths, including accessible voting equipment, to prevent the voting area from becoming a bottleneck after check-in.
- One tabulator per county positioned after voting with adequate queuing space and a contingency process for equipment failure.
- Chief inspector table – Chief Inspectors provide voter assistance coverage plus relief staff/runners so breaks, curbside voting, observer questions, and troubleshooting.
- Clearly defined observer areas that preserve public observation rights without interfering with voter privacy or traffic flow.

Conceptual layout – Whitewater Armory

PUBLIC ENTRANCE	GREETER / LINE CONTROL	REGISTRATION / ADDRESS CHANGES
BADGER BOOK CHECK-IN	BADGER BOOK CHECK-IN	BALLOT ISSUANCE / CONTROL
VOTING BOOTHS	VOTING BOOTHS	ACCESSIBLE VOTING
OBSERVER AREA	TABULATOR / BALLOT RETURN	EXIT
SUPPLIES / RELIEF STAFF	CHIEF INSPECTOR / TROUBLESHOOTING	CONTINGENCY QUEUE SPACE

The Armory's approximately 5,775-square-foot open area allows election functions to remain visible within one primary room and provides more room to add check-in stations, booths, or queue space if turnout is higher than expected.

Conceptual layout – Starin Park Community Building

ROOM 1 — ARRIVAL / CHECK-IN (approx. 1,125 sq. ft.)	ROOM 2 — VOTING / TABULATION (approx. 1,125 sq. ft.)
Entrance, greeter and line control	Ballot issuance / control
Badger Book check-in stations	Voting booths and accessible voting
Registration / address changes	Tabulator / ballot return
Controlled transition to Room 2	Exit / observer area / contingency queue

Because the two main Starin rooms total approximately 2,250 square feet, both rooms would likely be needed to accommodate election operations. Using two separate rooms, however, would create additional staffing and coordination challenges. Observers would be stationed depending on what part of the process they want to observe. An Election Chief would be needed in each room, which could make communication and coordination between the Chiefs more difficult. I would also need an additional staff member to ensure staff coverage in both rooms. Beyond staffing, consideration would need to be given to whether voters could move efficiently from check-in in one room to voting and tabulation in the second without crossing queues, creating confusion about the flow of voters, or presenting supervision or accessibility concerns. This should be feasible if the voters exit out the door in the second room after voting and walk around the building to the parking lot.

Conceptual layout – Whitewater Public Library

PUBLIC ENTRANCE	GREETER / LINE CONTROL	REGISTRATION / ADDRESS CHANGES
BADGER BOOK CHECK-IN	BADGER BOOK CHECK-IN	BALLOT ISSUANCE / CONTROL
VOTING BOOTHS	VOTING BOOTHS	ACCESSIBLE VOTING
OBSERVER AREA	TABULATOR / BALLOT RETURN	EXIT
SUPPLIES / RELIEF STAFF	CHIEF INSPECTOR / TROUBLESHOOTING	CONTINGENCY QUEUE SPACE

The Whitewater Public Library large meeting room provides approximately 3,850 square feet in one primary room. A single-room configuration would allow check-in, registration, ballot issuance, voting, tabulation, observer space, and line management to remain within one room rather than requiring the room-to-room transition contemplated at Starin.

5. Facility Comparison

Factor	Whitewater Armory	Starin Park Community Building	Whitewater Public Library
Usable election space	Approx. 5,775 sq. ft. in one primary open area.	Two main rooms at approx. 1,125 sq. ft. each; approx. 2,250 sq. ft. combined. Both would likely be required.	Approx. 3,850 sq. ft. in one large meeting room.
Configuration / voter flow	Single-room model supports direct visual supervision and flexible placement of stations and queues.	Two-room model requires an intentional handoff between check-in and voting functions and additional signage and staff.	Single-room model can keep election functions in one space;

Factor	Whitewater Armory	Starin Park Community Building	Whitewater Public Library
Parking	No-known parking issues during previous elections	76 parking spaces are available in the closest lot and plenty others available in the far lot for Poll workers.	49 parking spots in the parking lot and there is also street parking on one side of Church Street and Center Street.
ADA / accessibility	No issues in past reviews.	Polling Place Accessibility Survey done and passed.	Polling Place Accessibility Survey done and passed.
Entrances / exits	Designated voter entrance, accessible entrance, emergency egress and queue placement.	Voters will come in front door, check in in first room and get ballot, then go second room to vote and put ballot in tabulator machine and exit from this room. Will require voter to walk around building to get back to parking lot.	Voter will use same entrance, accessible entrance, emergency egress. Voter queues can be managed without interfering with normal building circulation.
Staffing needed	Potentially simpler supervision because functions can remain in one room.	Will require additional staff for room-to-room direction, supervision and ballot-control continuity.	Single-room supervision may reduce the need for room-to-room staffing.
Equipment capacity / electricity	Open floor area provides more flexibility for check-in stations, booths and equipment; electrical load/outlet locations still require verification.	Capacity is more constrained by room size; outlet locations, extension-cord safety and equipment placement will all be sufficient.	3,850-sq.-ft. room provides more space than Starin's two-room combined footprint but less than the Armory; outlet locations, electrical load, and equipment placement will be sufficient.
Wi-Fi	Connection quality and secure Badger Book connectivity works well at the Armory.	Connection quality and secure Badger Book connectivity should be tested in both rooms under election-day load. We hard wire our Badger Books and they do not use Wifi, should not be a problem.	Connection quality and secure Badger Book connectivity should be tested in the meeting room under election-day load. We hard wire our Badger Books and they do not use Wifi, should not be a problem.
Security / ballot control	Single-room visibility can simplify supervision of ballots, equipment and voter movement.	Two rooms require supervision between functions.	Single-room visibility can support continuous supervision of ballots, equipment, and voter movement.
Public transportation / travel access	Document transit proximity, pedestrian routes and	Document transit proximity, pedestrian routes and	Document transit proximity, pedestrian routes, and added/shortened travel by

