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Office of the City Clerk
312 W. Whitewater St.
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To: Whitewater Common Council
From: Heather Boehm, City Clerk
Date: December 17, 2024
Subject: Debrief on Presidential 2024 Election

Overview

The 2024 Presidential Election in Whitewater, WI, witnessed high voter turnout and significant operational challenges. This memo highlights key issues and recommendations for improvement.

Key Issues Observed

1. Long Lines at Polling Stations

Challenge: Higher-than-expected voter turnout, insufficient staffing, high number of Election Day Registrations, address changes, voters not being prepared with required documents slowed down check in process. Ballot table also got backed up at times.

Feedback: Some voter frustration and potential deterrence for some voters. Most voters questioned were in good spirits, understanding, thankful for our volunteers/poll workers. Having more ballot tables will help. Registering prior to the election will cut down a lot of the wait time.

2. Badger Books Performance

Challenges:

- Lack of comprehensive training for poll workers on troubleshooting Badger Books.
- Finding addresses or dorms on campus in Badger Books.
- Driver License scanners not working

Feedback: Many workers and voters expressed having more Badger Books would help the situation. More training, especially if addresses needed to be added and registrations.

3. Central Count Operations

Challenges: Having the City Clerk being pulled away to answer phone calls from other polling locations, slowed the process down. Scanners not working so absentee ballots could be scanned in, instead of typing the person's name.

Feedback: City Clerk will no longer have specific job at any polling place. I will make myself available to go to all polling locations and Central Count as I am needed.

4. Food & Breaks

Challenges: Having additional election workers to provide breaks for workers to get lunch and dinner.

Feedback: A few workers at the UW polling place would like to see lunch provided and not having to stand in lines with the other patrons at the UW eateries. A quiet area for poll workers to decompress was recommended.

Recommendations:

1. Addressing Long Lines

- Increase staffing levels at polling locations, particularly during anticipated peak times.
- Improve voter flow management by introducing additional registration stations and directing voters more efficiently.
- More signage about what proof of residency is needed, MyVote.wi.gov to check on voter status and polling place before getting in line.
- Expand early voting options and promote them to reduce Election Day traffic.
- More than one ballot table.

2. Enhancing Badger Books Usage

- Conduct mandatory, in-depth training for poll workers, focusing on registrations and best practices.
- Hard wiring the Badger Books so we can add more together and increase speed.

3. Improving Central Count Efficiency

- Allocate additional staff and resources to central count operations. Removing the Clerk as a staff person, so she is available to all three locations.
- Scanning bar codes to check in absentee ballots will be a lot faster when the scanners work.

Closing Remarks

While the 2024 Presidential Election was successful in terms of voter participation, addressing the outlined issues is critical to ensure smoother operations in future elections. Implementing these recommendations will improve the voting experience and maintain public confidence in our electoral process.

Action Items

1. Advertise for and approve additional staffing.
2. Adding additional Badger Books.
3. Plans to expand early voting times.
4. Look into other food options at UW for poll workers.
5. Rework the lines so there is an added address change line, registration line, and check in.
6. Added signage before voter gets in line for them to check myvote.wi.gov or check with greeter to make sure they are in the correct polling location, and they are registered at their current address.
7. Mandatory training in the weeks leading up to the election on badger book registrations and address changes.
8. Updated reference binders at each station to include Ward maps, street lists with corresponding Wards, Dorm lists with addresses.
9. Work with Wisconsin Elections Commission to get all scanners working and train the poll workers how to use them and when and why they might not work i.e. not being registered exactly how name states on driver's license or bar codes too long on absentee labels.



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