MEMORANDUM

TO: City of Whitewater Common Council
FROM: City Clerk
DATE: November 17, 2026
RE: November 3, 2026 General Election – Election Operations and Ballot Management

Election Day Operations

The November 3, 2026, General Election experienced higher-than-anticipated voter turnout, particularly among University of Wisconsin–Whitewater students. Despite the increased turnout, election operations were generally successful, with improvements in voter processing, shorter wait times, and more efficient Election Day registration procedures.

One of the most significant improvements was the assistance provided by student election workers, who helped ensure voters were prepared before reaching the registration and check-in stations. Students assisted voters in identifying the documentation needed for Election Day registration, allowing voters to have their required information readily available when they reached the front of the line. This proactive approach helped reduce delays, improved the registration process, and contributed to shorter wait times throughout Election Day.

Overall Election Turnout

The November 3, 2026 General Election saw significant voter participation across the City of Whitewater. The following is a breakdown of voter turnout by voting method and polling location:

Voting Method / Location	Wards Served	Voters
Absentee Voting	Wards 1–13	1,381
Whitewater Armory	Wards 1–7 and 11–12	1,854
UW– Whitewater	Wards 8-10 and 13	1,349
Total Voter Turnout	**Wards 1-13**	**4,584**

Of the 4,584 voters who participated in the election, 1,381 voted absentee, while 3,203 voted in person at the City's two polling locations on Election Day.

This level of participation contributed to increased activity at both polling locations and highlighted the importance of effective voter flow management, adequate election staffing, and sufficient ballot supplies.

Ballot Supply and Management

Due to higher-than-anticipated voter turnout, ballot supplies became limited for Wards 1–7 at the Whitewater Armory and Ward 13 at the UW–Whitewater polling location.

Upon identifying the need for additional ballots, the Clerk's Office immediately contacted the appropriate County Clerks to coordinate the production and delivery of additional ballots to the respective polling locations.

At the UW–Whitewater polling location, the supply of regular paper ballots became critically low before authorization was received from the County to produce additional ballots. To ensure voting could continue without interruption, additional ExpressVote ballot cards were delivered, allowing voters to continue casting their ballots using the ExpressVote equipment and subsequently inserting their completed ballots into the tabulators. An ExpressVote machine uses touch-screen technology that produces a paper record and then voters put the ballot directly into the tabulation machine to be counted.

There was a line that formed for the ExpressVote machine. It took about 3 minutes for voters to make their choices on the screen and print the ballot.

As additional ballots for Ward 13 were produced, they were promptly delivered to the UW–Whitewater Hamilton Room. Throughout this process, the Clerk's Office maintained close communication with election officials at the polling location to monitor ballot inventory and coordinate timely deliveries.

It is important to emphasize that neither polling location experienced a complete shortage of available ballots, and no voter was turned away or denied the opportunity to vote due to ballot availability. Through coordination with the County Clerks and election officials, voting continued while additional ballot supplies were secured.

Ballot Ordering, Turnout Statistics, and Future Improvements

The initial ballot quantities for the November 2026 General Election were determined using turnout statistics from the previous gubernatorial election in 2022. These historical figures were used to establish ballot quantities that would accommodate anticipated turnout while allowing for additional voter participation.

The following table provides a comparison of historical turnout, the number of ballots initially ordered, and the 2026 election figures.

Polling Location	Previous Turnout 2022	Ballots Ordered	2026 Election Figures
Wards 13 - UW	180	200	421
Wards 1-7 -Armory	1,825	2,000	2,726

*Does not include other wards that did not have a shortage of ballots.

The initial ballot orders exceeded previous turnout figures by approximately 11% for Ward 13 and 9.6% for Wards 1–7. While these additional quantities were intended to provide a reasonable allowance for increased participation, the actual demand for ballots significantly exceeded projections.

The 2026 election figures also include absentee ballots that were requested but not returned. Specifically, Ward 13 had no unreturned absentee ballots, while Wards 1–7 had 51 absentee ballots requested but not returned. Excluding these unreturned absentee ballots, the corresponding figures would be 421 for Ward 13 and 2,675 for Wards 1–7.

Additionally, both polling locations experienced a higher-than-normal number of spoiled ballots, which further increased the number of physical ballots needed throughout Election Day. Seventy-four people spoiled their ballots and needed a second ballot. Normally that number is much smaller. Spoiled ballots must be replaced to allow voters to cast their votes, creating additional demand beyond the number of individuals participating in the election.

Predicting Election Day registration among university students presents a unique challenge, as student participation can fluctuate considerably between elections. Although additional ballots were ordered beyond historical turnout figures, the increase in voter participation was substantially greater than anticipated.

Moving forward, the Clerk's Office will review turnout data from previous general elections, including the November 2026 election, to establish more accurate ballot ordering projections. Particular consideration will be given to student voter participation, Election Day registration trends, absentee ballot activity, and the additional ballot quantities needed to accommodate spoiled ballots.

Ballot orders are based on historical turnout and anticipated voter participation, as ordering ballots for 100% of registered voters or enrolled university students would result in unnecessary costs to the City. The Clerk's Office strives to maintain sufficient ballot supplies while remaining mindful of City resources and taxpayer dollars.

The Clerk's Office will also evaluate appropriate contingency quantities to provide a greater margin for unexpectedly high turnout while remaining mindful of ballot printing costs and responsible use of City resources.

The goal will be to develop a more comprehensive approach to ballot ordering that better accounts for fluctuations in voter turnout and reduces the likelihood of requiring additional ballots on Election Day.

Conclusion

Overall, the November 3, 2026 General Election demonstrated meaningful improvements in voter processing, Election Day registration preparedness, and wait times. The assistance of student election workers was particularly valuable in helping voters arrive at registration stations with the necessary documentation, contributing to a more organized and efficient voting experience.

Although higher-than-anticipated turnout created challenges with ballot inventory, election officials responded promptly and effectively to maintain voting operations. Coordination with the County Clerks, timely delivery of additional ballots, and the use of ExpressVote equipment ensured that all voters had the opportunity to cast their ballots.

The experience provided valuable information that will be used to improve future election planning, particularly in the areas of ballot ordering, student voter turnout projections, absentee ballot activity, and contingency procedures.

The priority of the Clerk's Office remains ensuring that every eligible voter has the opportunity to cast their ballot in an efficient, accessible, and well-organized election while maintaining compliance with Wisconsin election laws and procedures.