

City of Milwaukee Election Task Force

Official Report

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City of Milwaukee Election Task Force

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Executive Summary

In November 2004, the City of Milwaukee's election process was tested by the sheer size of the election and challenges resulting from the political dynamics surrounding the presidential race. Like many other cities located in key battleground states, Milwaukee experienced an unusually high voter turnout, a record number of absentee voters, and questions surrounding how the election was conducted.

Mayor Tom Barrett formed an Election Task Force to study the City's election system and make recommendations for improvements. The Mayor charged the task force with proposing specific, practical changes to improve the City's election process in ways that would guarantee efficient, well-run elections and restore pride and confidence in the system.

After several months of study, discussions, and deliberations, the task force has formulated numerous recommendations that provide a strong foundation for updating and strengthening the City of Milwaukee's election system. The recommendations in this report embody the spirit of the Mayor's charge and reflect broad public input.

The task force convened four publicly noticed meetings on critical aspects of the election system including processes and procedures related to: 1) voter registration, 2) absentee ballots, 3) polling locations, and 4) poll workers. The standard format for each meeting included an overview of current Election Commission processes and procedures, relevant governing laws and testimony from individuals with knowledge on the topics examined. An extensive question and answer period followed.

The task force divided into four subcommittees on each of these respective focus areas to formulate preliminary recommendations and seek input from local and state election officials, community leaders, attorneys, poll workers and other interested citizens.

The task force convened a fifth publicly noticed meeting with an Election Management Team appointed by the Mayor to manage the spring 2005 election. Just days after the April 5, 2005 election, this management team, comprised of five experienced City Managers, de-briefed the task force on the strengths of the Election Commission and areas of concern.

The task force applauds the permanent and temporary staff of the Election Commission for their cooperation and help in assessing the operational aspects of the Election Commission and identifying areas in need of improvement. The task force also commends the staff for their professionalism throughout this undeniably difficult time.

As a result of its comprehensive review, the task force has found some imperfections in the City's election system and mistakes that must be addressed. Many problems can be attributed to staffing levels and training issues that can be resolved by enhancing training, strengthening quality control measures and through better pre-planning and advance

preparation. However, some problems require legislative fixes. Key recommendations follow.

The task force encourages an objective evaluation as to whether permanent staffing levels are adequate to effectively manage and administer elections in the City of Milwaukee, but believes it would be premature to recommend funding new positions until after the new Statewide Voter Registration System is implemented. The task force, however, recommends that the 2006 and future departmental budgets include much higher amounts for part-time, temporary workers in peak election years. Additional funding for computer hardware and software also needs to be analyzed, both in terms of newer as well as more capable equipment.

In an effort to enhance and strengthen the performance of an already highly capable permanent and temporary staff, it is important for the Executive Director to adopt and implement new administrative measures to support the needs and success of staff. The task force recommends:

- Restructuring Staff Priorities And Expanding Skills Through Cross Training. The permanent, full-time staff of the Election Commission consists of an Executive Director, Election Services Manager, Poll Worker Coordinator, Absentee Ballot Coordinator, Election Supplies/Equipment Coordinator, Customer Service Representative and Administrative Assistant. A reorganization of the staff to provide for an enhanced team with a combination of strong leadership, management, community outreach, media and election coordination skills is critical to improve operations as well as the public's perception of the Election Commission Office. The reorganization should focus on cross-training staff members to minimize disruptions of work and backlogs in all areas during peak times and/or if one staff member is out of the office for an extended period of time. Cross-training should also heighten morale and increase the team spirit among staff members rather than isolating duties strictly according to functional expertise.
- Developing Standard Operating Procedures. The Election Commission staff relies on separate election manuals issued by the State Elections Board, but there is no customized procedural manual available to staff. Development of a departmental manual of procedures should encompass pre-election, Election Day and post election issues – including but not limited to staffing, targeted due dates, software, election preparation, Election Day field operations, voter registration and absentee ballot processing and distribution. This manual should be reviewed by the State Elections Board and the City Attorney's Office.
- Prioritizing Urgent Tasks/Mobilizing City Resources. With tight budgets and the overwhelming demand of recent elections, it is difficult for the Election Commission to carry out all the core functions related to its mission, especially during peak election years. A solution is to better utilize City departments and divisions that support the whole of City government. City managers should be asked to loan exempt employees as needed before an election, on Election Day, and afterwards.

Prioritizing tasks according to their urgency and mobilizing City resources will help prevent problems like the one that occurred on the eve of the November 2, 2004 election involving thousands of new voter-registration cards that were not processed prior to the election. When conducting a post-election review, the Election Commission also found absentee ballots that were rejected at the polls because they lacked proper signatures. However, several were date stamped around mid-October, which should have been returned to the electors for signature so their vote could have been counted on Election Day.

- Create partnerships with private sector businesses. To augment the additional City resources dedicated to election activities, it is vital to embrace the business community of Milwaukee to attempt to promote their participation in Election Day activities as a civic duty. By doing so, the potential for expanding the City's base of qualified poll workers dedicated to conducting elections in a smooth and unbiased manner could be greatly increased.
- Establish Formal Staff Training. A formal training and orientation process should also be available to both permanent and part-time, temporary staff. The State Elections Board and City Attorney's Office should be involved in developing training content.

While most poll workers do their jobs admirably, often under difficult circumstances, the task force finds tremendous potential for improvement in the recruitment, training and development of poll workers. When conducting a post election review of materials related to the November 2004 election, the Election Commission Office found rejected absentee ballots that could have been re-constructed and counted on Election Day. For example, ballots that are torn and that cannot be fed into the voting machine can be reconstructed if voter intent is clear.

The staff also found Inspectors' Statements (EB 104 forms) that were not filled in accurately and completely. Omissions included, but were not limited to:

- No signature of the inspector.
- No tally of total absentee ballots.
- No tally of total number of voters.

In addition, many election poll list voter totals were not reconciled to the machine recorded vote totals at the end of Election Day, November 2004. As a result of inconsistencies, inaccuracies and incomplete poll books and EB-104 statements, there were discrepancies between the total number of voters and total number of ballots. Earlier this year, the United States Attorney for the Eastern District of Wisconsin, the Milwaukee County District Attorney, the Milwaukee Police Department, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation began a joint investigation of activities relating to the November 2004 election.

