



Legislation Text

File #: 19-2383, Version: 1

City of Alexandria, Virginia

MEMORANDUM

DATE: JANUARY 8, 2020

TO: THE HONORABLE MAYOR AND MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL

FROM: MARK B. JINKS, CITY MANAGER /s/

DOCKET TITLE:

Introduction and First Reading. Consideration. Passage on First Reading of an Ordinance to amend and reordain subsection (l) (Agudas Achim Congregation Election District) of Section 2-2-10 (Establishment of Election Districts and Voting Places), and to amend and reordain "The Official Map of the City of Alexandria, Virginia, Designating Election Districts and Voting Places," adopted by Section 2-2-13 (Map of Election Districts and Polling Places), all of Chapter 2 (Elections), Title 2 (General Government) of The Code of the City of Alexandria, Virginia, 1981, as amended to rename the Agudas Achim Congregation Election District the Charles Barrett Center Election District and establish the Charles Barrett Center (in lieu of Agudas Achim Synagogue) as the polling place for this precinct for elections in 2020 and thereafter.

ISSUE: Consideration of an ordinance to establish the Charles Barrett Center (in lieu of Agudas Achim Synagogue) as the polling place for this precinct and rename the Agudas Achim Precinct the Charles Barrett Center with no change to any precinct boundaries.

RECOMMENDATION: That City Council pass on first reading and schedule for second reading, public hearing and final passage on January 25, 2020 an ordinance (Attachment 1) to establish the Charles Barrett Center (in lieu of Agudas Achim Synagogue) and rename the Agudas Achim Precinct the Charles Barrett Center and as the polling place for this precinct with no change to any precinct boundaries.

BACKGROUND: The Alexandria Electoral Board, which is a bipartisan board comprised of three members who are appointed by the Alexandria Circuit Court for staggered three-year terms, is responsible for making recommendations to City Council concerning changes in precinct boundaries and the establishment of new precincts and polling places. The Code of Virginia (§24.2-307) gives City Council the statutory authority to make these changes.

In making its recommendations to City Council, the Electoral Board is primarily concerned with ensuring that precincts conform to legal requirements, are a manageable size, have suitable voting facilities and those voting facilities are fully accessible. The Electoral Board monitors any changes in the availability of polling place facilities and considers the current number of registered voters, in-person turnout statistics, the size of the voting facility and any likely residential development within the precinct.

In addition, the Code of Virginia (§24.2-310) requires that “each polling place shall be located in a public building whenever practicable.”

Following the June 11, 2019 Primary Election, the Electoral Board and representatives from Agudas Achim agreed to relocate the Agudas Achim polling place.

DISCUSSION: It was not legally possible to recommend a permanent replacement for Agudas Achim for the November 5, 2019 General Election. The Code of Virginia (§24.2-306) does not allow polling place changes to be enacted within 60 days of a general election and City Council’s first fall meeting did not take place until September 10, which was inside this 60-day window. (There is no such prohibition against enacting polling place changes prior to a Primary election.)

Instead, on August 7, 2019 the Alexandria Electoral Board voted unanimously to ask the Virginia Department of Elections to approve an “Emergency Polling Place Relocation” from Agudas Achim to the Art Gallery at Convergence. This move was in effect only for the November 2019 General Election; however, the Electoral Board had hoped to recommend Convergence as a permanent voting location following the election.

Unfortunately, Convergence experienced an electrical fire on October 31 and has indicated they are still without electricity. At a meeting on December 4, 2019, the Alexandria Electoral Board expressed concern over the repair schedule and stated a preference for relocating the permanent voting location for this precinct to the Charles Barrett Center (1115 Martha Custis Dr.) effective with the March 3, 2020 Presidential Primary Election.

The Charles Barrett Center is located about 4000 feet (about $\frac{3}{4}$ of a mile) from Agudas Achim and is closer to the population center of the precinct. It has served as temporary polling place in the past, for example from 1995 through 1999 when Agudas Achim was undergoing renovations and again in 2005 and 2008 when June Primary dates corresponded to religious holidays making Agudas Achim unavailable.

Parking: Voter parking can be reserved along Martha Custis, in front of Charles Barrett.

Accessibility. The Charles Barrett Center is fully accessible.

Available Space: For many elections, voters will be able to use the recreation center’s smaller spaces to vote; however, for the City’s largest elections voters would need to use the gymnasium—for example, the March 3, 2020 Presidential Primary and the November 3, 2020 Presidential election. Schools will be closed to students on both these days. The Electoral Board has secured permission from the Department of Recreation, Parks & Cultural Activities to use the Charles Barrett Center.

Outreach: Prior to proposing this change to City Council, the Electoral Board discussed polling place options over the course of several public meetings. All meeting notices and minutes have been posted online.

If City Council approves this ordinance, the Electoral Board will send notification by first class mail to all

affected voters prior to the March 3, 2020 Primary Election. Although only one notice is legally required, staff recommends that a second notice be sent to voters prior to the June 9, 2020 Primary Election as an added measure to ensure that voters are aware of the precinct changes. In addition, the Electoral Board will reach out to communities in the affected precinct, including Park Fairfax, Parc East Condominiums and Lloyd apartments to inform them of the change.

Additionally, the Electoral Board will post directional signs and maps at Agudas Achim and Convergence for all elections in 2020.

Timing: The Electoral Board recommends that Council make this polling place change effective with passage of the ordinance so it is in effect for the March 3, 2020, Democratic Party Presidential Primary Election. This will provide a greater opportunity for voters and election officers to adjust to the new polling place prior to the 2020 Presidential Election.

Future Polling Place Changes: The Electoral Board continually monitors polling places to ensure that they adequately support the voting process. Due to upcoming construction at Douglas MacArthur, this polling place will need to be relocated prior to the November 2020 Presidential Election.

FISCAL IMPACT: Currently, there are 2,823 registered voters in the Agudas Precinct. It will cost approximately \$3,700 to send two notifications to each registered voter in the precinct. This amount can be accommodated within the budget for the Office of Voter Registration and Elections.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Proposed Ordinance Cover
2. Proposed Ordinance
3. Exhibit 1 to Ordinance
4. Precinct Map

STAFF:

Susan Kellom, Secretary, Alexandria Electoral Board
Bruce Brown, Chairman, Alexandria Electoral Board
Jack Powers, Vice Chair, Alexandria Electoral Board
Laura Triggs, Deputy City Manager
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