



Legislation Text

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City of Alexandria, Virginia

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MEMORANDUM

**DATE:** JUNE 3, 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 Section 2-2-11 (ESTABLISHMENT OF CENTRAL ABSENTEE VOTER ELECTION DISTRICT AND VOTING PLACE), to amend and reordain Section 2-2-10 (ESTABLISHMENT OF ELECTION DISTRICTS AND VOTING PLACES) Subsection (n), 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 VOTING PLACES), all of Chapter 2 (ELECTIONS), Title 2 (GENERAL GOVERNMENT) of The Code of the City of Alexandria, Virginia, 1981, as amended.

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**ISSUE:** Consideration of an ordinance to establish Minnie Howard School and George Washington Middle School as additional Saturday in-person early voting locations for Presidential Elections and establish the George Washington Masonic National Memorial as a temporary replacement for Douglas MacArthur school polling place during construction with no change to precinct boundaries.

**RECOMMENDATION:** That City Council pass on first reading and set for public hearing, second reading and final passage on June 20, 2020, an ordinance (Attachment 1) to establish (1) Minnie Howard School and George Washington Middle School as additional Saturday in-person early voting locations for Presidential Elections, and (2) Establish George Washington Masonic National Memorial as a temporary replacement for Douglas MacArthur School voting location.

**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, polling places, and for establishing new precincts. City Council has the statutory authority to make these changes. In making its recommendations to Council, the Electoral Board is primarily concerned with ensuring that precincts and polling places conform to legal requirements, are a manageable size, have suitable voting facilities and 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.

The Electoral Board has determined, that due to the passage of No Excuse Absentee Voting legislation, additional satellite absentee voting sites are needed to accommodate the increase in voters for the November 3, 2020 Presidential Election. Additionally, the Board has determined that a polling place is needed to temporarily replace the Douglas MacArthur School because this facility will not be available due to ongoing construction.

**DISCUSSION:** On February 5, 2020 the Alexandria Electoral Board voted to recommend that City Council make the following changes:

- **Establish the Minnie Howard Campus and George Washington Middle School as satellite absentee voting sites for presidential elections, for the two Saturdays immediately preceding the election.**
  - **Background:** On April 11, 2020 Governor Northam signed HB1, which permits any registered voter to vote by absentee ballot in any election in which they are qualified to vote.

In recent years, there has been significant growth in absentee voting both in Alexandria and across the country, especially for Presidential Elections and other large turnout elections. Absentee voting has increased 23% from the 2012 Presidential Election to the 2016 Presidential Election. With the passage of no excuse absentee voting, that percentage is likely to significantly increase.

	Registered Voters	Absentee Turnout	Election Day Turnout	Total Turnout
2016	91,724	20,074	56,437	76,511
2012	86,134	16,259	57,839	74,098
2008	93,230	15,966	54,398	70,364
2004	76,962	7,279	54,236	61,515

The United States Election Assistance Commission shows the number of ballots cast prior to election day has doubled since 2004. Additionally, they noted in 2016, nationally 40% of voting was done prior to election day.

If Virginia has an absentee turnout of 40%, Alexandria could have over 30,000 voters cast ballots prior to election day.

Saturdays and the week prior to the election are the most popular time for voters to vote in person absentee. In 2016, 57% of in person absentee voters cast ballots during the last 7 days of absentee voting. Almost 40% of those voters cast ballots on the last two Saturdays prior to the election.

Currently, The City provides in-person absentee voting at the Office of Voter Registration and Elections, which is located at 132 North Royal Street, Suite 100, during normal office hours (Monday through Friday: 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.), for 45 days prior to each election, and minimum the last two Saturdays before each election. In addition, the Electoral Board keeps this office open for extended hours several evenings prior to each election for in-person absentee voting and these

extended hours are posted on the Voter Registration and Election web site and are also advertised in the local section of the Washington Post prior to each election.