Almost all of the election materials associated with the November 2004 election are now in the custody of the U. S. Attorney, District Attorney and Police Department. The task

force has not, however, found any evidence to conclude that mistakes made on Election Day November 2, 2004 were based on the willful neglect or intent of any poll worker. However, it is imperative that the Election Commission take immediate action to attract and comprehensively train new poll workers.

The task force recommends that increased levels of performance be achieved in the following areas:

- Standards and Expectations: Elections have become more complex and expectations are rapidly rising, but standards for poll workers remain largely unchanged. Over the years, there has been little change in efforts to better train and recruit new poll workers despite the increasing demands of elections. Compensation is low, training is insufficient and recruitment efforts are lacking. Standards and expectations must be established on how our poll workers perform, how they are recruited and selected, and how they are trained and compensated. There is a need for post-election poll worker performance assessments to identify areas where training is most needed.
- Recruitment: The task force recognizes and commends our many outstanding long-serving poll workers for their loyalty and service. In addition to retaining current poll workers, the Election Commission must implement a plan to attract a new, diverse pool of poll workers, including young people. The average age of poll workers is between 65 and 75 and many have a great deal of difficulty working the extremely long hours demanded on Election Day. Splitting shifts should be considered to alleviate the burden on the elderly and attract students.
- Training: Existing training programs are insufficient for current needs. Class sizes are too large, there is minimal interaction between poll workers and trainers and one-hour classes appear to be insufficient. Training must be rigorous to ensure that poll workers meet minimum standards for knowledge of election procedures. Testing should be considered (perhaps an open book approach) and continuing education should be required during off-seasons. The State Board of Elections has already offered to help develop training content and even provide instruction.
- Compensation: To attract and retain the highest level of poll workers needed, increases in compensation should be offered. Compensation should reflect the increasing demands of elections.
- Volunteer Poll Workers: To attract volunteer poll workers, the task force recommends that the Election Commission aggressively launch a public relations and recruitment plan to engage businesses, community groups, universities and others in generating new poll workers. Establishing City/community partnerships will not only elevate Election Day as the City's highest priority each Election Day, but will also further the ultimate goal of increasing voter participation.
- City Managers: City managers should be reassigned from their respective departments to work the polls on Election Day and should be extensively trained to

help enforce quality control measures. It is mandatory that the City work closely with poll workers to ensure timely, efficient, complete record keeping and that numbers are reconciled at the end of election day.

The task force recognizes the need to adopt policies and procedures that will ensure the accuracy of the City's poll lists and that thwart the potential of election fraud. The implementation of the new Statewide Voter Registration System will enhance the City's ability to process voter registration, verify registration, generate ward lists, perform list maintenance and improve the accuracy of voter lists. Nonetheless, the task force anticipates ongoing challenges associated with same day registration and massive voter registration drives. The task force recommends:

- Establishing Procedures to Reduce Stress on the System and the Potential of Fraud. Current Election Day registration procedures make it difficult to detect fraud. For example, current voter registration cards do not contain a clear statement explaining that felons on probation or parole are prohibited from voting. In addition, crowded and stressful conditions at the polls can result in improperly filled out cards. The representative of the City Attorney's Office has expressed support for a requirement that people who wish to register at the polls show current photo ID, but there was no consensus reached by the task force. This requirement would not be applied to registered voters who arrive at the polls to vote, only to those individuals who did not pre-register.

In addition, address-verification postcards should be sent as a tool to update polling lists and tracked as they are returned to reduce fraud. Registration cards should contain a specific, clear statement that the individual is not a felon, on probation or parole.

- Establishing Tighter Controls for Deputy Registrars. Voter registration groups, in many cases, compensate their employees based on the number of new registrants an individual is able to engage. This incentive invites error and fraud. In 2004, the City registered more than 2,000 Deputy Registrars and many did not always follow registration guidelines as set forth in State statutes. This led to an increase in the number of questionable registration forms. Deputy Registrars should be clearly identified on registration cards, so that it is easier to track their activity. Current law should be amended to prohibit payment to deputy registrars based on the number of registrants. Training should also be enhanced for Deputy Registrars.

The task force finds the absentee balloting process to be particularly onerous and another area where there is great need for improvement. However, procedures and measures regarding absentee balloting are almost entirely the province of state law, and the ability to make changes at the local level is limited. The task force recommends:

- Moving in-person absentee voting from the current Election Commission Office location. The absentee ballot process in Wisconsin evolved into two somewhat unrelated situations in earnest in the November 2004 election – the typical absentee

voter who is out-of-town or cannot get to the polls, and the voter who wanted to avoid the normal Election Day rush. Unfortunately, many of the latter voters waited as long or longer than the wait time on Election Day in November 2004. “Off loading” in-person absentee voting to other locations makes sense in terms of both voter convenience and orderly election processing.

- Changing statutes to allow the processing of absentee ballots centrally, rather than at the polls. This change would greatly simplify absentee ballot processing and at the same time lower the costs and confusion associated with absentee balloting. In November 2004, runner confusion caused 238 ballots to be counted after the election. Between wages, vehicle rentals and cellular phones this costs the City approximately \$6,728 per election, money that could be better spent in other areas of the process.
- Advancing statutory deadlines to allow more efficient processing of absentee ballots. Clearly, the current deadlines – particularly the Friday before election deadline for submitting a ballot request – are unrealistic and compound the problems related to accurate polling place voter counts and thorough, accurate absentee ballot processing. With more time to resolve problems with the requests, rejection rates for these ballots should decline dramatically.

The City faces immediate challenges in addressing State and Federal requirements mandating that all polling locations must be accessible to individuals with disabilities. The state will provide Help America Vote Act (HAVA) funds for accessible voting machines (one per polling site), but we must find new locations to replace current sites that are not accessible. The task force recommends:

- Taking Immediate Action to Comply with HAVA polling place accessibility requirements. Milwaukee currently has 202 polling sites. The Election Commission must act immediately to identify sites that do not meet existing State and Federal requirements for physical accessibility standards and find new sites that are accessible, and should coordinate with MPS to identify other, more accessible locations.
- Establishing Voting Centers. The City should consider having fewer voting sites. This would mean fewer locations and larger spaces better laid out and organized. The voting center model (used in Colorado) enables election officials to reduce the number of polling places to a small, more reasonable number of centers.