Factor	Whitewater Armory	Starin Park Community Building	Whitewater Public Library
	impact on voters currently accustomed to the Armory.	added/shortened travel by ward.	ward relative to the Armory and Starin.
Setup / teardown	Larger one-room setup; equipment can be staged in one primary space. Equipment is housed at Armory.	Two rooms must be staged, signed and staffed; smaller rooms may increase precision required for setup. Will be staged the night before and picked up the morning after the election, usually before 8:00 am.	One-room setup; equipment can be staged in one primary space the night before the election and picked up the morning after the election, usually before 8:00 am.
Facility conflicts	Confirm building availability for setup day, Election Day and teardown, including any scheduled recreation/community use. Currently I close the Armory for 2.5 days.	Confirm building availability and any park/recreation programming conflicts. This will have to be done closer to the election.	Confirm Library availability for setup day, Election Day, and teardown, including meeting-room reservations, Library programming, and public access needs. This will have to be done closer to the election.

6. Voter Impact

A centralized polling location may simplify voter messaging by providing one citywide location for an August Primary, but the location selected affects travel distance, parking, pedestrian access, and familiarity. Starin Park is closer to the University and the West side of the City; the Armory is the location voters used for the 2022, 2024, and 2026 August Primaries. The Whitewater Public Library is also closer to the University and the South side of the City; The principal voter risk is change, voters who are accustomed to another polling location may travel to the wrong site, and a single site concentrates parking, pedestrian traffic, and lines in one place.

Communication: I will use mailed notices where required, MyVote updates, City website/social media, press releases, signage at former polling places, UW communications and direct outreach to senior/disability-serving organizations.

- Voter confusion: if a polling location is discontinued, place conspicuous directional signage at the former location and ensure staff are prepared to redirect voters.
- Accessibility: Wisconsin Election Commission has an Accessibility Survey and I have assessed the locations and all three passed. Accessibility Survey will have to be done again closer to the next August election in 2028 to make sure nothing has changed.
- Change management: if consolidation is intended only for August primaries, communications should emphasize that the polling location may be different for November, presidential, gubernatorial or other elections. We will again put out communication listed above and posted at the current polling location of where the next one will be.

7. Financial Impact

An additional staff member will be needed for Starin because election functions would be divided between two rooms. At the current rate for Election Chiefs the financial impact would be about \$200. The library's single-room configuration may not create that same room-to-room staffing requirement.

8. Risks and Mitigation

Risk	Potential effect	Mitigation / information needed
Unexpected turnout	Lines, crowded rooms, insufficient booths/check-in capacity	Size plan to peak-hour demand; maintain reserve booths/stations and call-in or relief staff.
Parking congestion	Voter delay or unsafe pedestrian movement	Count available spaces; designate accessible parking; establish overflow/traffic plan if needed.
Equipment or network failure	Check-in delays and longer lines	Test connectivity and power; maintain statutory/manual contingency procedures and spare equipment where available.
Voter confusion after location change	Voters arrive at former location or are delayed	Advance multi-channel notice, MyVote update, directional signs and staff/signage at former site when required or operationally prudent.
Two-room separation at Starin	Missed directions, supervision gaps, ballot-control complexity	One-way voter path, dedicated room-to-room staff, clear signs, documented ballot-control procedures and pre-election simulation.
ADA barrier	Voter access may be impaired	Complete formal accessibility inspection and correct deficiencies before designation/use.
Facility conflict or unavailable setup time	Compressed setup or inability to use site	Reserve the selected building well in advance; include setup/teardown windows; confirm recreation, community, or Library programming conflicts as applicable; and identify a backup plan.
Single-site concentration	A site-specific emergency affects all City voters	Document emergency relocation procedures, communication chain and critical supply/equipment contingency.

9. Overall Feasibility Assessment

Based on the legal framework and the City's successful use of one polling location for Wards 1–13 in the August 11, 2026 Partisan Primary, an August-only centralized polling model is legally permissible in concept and has been operationally demonstrated at the Armory. The remaining question is whether the City should continue with the Armory or choose which of the three facilities (or other facilities) best meets the operational and voter-service requirements.

The Armory offers approximately 5,775 square feet in one primary open area; the Whitewater Public Library large meeting room provides approximately 3,850 square feet in one room; and Starin provides approximately 2,250 square feet across two main rooms. Its single-room layout avoids the room-to-room handoff required at Starin, while providing less overall capacity than the Armory.