

Ad Hoc Polling Place Review Committee
July 24, 2012 at 6:30 p.m.
Engineering Conference Room
Woburn City Hall
Woburn, Massachusetts

Attending: City Council President Paul Denaro, Administrative Assistant to the Mayor Marie Lingblom, Woburn Handicapped and Disabled Citizens Commissioner Jennifer Murray, Republican City Committee Member Daniel MacGilvray, Democratic City Committee Member Joseph Demers, Unenrolled Voter Shaheen Mozaffar, Ph.D., and City Clerk William Campbell.

Absent: Assistant Superintendent of Schools Joseph Elia.

Chair of the committee, William Campbell, began the meeting by presenting the committee with a breakdown of Woburn's population as of July 19, 2012, the population in each Woburn precinct according to the 2010 Census, a list of each polling location with its distance from Woburn Memorial High School, and a letter from Superintendent of Schools Mark Donovan. In the letter, Superintendent Donovan acknowledged that having the elementary schools serve as polling locations is convenient for parents who can vote while either dropping their child off in the morning or picking him/her up in the afternoon. He also stated that using the schools as polling locations allows Woburn's citizens to spend time in the elementary schools. Lastly, he stated that having elections in the schools provides teachers with an opportunity to teach their students about citizens' roles within a democracy.

However, Superintendent Donovan also addressed a few major concerns in his letter. He stated that traffic was the biggest issue with having elections in the schools, due to the fact that traffic is normally an everyday concern and that citizens might not be familiar with the school's drop-off system and cause excess confusion. In addition, elections are generally held in the school's gym, cafeteria, or library, which prevents children from using those facilities and disrupts the day. Lastly, security is a major concern for many parents. He stated that around election time, he frequently receives phone calls from parents who are concerned for their child's safety. Superintendent Donovan feels that the negative aspects of having elections in schools far outweigh the positive aspects. He stated that although the schools have for many years been able to accommodate the needs of the city, he encourages the City of Woburn to explore as many alternative locations as possible. Dr. Mozaffar stated that Superintendent Donovan's letter thoroughly addressed the concerns regarding elections in the elementary schools and he appreciated how Superintendent Donovan mentioned both the positive and negative elements to the current voting situation.

In addition, Dr. Mozaffar presented to the committee a chart that showed the 2010 population and variance for each polling location in every precinct and ward in the City

of Woburn. President Denaro made a motion to place the aforementioned documents in the permanent record. The motion was passed, all in favor. Lastly, the official minutes for the July 16, 2012 meeting were adopted, all in favor.

Dr. Mozaffar stated that he appreciated the population breakdown of each precinct because it gave the committee an accurate figure of what it is dealing with. William Campbell stated that the number of voters in each precinct is more important than the total population. William Campbell stated that there are many opportunities for Woburn's citizens to register to vote, and that the voting totals of each precinct are mostly static although he acknowledges changes due to citizens moving and passing away.

Daniel MacGilvray stated that the School Committee wants a consolidation of the polling locations and they want the elections to be removed from the elementary schools as soon as possible. President Denaro agreed that the School Committee has mentioned in the past that they would prefer elections to be moved to new locations.

Joseph Demers mentioned the option of consolidating to only three locations. He stated that in order to consolidate precincts into only three locations, the precincts must border one another. William Campbell suggested a combination of the Joyce Middle School, Spence Farm, and the Senior Center. Joseph Demers stated that the Joyce Middle School was a good location because the gym is separate from the main building of the school, which is beneficial for student safety. He mentioned that the Kennedy Middle School was used in a past election when the Goodyear Elementary was under construction. However, William Campbell stated that parking is a concern at the Kennedy Middle School. Jennifer Murray stated that Spence farm is not big enough and does not have enough parking spaces to accommodate the voters.

Marie Lingblom stated that Chief Appraiser Andrew Creen told her that he would like a narrower assortment of information to determine property suitable for polling places. Marie Lingblom stated that the goal of the committee should be to try to think of additional city-owned property that could be used in future elections. President Denaro stated that he would prefer to select a publicly-owned building in case a privately-owned property is not available in the future. He stated that he wants to stay with municipal property in the future.

William Campbell stated that an alternative for the Goodyear Elementary School in Ward 5 was Cummings Property. He stated that Cummings Property had offered the City of Woburn the use of the one of their buildings in the past for no charge. However, he stated that the use of a Cummings Property building would not be a reliable source in the future as the property becomes rented. President Denaro suggested the use of the fire stations, but acknowledged that the fire stations could not be used in the future because they are too small and crowded. Joseph Demers suggested the use of the Boys & Girls Club in Ward 3, Precinct 2, but he acknowledged that he had concerns about the young children on the property. He suggested that the Boys & Girls Club may be able to rearrange their schedule to accommodate the election. He stated that the Boys & Girls Club is closed on Mondays and suggested asking the Boys & Girls Club to close on the election day instead

of the Monday of the election week. However, Marie Lingblom was concerned about using the Boys & Girls Club as a polling location due to the young children on the property. William Campbell stated that the Boys & Girls Club has a gym and an open area in the back where elections could take place.

Joseph Demers suggested consolidating to only three elementary schools with one day off to hold the election. However, President Denaro stated that it is not possible to only cancel school for one day. He stated that three days would be needed to hold an election in the elementary schools. William Campbell stated that consolidating to three elementary schools would be ideal if everyone's schedule coincided. He stated that the City of Woburn knows the date of the election a year in advance but it is difficult to accommodate the schools' schedules.