These are among the many proposed election reforms outlined in this official report of the City of Milwaukee Election Task Force. Although a high level of energy and enthusiasm is needed to reshape the operations of the Election Commission Office, it is not an insurmountable task.

These findings and recommendations also clearly demonstrate the need for current and future managers of the Election Commission to build and maintain solid relationships in Madison and Washington to ensure that Milwaukee has a strong voice in policy

discussions and decision-making involving elections. Likewise, they reinforce the crucial need for local, state, and federal officials to infuse more resources into elections. Without adequate funding, it will be impossible for the City of Milwaukee to implement election reforms and maintain a strong election system.

Improvement of the election process is needed in Milwaukee, across Wisconsin and America, but it will not result in a quick fix to any given problem. Elections are complex, dynamic and evolving events that require advance planning and careful thought. Likewise, changing the process will take planning, careful thought, and most importantly, time.

The Mayor, the Election Task Force and City workers are committed to conducting open, fair and efficient elections and implementing the recommendations in this report.

Voter Registration

Background

The task force identified the purposes of the voter registration system as: obtaining a complete, accurate list of eligible voters before and after election day; ensuring against fraud; and facilitating the voting of those who are eligible. The task force attempted to gain a working understanding of the voter-registration laws, how the City's Election Commission handles its voter-registration functions, and the way the new Statewide Voter Registration System will operate. With this information, the task force's objectives were to identify weaknesses, and then to make recommendations to address those weaknesses.

The task force limited its work to issues involving voter registration, both before Election Day and at the polls. It did not address issues relating to the actual mechanics of voting.

State laws governing registration are outlined in Chapter 6 of the Wisconsin Statutes. Throughout the year, and before the close of registration, voter registrations may be processed at the Election Commission Office.

State law requires that upon receipt of a registration form that has been submitted by mail, the Election Commission must examine the form for sufficiency. If the voter registration form is insufficient or if the Election Commission has reliable information that the individual is not qualified, state law requires the office to notify the proposed elector within five days, if possible. The Election Commission is required to request that the elector appear at the Election Commission to complete a proper registration or substantiate the information presented. If the registration form is submitted later than the close of registration (13 days before the election), the Election Commission must make a good faith effort to notify the elector that he or she may register at the Election Commission or at the polls on election day. If, on the other hand, the registration is sufficient, the Election Commission is required to enter the elector's name on the registration list and send a first class letter or postcard to the registrant, specifying the elector's ward or aldermanic district and polling place.

The Election Commission is also required to follow procedures for appointment of special registration deputies prescribed by the State Elections Board. Registration deputies can be appointed by the Election Commission to take registrations at locations other than the Election Commission office.

Beginning in 2006, the Help America Vote Act (HAVA) requires states to have a single, uniform, centralized, interactive, computerized, statewide voter registration list. Wisconsin must implement its list by January 2006. The Election Commission is not responsible for implementation, but will be responsible for duties associated with entering new voter registrations and updating lists whenever the office receives information showing a change in elector data, such as a new address or a change in the eligibility status of the elector.

Issues and Concerns

The task force found many problems with respect to the November 2004 election associated with voter registration processes and procedures. These problems can be summarized in two basic areas – operations and current laws.

Operations:

1. Lack of sufficient staffing and equipment.
2. Limited purging and updating of lists.
3. Input errors.
4. Illegible and incomplete registration cards received in the mail and on Election Day. Problems with election-day registration cards made it difficult to get an accurate list of people who voted.
5. Surges in registrations for major elections can overwhelm the system, both before the election and at the polls.
6. Lack of written procedures.
7. Poll-worker errors.
8. Duplicate registrations. This can be a particular problem with election-day registrations, because people forget they already registered, are worried that their registrations were not processed, or intentionally violate election laws.
9. Failure to send verification postcards for early registrations.
10. Difficulty identifying felons. Obviously, felons cannot be identified when registering on Election Day. Felon matches for pre-registrants will be easier to identify with the statewide system.
11. Insufficiently trained deputy registrars.

Current Law

Deputy registrars can legally be paid based on the number of people they register. This may be an incentive for fraud. They are unregulated and difficult to track.

Election-day registration procedures make it difficult to verify eligible voters because poll workers do not have access to computer databases. The volume puts stress on the system.

Findings and Recommendations

1. In major elections, registration and, in particular, election-day registration is a major cause of problems in administering an election. Current Election Day registration procedures make it difficult to detect fraud. In addition, crowded and stressful conditions at the polls can result in improperly completed registration cards. Significantly, the investigation conducted by the U.S. Attorney and the District Attorney focused primarily on election-day registrations. Because election-day registration is currently permitted, procedures and improved staffing must be put in place to reduce stress on the system and to reduce the potential for voting twice or improperly. The representative of City Attorney's Office has expressed support for a requirement that people who wish to register at the polls, must show current photo I.D, but there was no consensus about this on the subcommittee.

2. There were very few written procedures regarding registration in existence at the Election Commission. There was no step-by-step written procedure for utilizing the software system. These must be created. The state will be writing some standardized procedures for the use of its system, but the City should have its own detailed procedural manuals.

3. There is insufficient staffing and equipment to handle registrations before and in the aftermath of major elections. Input errors and delays could be reduced by increasing staff levels and purchasing new and better software and hardware, and by keeping trained technicians available or on staff. City workers from other departments could be used more effectively. While the statewide system may be easier to use, inputting data will still be the City's responsibility.

4. The software currently used at the Election Commission only verifies that an address is "plausible"; that is, the address "could" exist within the City of Milwaukee. The statewide system's address-verification software is the same. There are other City databases that could be made available to verify whether the address is an "actual" address and these tools should be used when new registrations are entered.

5. Opportunity for fraud will be reduced before an election if address-verification postcards are sent to advance registrants, and if voter lists are then appropriately updated and purged. Some of this may be more easily accomplished with the new statewide registration system. In fact, with the new system it will be simple to print out and label postcards. The state, with appropriate legislation, could send out the postcards and do the updating instead of the City. It is important to remember that the statutory tool to achieve accurate voter registration lists and to catch fraud before the election is the verification postcard. These postcards are also used after the election, because there is currently very

little else that can be done when people can register at the polls, to detect fraud before someone votes.

6. Deputy registrars should be clearly identified on registration cards, so that it is easier to track their activity. There were approximately 2,000 deputy registrars in the November 2004 election. Perhaps there should be a limit to the number of deputy registrars. Each deputy registrar should be given an ID number, which must be inserted on each card and included in the database. The law should prohibit payment to deputy registrars based on the number of registrants.