In 2012, City Council voted unanimously to add Beatley Library as a Satellite absentee voting site for all November General Election. The hours and dates of absentee voting at the Beatley Library site are determined by the Alexandria Electoral Board. Historically Beatley has been opened for a minimum of seven days, including two Saturdays and four evenings immediately prior to General Elections.

§ 24.2-701.1.C. of the Virginia Code indicates that Satellite absentee voting “shall be in a public building owned or leased by the county, city, or town within the county”. Therefore, we are unable to use private facilities.

The Charles E. Beatley, Jr. Central Library in-person absentee voting location has been a successful location for elections, and Library staff are extremely helpful to voters, Election Officers and Election staff. Considering the success of this location and the continued growth in absentee voting, the Electoral Board recommends that City Council approve the ordinance to add Minnie Howard and George Washington Middle school as additional in-person Saturday absentee voting location for Presidential Elections.

- **Location of absentee voting sites:** Having in-person absentee voting available at the Minnie Howard Campus and George Washington Middle School, would provide voters with more geographically balanced, convenient locations to vote absentee. In addition, both locations have large parking lots and gymnasiums to accommodate a large number of voters. The additional locations should reduce the potential for waiting and lines at The Office of Voter Registration and Elections and at Beatley Library; both locations experience large numbers of voters on Saturdays.
- **Accessibility of the facility and available space:** The Alexandria City Public schools have indicated the gymnasiums are available for absentee voting at both facilities on Saturday, October 24, 2020 and Saturday, October 31, 2020.
- **Notification to voters:** If Council approves this ordinance, the Electoral Board will highlight the additional sites in the Citywide mailing scheduled to be sent to every registered voter prior to the November 3 Presidential Election. Additionally, notices will be posted about the additional absentee locations on the Department’s web site, press releases, social media and in the local newspaper.
- **Fiscal impact:** It will cost approximately \$9,000 to staff both satellite site for two Saturdays. This includes seasonal staff costs and janitorial services for the facility.
- **Establish the George Washington Masonic National Memorial as a temporary replacement for Douglas MacArthur school polling place during construction.**
  - **Background:** According to State law (Section 24.2-310.1 of the Code of Virginia) polling places are to be located in public buildings whenever practical. Douglas MacArthur Elementary is scheduled to be renovated beginning November 2020 through December 2023 and will not be available to serve as a polling place. The George Washington Masonic National Memorial has agreed to serve as a temporary replacement during this period as there are no alternative suitable public buildings located within or nearby the precinct.

- **Parking for voters:** The George Washington Masonic National Memorial has 200 parking spaces available which is adequate for the expected turnout on the November 2020 Presidential election and all other elections.
- **Accessibility of the Facility and Available Space:** The George Washington Masonic National Memorial has agreed to make their conference room available for voting. The conference room is immediately adjacent to the handicamp ramp, allowing for access for all voters. Additionally, the conference room is ideally situated with two doors, allowing voters to enter one door and exit the other keeping a clean traffic pattern.
- **Notification to Voters:** The George Washington Masonic National Memorial is 1.5 miles from the Douglas MacArthur polling place. All registered voters in the Douglas MacArthur will be mailed a notice indicating the polling place has temporarily changed. Additionally, the Office of Voter Registration and Elections will post information on the website, press releases and social media advertising the change. Signage will be posted close to the entrance of the old Douglas MacArthur polling place on Election Day, directing voters to the George Washington Masonic National Memorial.
- **Fiscal impact:** It will cost approximately \$2,900 to send notifications to the 3,800+ registered voters in the Douglas MacArthur precinct. This amount can be accommodated within the budget for the Office of Voter Registration and Elections.

**FISCAL IMPACT:** The cost of these two changes is approximately \$12,000 and is included in the FY 2021 Approved Operating Budget.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Ordinance Cover
2. Proposed Ordinance
3. MacArthur Temporary Polling Place Map

**STAFF:**

Jack Powers, Secretary, Alexandria Electoral Board  
Bruce A. Brown, Chairman, Alexandria Electoral Board  
Mary Lyman, Vice-Chair, Alexandria Electoral Board  
Joanna Anderson, City Attorney  
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