Daniel MacGilvray suggested looking at Woburn Memorial High School as one consolidated, central location. William Campbell stated that the committee should look at surrounding cities and towns that have one consolidated election location as an example. In regards to the high school, William Campbell stated that parking would be an issue. He stated that voter turnout for Presidential elections in the past has been between 70% and 75%, and was concerned that there would not be enough parking spaces to accommodate all of the voters. President Denaro stated that each class at the high school contains between 300 and 400 students. William Campbell suggested that on election days, perhaps students should not be allowed to drive themselves to school. Joseph Demers suggested consolidating the voting sites to the Joyce Middle School, Kennedy Middle School, and Woburn Memorial High School in order to completely remove the elections from the elementary schools. Daniel MacGilvray, however, stated that hosting the elections in the middle schools is still dangerous. Joseph Demers stated that the elections could be held in the gym at the Kennedy Middle School instead of in the hallways. Daniel MacGilvray stated that the Kennedy Middle School gym has a rear door but parking is an issue. Marie Lingblom suggested the use of churches, but acknowledged that the number of churches in the City of Woburn is decreasing. Joseph stated that the Woburn Mall cannot be used as a location because of access issues and there is too much traffic during commuting hours.

President Denaro stated that a single polling place raises the issue that the wards need to be touching, and it would be cost friendly. He encouraged the committee to look at other communities that have consolidated to one location as an example. William Campbell asked if the overall consensus of the committee was to completely remove the elections from elementary schools and the committee members concurred. Jennifer Murray stated that the primary focus of the committee should be to take the elections out of the elementary schools.

President Denaro suggested splitting the precincts in the City of Woburn into two polling locations. He suggested having the elections in both Woburn Memorial High School and the Joyce Middle School if logistics do not work with consolidating all the precincts to the high school. Joseph Demers stated that legislation would need to be passed in order to allow the City of Woburn to consolidate to two locations. William Campbell

acknowledged that dividing the city into two locations would be more convenient for parking and it would be easy for poll workers to travel between the Joyce Middle School and the High School, although he stated that the committee would have to compare the size of the Joyce Middle School gym and the High School gym. However, Dr. Mozaffar was concerned that voters in Ward 6 would have to travel far if the Joyce Middle School and High School were the only locations used. William Campbell echoed Dr. Mozaffar with his concern that it may not be fair for residents in North Woburn to travel to the High School to vote.

William Campbell stated that having only one voting location is convenient because all the poll workers and supplies are in one area. He stated that for a 2002 special election, the High School was used as a consolidated location and it was very successful. He mentioned that former Mayor Curran suggested that the elections be moved to the High School and Mayor Galvin has not opposed the concept of moving the election to the High School. Dr. Mozaffar stated that the High School could be closed for two days, one for the primary and one for the election. He stated that if the election is only being held at the High School, there would be many voters crowding the school but that the lines would move quickly. President Denaro stated that the poll workers could set up the supplies in the gym while school was still in session. Dr. Mozaffar stated that a conversation with Superintendent Donovan would be needed in order to consolidate to the High School. President Denaro said that a conversation with Superintendent Donovan would be needed whether there was one location or two voting locations.

President Denaro stated that consolidating to the High School should be the first option, consolidating to the Joyce Middle School and the High School should be the second option, and consolidating to the High School, the Joyce Middle School and the Senior Center should be the third option. William Campbell stated that having three locations should be a third option to fall back on and that having these three polling locations would not require legislation to be passed. He stated that the Senior Center would cover Ward 6, the Joyce Middle School would handle Wards 1, 3, and 7, and the High School would cover Wards 2, 4, and 5. President Denaro asked how long it would take for legislation to be passed if the City of Woburn consolidated to either one or two polling locations. Joseph Demers stated that legislation requests are generally not rejected unless they are done improperly. He said that local matters brought to the legislature are generally left alone. However, he stated that he would collect information on past precedent.

Dr. Mozaffar asked if Superintendent Donovan would come and speak with the committee about the committee's plans. William Campbell stated that Assistant Superintendent of Schools Joseph Elia would be present at future committee meetings. President Denaro stressed that the School Committee must be involved throughout the process of securing new voting locations.

Members of the committee were assigned tasks to be completed before the next meeting. Marie Lingblom is going to speak with the Director of the Council on Ageing Joanne Collins and Chief Appraiser Andrew Creen. William Campbell said that a statement from

Director Collins about how the Senior Center would be impacted by the election would suffice if she did not want to physically come to a meeting. William Campbell and Marie Lingblom are going to research surrounding cities and towns that have consolidated voting locations. Daniel MacGilvray will research the populations of surrounding cities and towns. Joseph Demers stated that information regarding elections in Reading is posted online. William Campbell stated that elections are held at Town Hall in Stoneham, although parking is limited. Joseph Demers will collect information on past precedent of cities consolidating into one central location. William Campbell asked if the Secretary of State's Office will have any impact on a request to consolidate polling places, to which Joseph Demers responded that the Secretary of State's Office's involvement might be helpful. President Denaro will ask the School Committee for data of operating nine schools for election day.

Dr. Mozaffar concluded the meeting by describing election procedures in foreign countries. He stated that in Iraq, elections were held in both elementary schools and high schools, and the majority of poll workers were teachers who considered their participation to be public service. William Campbell stated that it is not possible for teachers to work as poll workers during elections due to conflict of interest laws prohibiting a public employee to also serve as a paid poll worker. In addition, Dr. Mozaffar stated that the United States of America is the only country in the western world that does not hold elections during the weekend. He stated that elections are more convenient during the weekends and that Massachusetts procedure is way behind compared to other states and nations. Lastly, William Campbell stated that the election is held on the same day of the week every year so that it does not confuse voters about which day they are supposed to vote.

The next meeting is scheduled to be held on Thursday, August 2, 2012 at 6:30 p.m.

Meeting adjourned at 7:18 p.m.

Attest: _____
Megan Murphy, Clerk