7. The delays and errors in processing registration cards were in large part caused by the surge of new registrations before the presidential election. Temporary workers were hired. Hands-on supervision of non-regular election staff is necessary. Another reason that entry of new registration cards was delayed was the fact that the poll list has to be run by a certain date in advance of the election; therefore, entry of new registrations had to be suspended to run the complete poll list for use at the polls. An earlier cut-off date for pre-registration, two weeks earlier than the current day, might have helped the situation. This would also facilitate better follow-up with verification cards and corrections.

8. The subcommittee did not ascertain the number of pre-registration cards that were not entered into the system before the November 2004 election. As discussed above, the delay in entering these names resulted from late cut-off dates, the need to stop entering data to work on absentee ballots, the need to run the poll list in advance of the election, insufficient staff and equipment, an antiquated software system, and difficulty reading handwritten cards. Supplemental lists and registration cards were provided to poll workers; anecdotal evidence suggests that they were not uniformly used, and there were numerous duplicate registrations as a result.

9. Poll-worker errors, perhaps understandable because of the volume, were responsible for much of the difficulty in processing election-day registrations after the election. There were duplicate registrations, incomplete cards, and illegible cards. The task force was told that more than 1400 cards had to be “followed up” with requests for more information. There should be better training for those poll workers who are responsible for registration.

10. The task force was told that there were 850 election-day registrations cards that could not be inputted, and over 1400 cards that needed follow-up for more information.

11. Verification cards were sent out to people registering at the polls, if the addresses were legible. The returned cards were given to the District Attorney.

12. It appears that there were no formal objections to registrations at the polls. There is a statutory mechanism to challenge registrations at the polls, as well as before the election (which was, in fact, utilized in October 2004).

13. Registration cards should be two-sided, with confidential information on one side only, to better accommodate public-records requests. Registration cards should specifically set forth all voting eligibility requirements, and should include a statement that the individual is not a felon, on probation or parole. It is the subcommittee's understanding that the state may be redesigning the cards and will require the voter's previous address.

14. Cities across the country experienced similar conditions when registering new voters. While the task force heard testimony regarding other cities' registration procedures, staff time did not permit an in-depth survey and analysis. The City should examine other jurisdictions' registration systems to identify "best practices" that can be applied to Milwaukee.

Additional Thoughts

The initial implementation of a Statewide Voter Registration System will produce some immediate benefits in terms of standard registration procedures and internal controls over the voter database updates. Moreover, applied to its full potential, an automated Statewide Voter Registration System would make possible fundamental improvements to Milwaukee's current election system. A uniform statewide voter database that can be accessed "real time" would provide the potential for a virtual elimination of duplicate voting. Immediate, automated access to voter registration information would also speed up the voting process for both poll workers and voters. Ultimately, a fully automated system could reduce the number of people and voting location places needed while at the same time increasing convenience and reducing wait times for voters. It will require an extensive effort to achieve this level of automation of the election process. Elected officials and the general public will need to fully understand and reach agreement on the necessary changes. Legislative change will be required. Additional funding and a period of extensive effort to design and implement the desired automation will also be required. However, in spite of these obstacles, the opportunity to achieve major improvements in the cost-effectiveness of the current outdated election processing system cannot be ignored.

Absentee Ballots

Background

The task force considered several aspects associated with absentee ballots including the qualifications to vote absentee, the application process and the absentee voting process. The task force sought to identify processes and procedures that are overly restrictive and that can be simplified to make absentee voting more accessible and efficient.

Wisconsin state laws governing absentee ballots are outlined in Chapter 6 of the Wisconsin Statutes. The law provides that a qualified elector who is unable or unwilling to appear at a polling place, **for any reason**, may vote absentee. Electors may make written application by one of the following means:

- A written request by mail.
- In person at the Election Commission Office.
- By signing a statement that the elector is indefinitely confined due to age, physical illness or disability (they are then put on permanent list and sent ballots every election).
- By agent if elector is hospitalized.
- By delivering an application to a special voting deputy if the elector is a resident of nursing home, retirement home or community-based residential facility.

Preparing and Sending Absentee Ballots

State law requires that the Election Commission mail (return postage prepaid), an absentee ballot to an applicant, or deliver it personally to applicant at the Commission office. It must be mailed to the applicant's residence, unless otherwise directed.

The Election Commission is required to prepare write-in absentee ballots for delivery to military electors at each election. The Election Commission is required to prepare write-in ballots for overseas electors at each election for national office, no later than the 90th day before the election or as soon as possible after the offices to be contested in the election are known, whichever is later. The Election Commission must turnaround the request within one day after request is made. However, on the day official absentee ballots become available, write-ins are not to be mailed and instead, the official absentee ballots are to be sent.

Voting and Handling of Absentee Ballots

Identification is required for first-time absentee voters who have not voted in a national election. Acceptable ID includes a current and valid photo ID, a copy of a utility bill,

bank statement, pay check or check or other document issued by a unit of government that shows a current name and address of the elector. Processes and procedures related to voting and handling of absentee ballots include:

- The Election Commission is required to keep track of applications – when ballots are sent and returned – to compile the list of absentee voters.
- Absentee ballots must be marked in the presence of a witness who must sign a statement on back of the ballot envelope.
- When each ballot arrives at the Election Commission it must first be time stamped, then must be placed, unopened in a carrier envelope that is securely sealed and endorsed by Executive Director. On Election Day all ballots are delivered to respective polling places before polls close.
- Election Inspectors can process ballots through out Election Day, but they must be entered into election machines to be counted before the polls close at 8 p.m.
- Upon opening each carrier envelope, inspectors announce the name of electors voting absentee to provide opportunities for challenges.
- If the certification process is properly completed, ballots are deposited in ballot box and Inspectors enter elector’s name or voting number (followed by an “A”) in the poll list just as if the elector had been present.
- If rejected, inspectors cannot count ballot and must mark “rejected” and reason for rejection.
- Should an absentee ballot be reconstructed and accepted, then a number will be assigned and a reason stated for the reconstruction followed.

Staffing Issues

The Election Commission has a permanent staff of approximately seven authorized full-time positions, including an Absentee Ballot Coordinator. The Absentee Ballot Coordinator works with temporary employees and volunteers to review initial requests for applications and input data of the required information. Staff also tracks applications, when ballots are sent and returned.

Stuffing, labeling, mailing and data input following the return is handled by the Absentee Ballot Coordinator and temporary staff and volunteers. Sorting, packaging, packing in machines and delivery to each of the wards on Election Day are handled by the Absentee Ballot Coordinator, Elections Equipment and Supplies Coordinator and Absentee Ballot runners.

When the Election Commission receives ballots they are again, first time and date stamped, separated by aldermanic district and ward, and then placed in envelopes to be delivered to the correct polling location.

When the ballots are separated, absentee ballot runners deliver the ballots to their proper polling location on Election Day. Thirty-four runners are hired for each election to complete this task. Between wages, vehicle rentals and cell phones, this cost the City

about **\$6,728.00** per election - money that may be better spent in other areas of the process.

Moreover, the confusion, extra workload and exception processing imposed on poll workers attempting to record absentee ballots in high turnout elections make polling place errors more likely to occur.

Facilities/Equipment

Absentee Ballots are currently processed in the Election Commission Office main conference room.

Preparing, Sorting and Packaging Absentee Ballots and Dispatching to the Polls on Election Day is all handled in the “confines” of the Election Commission Office and main conference room.

Issues and Concerns

The heavy demand for absentee ballots for the November 2004 election created tremendous challenges for the Election Commission. Approximately **24,400** individuals requested absentee ballots for the November 2004 election. Of that total **18,651** requests were returned. This marks a substantial increase compared to past elections. **6,173** absentee ballots were processed for the September 2004 primary. In the fall 2000 primary, **4,492** were processed and **10,017** in November 2000 general election. A total of **7,939** electors voted in person before the November 2004 election and **10,712** voted by absentee/mail for November 2004 election.

Processing of this extraordinary number of requests was accomplished despite the fact that the Absentee Ballot Coordinator joined the Election Commission staff approximately one month prior to the fall 2004 primary, filling a position that had been vacant for some time.

Additional Staffing Issues

In the fall of 2004, the absentee ballot process was hindered due to the sheer enormity of requests and inadequate staffing levels. Following are problems encountered:

- Requests honored too late in some instances.
- Voters who tried to vote by absentee ballot in person waited in long lines for many hours (City Hall was the only location to cast such a vote).
- The Election Commission's intent was to utilize Absentee Ballot Runners as the first tier of distribution, with the Field Supervisors and Technicians to be used as the second and third tiers.
- On Election Day, ballots were not assigned for distribution consistent with the intent of the Election Commission, resulting in unsorted, unpackaged ballots being taken into the field for distribution.
- No time for proper processing (ballots received at 5 p.m.) and distribution to the polls caused 238 ballots to be counted after the election due, in part, to absentee runner assignment confusion.
- The total 18,651 absentee voters ballots would then have been delivered to the polls by runners, rather than having been preloaded into the voting machines prior to the election.

Facilities/Equipment

The main conference room where absentee ballots are processed at the Election Commission is **inadequate** during peak elections. There is a **STRONG** need for a much bigger space, **three times the current size**.

There is no separate count or bin for absentee ballots when they are placed in the voting machine. (A red "A" is placed next to the voter number in the polling book to identify persons as an absentee voter. This leads to confusion. Many poll workers did not accurately record the "A" **after the voter number** in the poll books for absentee votes **attributing to discrepancies reported in the newspapers**.)

Current Statutes

Although current law may be reasonable for smaller municipalities, the deadlines and timelines for processing absentee ballots are unreasonable for sizeable cities like Milwaukee, especially during peak election years.

State law does not provide sufficient time processing absentee ballots after they are delivered by the United States Postal Service. The City of Milwaukee has a cut off for absentee ballots of 5pm on Election Day. This is not sufficient time to process and deliver them to all 202 polling sites by 8pm to be counted.

Current law allows absentee ballots to be processed anytime between opening and closing of the polls, and absentee ballots must be counted after they arrive at the polls to be sure they are counted before business is wrapped up at the polls. This leads to many disruptions on Election Day. For Presidential Elections this task becomes insurmountable even for our best, most experienced poll workers.

Recommendations

1. Advance the statutory due dates for -

- **County submittal of ballot forms to City (or make City of Milwaukee as the State's only first class municipality responsible for printing its own ballot forms).**
- **Voter submittal of absentee ballot request applications.**
- **City mailing of ballot forms packet to absentee voter.**
- **Voter submittal of completed absentee ballots.**

Clearly, the current deadlines - particularly the Friday before election deadline for submitting a ballot request - are unrealistic and compound the problems related to accurate polling place voter counts and thorough, accurate absentee ballot processing. With more time to resolve problems with the requests, rejection rates for these ballots should decline dramatically.

2. Change statutes to allow the processing of Absentee Ballots centrally rather than at the polls.

Along with 1) above, this is by far the most significant recommendation. This change would greatly simplify absentee ballot processing, at the same time lowering the costs and confusion associated with absentee balloting. The main benefit would be in improved controls. A central election staff would examine AND COUNT all ballots in a consistent manner, properly recording each absentee ballot with the voter. Because ballots can be recorded as to voter (but not opened) before election day, this would enable the recording of the existence of an absentee vote associated with a given voter on the polling list **before** the lists are sent to the polling place. This also means no absentee ballot "runner" deliveries, no repeated trips as late absentee ballots are received, and most importantly, early recording of all absentee voters on the polling list. Thus, an excellent control discouraging double voting would be in place. Special processing would no longer be required at the polls to record these votes. This would lighten the workload and lower the level of "exception processing" at the polling locations.

There would need to be an opportunity to allow potential challenges to absentee ballots at the central location, but hopefully that could be arranged in an acceptable manner. This is another area requiring statutory change. However, given the substantial additional investments in personnel, training, equipment etc. which will be needed to improve election processing overall, the cost savings and effectiveness benefits produced through this recommendation together with the advancing of deadlines (see #1 above) should be pursued vigorously.

3. Change in-person absentee voting from current location to avoid congestion at the Election Commission Office. Establish other convenient early voting location(s) for high turnout elections.

The absentee ballot process in Wisconsin has evolved into two somewhat unrelated situations beginning in earnest in the November, 2004 presidential election – the typical absentee voter and the voter who wanted to avoid the rush of the normal election by voting early. Unfortunately, many of the latter voters waited as long or longer than the wait time on Election Day in November 2004.

“Off loading” some of the voting process to days prior to the election makes sense in terms of both voter convenience and orderly election processing. As voters are encouraged to come early, not only is Election Day made easier, but also many of the communication problems and paper flow between the City and the otherwise “mail in” absentee voter are eliminated.

One obvious response to the long lines encountered last November is to provide more appropriate central location(s) for in-person absentee voters in high turnout elections. Although there is obviously a cost associated with this provision, the benefits associated with convenient voter access to the polls prior to Election Day and the workload leveling benefits on Election Day strongly support this recommendation.

4. Evaluate workflow and space needs for absentee ballot preparation, mail out and receipt. Establish a suitable work site for absentee ballot processing (in a secure environment).

Efficient and controlled receipt of absentee ballot requests, preparation and mail out of absentee ballot packets, and the receipt and recording of absentee ballots is a time consuming, labor-intensive process. It has also accurately been described as a “very physical job” by election staff.

Descriptions of the process indicate well-controlled procedures in terms of central elections staff processing. However, a careful examination of the workflow, in process paper flow and storage is needed to make the process move as smoothly as possible. A key element of this analysis is the availability of a properly configured, adequate floor and records storage space to facilitate this processing. There may be a need to separate this processing from the Elections Commission office to provide adequate space and workflow.

5. Other thoughts for consideration

While the above recommendations are the primary recommendations of the task force, other ideas that merit consideration include:

- Use of the City’s cable channel and its web site to provide a live step-by-step “walk-through” to guide proper completion of the Application for Absentee ballot and completion of an actual ballot.

- Include a sample completed Application form in the packet keyed with numbers, with each number tied to a specific instruction to accompany the form.

General Comments

Much has been said throughout the course of task force discussions about the additional investment in people needed – both in terms of number of staff and staff preparation – for the job at hand. The need for added staff investment should indeed be investigated for absentee ballot processing. However, major permanent staff additions should not be made until AFTER the Statewide Voter Registration System is in place and the reforms recommended above have been pursued.

A recommendation dealing with the documentation of procedures certainly should apply to ballot processing. As people, technology and process change, procedure documentation provides the continuity or “glue” that allows positive change to proceed smoothly. Also, recommendations regarding training also apply to absentee ballot processing. Citizen and group comments regarding delayed, confusing and in many cases non-response to phone queries and phone messages are symptoms of a staff needing proper training.

Polling Locations

Background

This subcommittee explored deficiencies associated with polling locations and placed special emphasis on State and Federal requirements related to polling place accessibility. The state will provide funds for accessible voting machines (one per polling site), but in order to obtain the funding the City is responsible for identifying sites that do not meet accessibility requirements and replacing those sites by 2006.

State requirements for selecting polling places and site setup, in general, are outlined in Chapter 5 of the Wisconsin Statutes. These include the following elements:

- Polling locations must be public buildings unless impractical, in which case other private locations can be used.
- The Board of Election Commissioners establishes sites.
- Sites need to be established 60 days before September primary and general elections, and 30 days before others.
- The American flag must be displayed during open voting hours.
- There must be one voting booth for each 200 electors who voted in last general election.
- There must be a separate ballot box for each form of ballot.
- There must be separation of voting booths and machines from other activities occurring in the location.
- No distractions to electors are allowed.
- There are the following posting requirements:
 - Relevant voting instructions
 - Election fraud laws
 - Two sample ballots
 - Consolidated ballot instructions, if necessary

Staffing/Facilities

Currently, there are 202 polling sites for 314 wards in the City of Milwaukee. Some of the locations have multiple wards (two or three) voting in that location – there are 94 multiple ward locations. The locations consist of the following types:

- 103 public schools
- 31 private sites
- 17 City/County parks
- 14 public housing developments
- 9 fire stations
- 12 school/county recreation buildings

- 9 libraries
- 7 other public buildings

Public locations are chosen as much as possible. Where public sites are not available in an area, private sites are negotiated (most are at non-profit agency locations). A tremendous amount of work with multiple organizations, both public and private, is required to get the total number of sites.

For all locations, the Wisconsin State Elections Board “Polling Place Accessibility Survey Form” is self-administered by election officials. In Milwaukee, this shows many accessibility deficiencies, although some locations have only partial information. The Wisconsin Coalition for Advocacy (WCA) surveyed 9 locations in Milwaukee and looked at detailed accessibility issues. (Their findings are discussed later in this document.)

There are standards for setting up polling locations. These include such things as layout, signage and supplies, and locations of furniture and voting booths. Due to the need to fit into whatever location is supplied, these standards have to be applied very loosely to fit the space, which often results in less-than-ideal layouts. The layout is ultimately the responsibility of the chief inspector at each location.

It is important to note that that State and Federal law requires that the City submit an accessibility report to the State this year, and that all polling locations be accessible by January 1, 2006.

A number of groups monitor elections on site at polling locations. These include:

- Election Protection
- Wisconsin Coalition for Advocacy
- HAVA volunteers
- State observers
- Partisan observers

These extra people can cause confusion and may place an extra burden on election staff.

Issues and Concerns

The issues and problems regarding polling locations can be summarized in five different areas. These include the sites, accessibility, layout and space, equipment and materials, and flow and circulation.

Sites

Many of the polling sites are deficient in one or more aspects and there is no clear method to ensure that the acquired sites are adequate. Since there are so many sites needed, less than optimal space is often all that is available.

There is a process used with MPS to determine the school locations that will be used, and much coordination is required since we use so many schools. MPS generally controls what sites are used and took some sites off the table in the last November election. There is often poor coordination with other school activities that are occurring at the same time, and this can disrupt and confuse the voting process.

The Milwaukee Fire Department no longer wants to allow the use of fire stations, since they are unattended if staff needs to leave for a fire. This is an issue, since nine other sites would have to be found to make up for these.

Finally, we use a number of private non-profit sites. We pay for use of non-profit sites, even though they do not pay taxes and benefit from City service including Police and Fire protection. This is an extra, and perhaps unnecessary, expense for the City.

Accessibility

There are problems with accessibility at many of the sites. This is largely due to the large number of sites needed, and the fact that many schools are not handicapped accessible. Of the MPS schools used as polling locations, 25 are non-accessible to the handicapped.

Of nine City site surveys conducted by WCA, one site had one accessibility problem, seven sites had numerous issues (ranging from two to nine), and the site with the most problems had twelve. Disabled voters had many challenges, including the following:

- Waiting for a ballot at the curbside – there was usually not enough staffing or staff were busy doing other things. Election Protection pointed out that there was a shortage of staff to assist, making the wait unacceptable.
- The frail and elderly have trouble standing in line for long periods.
- Stairs were a barrier in many locations.
- Accessible doors were sometimes locked.
- Pathways to the building and entrances often had access problems.
- There were often problems moving around once inside the building.
- Various access problems existed in the voting areas.
- Markings for parking– both the polling locations and the parking were not always well marked.
- The parking location was not always convenient for access.
- The amount of accessible parking was often lacking or non-existent.

Layout and Space

In terms of layout and space, poor organization of the room and space often made for inefficiencies. This may be largely due to the variations in space at different locations, resulting in the inability to apply the same standards to each space. Essentially, each space is unique. This sometimes leads to the inability to properly separate different functions and people during the voting process. A lack of sufficient voting booths was cited as an issue at some locations, especially in a large election.

Equipment and materials

Materials are numerous and easy to misplace. Materials may not always be easy to use; adequate training is needed. There also seems to be different equipment provided at different locations. The Election Commission should provide all the materials and equipment that are required at a site.

Flow and circulation

There would seem to be a lack of current operating procedures relating to proper methods to ensure adequate flow and circulation. This is obviously worse during a large election. Lines and crowding seem to occur, perhaps due to inadequate signage, staff to direct people, and general layout issues. Finally, improper mingling of voters and observers occur due to space constraints, lack of clear area delineation, and inability of staff to spend time controlling observers.

Recommendations

Recommendations follow the same five areas used to identify issues and problems above.

Sites

The City, together with appropriate groups, needs to finish surveying all sites in order to determine adequacy and issues that occur with various spaces and surrounding areas. This includes the size, layout and the accessibility of the space. (Wisconsin State Elections Board Polling Place Accessibility Survey Form). All 202 current sites are scheduled to be surveyed by the Election Commission this year. The survey report must be timely filed with the State.

The City should look very seriously at having fewer sites that are better equipped, better planned, better staffed and better laid out and organized (voting centers). The voting center model (used in Colorado) enables election officials to reduce the number of polling places to a smaller, more manageable number of centers. It significantly reduces the number of election workers needed and enables better selection of personnel who demonstrate needed skills.

The City should also consider working much more closely with MPS to recognize importance of election days. School sites are numerous and generally accessible and well known. The City has a good working relationship with MPS. The City should try to get better, larger, more accessible space in the schools. We should also examine the possibility of scheduling teacher in-services around election days, in order to improve the environment and access.

The City should negotiate with private sites to get them at no charge if they are owned by tax-exempt organizations.

The Election Commission should try to keep current fire station locations, as it would be very difficult to find facilities to replace all nine of these, and in addition they are all accessible. State and Federal law require that all facilities must be accessible. This argues in favor of several recommendations above, including fewer locations better staffed and equipped, schools closed during large elections, and retention of fire stations.

The City needs to anticipate and plan for the large elections, perhaps differently than for the smaller elections. Especially for large elections, we need to plan for more observers with regard to space and organization.

A final site issue that should be examined is to enable the addition of other locations for absentee voting before an election, not just at City Hall. This would relieve pressure on a single site, and provide for more efficient processing, especially if computers were available at all the sites.

Accessibility

Wisconsin Advocacy Coalition identified 15 “easily correctible” types of problems in its analysis, ranging from clearly designated accessible parking spaces to clearing pathways to the buildings. These should be analyzed and corrected to the greatest extent possible.

Generally, the needs of the disability community fall into the following categories:

- Availability and clear signage for accessible parking and entrance routes and pathways.
- Availability and clear signage for curbside voting.
- Staff availability for assistance.
- Need better outreach to handicapped before elections, so they know what is available and where – work with the advocacy groups to accomplish this.
- Need funding (federal, state) to accomplish some of these objectives.

A lesser number of large voting centers could provide easier and less costly compliance with HAVA accessibility requirements.

Layout and space

It would help to better organize and mark the available space to keep people moving and in the right place. Poll watchers need to be contained in designated spaces so they do not interfere with the voting process or the election workers.

There should be a review of standards and templates for layout and space. Training should be provided in setup. Oversight of the process could be done by City or other volunteers.

Equipment and furniture

There should be standard setup and layout templates. It may help to have more tables and a resulting better separation of functions, especially for large elections. Finally, a designated separate area for workers to break and eat would be helpful.

Flow and circulation

Improved signage would help to alleviate lines. Bulletin boards and posted information should be posted up front and be large and clear. Where there are multiple wards, persons often wait in a single line rather than splitting into the two ward signs. This would be facilitated by large maps at the entrance, where a voter could determine their ward, and therefore the correct line to stand in to vote.

Having staff available to greet and provide directions up front when people enter and join the line would also be of great benefit to help keep things moving along.

Finally, the City should examine the feasibility of completing the registration process all in the same line, rather than having to walk over to another table to get a ballot.

Overall Recommendation

1. Establish “voting centers” – this would mean fewer locations, with larger spaces available which are better laid out and organized. Overall, this would require less but much better trained, computer proficient staff. This approach is largely dependent on use of the SVRS computerized state list on site in each location for efficient processing of voters. We would need to ensure these sites are easily accessible by bus, and have plenty of parking.
2. Work more closely with MPS to establish a better set of locations to handle large elections. Examine the feasibility of scheduling teacher in-service days during large elections. This recommendation is in concert with the voting center concept.
3. Accessibility issues should be analyzed, solutions should be standardized and universal at all locations (required by State and Federal law). Survey all locations and create specific strategies for solving these issues over the course of the next year.
4. Create standardized and documented procedures for setting up and running polling locations. While procedures exist now, they need to be adjusted to the space provided in each location, which results in much inefficiency. Space should be standardized. Provide better signage and space layout (standard procedures).
5. Additional staff is needed to improve overall functioning of the locations and their flow and circulation. There should be trained staff to oversee each facility and flow. We

need to examine the possibility for more permanent staff, especially needed before and during large elections.

6. Communications must be improved so that election workers have a direct line to elections staff so that questions and concerns can be addressed immediately.

7. Make a case for more funding from federal and state levels to accomplish mandated objectives of HAVA and ADA.

Poll Workers

Background

The task force focused its review on the recruitment, training and retention of qualified poll workers.

Wisconsin state laws governing poll workers are included in Chapter 7 of the Wisconsin Statutes. The law requires that seven election inspectors (also known as poll workers) must be appointed to staff each polling place at each election, except where voting machines are used. Election inspectors must meet the following qualifications:

- Must be qualified electors of the municipality and the ward served by the polling place they are assigned to staff, unless the Election Commission chooses to reassign them to work at another ward or polling place where they need to fill a vacancy.
- Must be affiliated with one of the two recognized political parties that receive the largest number of votes in the previous presidential election, or governor's race in non-presidential general election years unless the political parties do not make nominations).
- Must be able to read and write the English language, be capable and have a general knowledge of election laws.
- Inspectors are precluded from being a candidate for any office on the ballot. In first class cities, like Milwaukee, state law precludes an election inspector from holding public office (other than a notary public).
- Students 16 or 17 years of age, enrolled in grades 9 to 12, who have at least a 3.0 grade point average, may serve as election inspectors at the polling place serving the student's residence, or reassigned based on need like any other poll worker. However, the student's parent, guardian or school principal has to approve their participation.
- Chief Inspectors may not serve unless certified by the State Elections Board.

Poll workers are the field operations team members for a successful Election Day. They are responsible for:

- Election Day registration and poll lists.
- Handling and endorsing ballots.
- Preserving order at the polling place.
- Adjourning to another polling place if it is impossible or inconvenient to hold an election at the designated locations.
- Resolving challenges to voters.
- The Chief Inspector is responsible for directing the conduct of duties assigned to the inspectors at the polling place (including opening and closing the polls).

Staffing

The City of Milwaukee typically hires approximately 1,700 persons broken down into the following categories: 235 Chief Inspectors, 1,000 Poll Workers, and 204 Registrars (for major elections).

In November 2004, extra temporary workers were hired to meet the expected high turnout. Those numbers and ward totals were:

219	Chief Inspectors	1,480	Inspectors/poll workers	218	Registrars
110	Single Ward	78	Double Wards	16	Triple Wards

The Election Commission maintains a database containing the names of 1996 active poll workers. This database is not purged and updated prior to each election cycle, although there is a process for placing persons on an “inactive” list based on performance history. Approximately 80% to 85% of poll workers return from one year to the next, and many have been serving for 15-20 years. The average age of poll workers is between 65 and 75 years old.

Recruitment

Current recruitment strategies are limited to word-of-mouth, aldermanic and MPS newsletters, and visitations to university registration drives. This is not adequate to meet the needs of high turnout elections.

On Election Day poll workers are typically assigned according to location convenience for the individuals, anticipated turnout needs, and work history. In November of 2004, cellular phones were distributed to Chief Inspectors to enhance their accessibility and the ability of the Election Commission Office to respond to problems quickly.

Compensation

State law provides for “reasonable” compensation for poll workers. Rates of pay are also set by City Ordinance at a per day rate: Chief Inspectors: \$109.00 and Poll-workers/registrar: \$84.

Training

Poll workers are required by the Election Commission to attend one hour of training prior to an election. These are conducted through a combination of presentation materials and include a hands-on review of the voting machines. For the November 2004 election, 1,012 poll workers attended one of 17 classes offered.

Issues and Concerns

Recruitment

Current Election Commission processes and procedures are inadequate to ensure a large workforce to meet the needs of polling locations. For instance:

- For the 2004 primary and general election, internal processes were not in place to provide the appropriate level of poll staffing for the record high turnout election.
- For the 2004 primary and general election, the Election Commission was inadequately prepared to deal with the unprecedented number of voter volunteer and registration drives, and for the poll-watching performed by various external groups.
- Not broad enough outreach to businesses and community groups.
- No documented processes handling “problem” poll workers.
- No proactive approach for engaging the political parties to meet their commitment to put forward qualified candidates.
- Not enough poll workers for “high turnout” elections, too many for “low turnout” elections.
- Cellular phones were distributed to Chief Inspectors to enhance their accessibility to the Election Commission Office, but tremendous backlogs occurred due to the high demand for help.

Compensation

Compensation is not sufficient to attract poll workers. The average workday for a poll worker is 14 hours during slow elections and about 20 during peak elections.

Training

Post Election Day reviews of the Fall 2004 and Spring 2004 elections conducted by the Executive Director and Election Commission staff demonstrated the need to enhance poll worker training to ensure the consistent and efficient administration of elections. For instance, the Election Commission Office found Inspectors’ Statements (EB-104 forms) that were not filled in accurately and completely. In addition, the Commission found inaccurate and incomplete poll books.

The task force identified many circumstances that attributed to poll worker errors and problems. For instance:

- Training classes are typically too large; there is little interaction between poll workers and trainers.
- For the November 2004 election, staff was stretched too thin to perform all the trainings tasks required.
- Not all “trained” poll workers are qualified to perform required duties (i.e. understanding of election rules, literacy concerns, interpersonal skills).

- For the 2004 primary and general election, information conveyed during training was inconsistent and training materials contained inaccurate or outdated information.
- Classes are too short to provide time for questions and answers.

Recommendations

1. Formulate the staffing plan and expense budget based upon the expected turnout of a given election: higher for even (Presidential, Gubernatorial, Mayoral, Aldermanic) years, lower for odd years.
2. Work with State Elections Board and external groups to coordinate (and separate) volunteer efforts with Election Commission official tasks on registration and poll worker needs.
3. Proactively prepare public relations and recruitment plan to engage businesses, community groups, festivals, universities and others in generating new poll workers. This will serve multiple purposes in educating and connecting the public to the importance of participating in the electoral process.
4. Internally document all work procedures relating to the recruitment, hiring, data collection, job requirements, and post-election review of poll employees and Election Day operations.
5. Work with the Democratic and Republican Party chairpersons to fulfill their “obligation” to help supply potential workers.
6. Establish City policy requiring City managers to assist with Election Day activities and train an on-call “City managers” pool to fill needs in high turnout or problem wards.
7. Review the current compensation structure. Develop system of tracking unpaid volunteers (both City and external).
8. Consider splitting shifts to get more young professionals interested. The full-day, more than 10 hours for Inspectors may seriously be impacting ability to find and retain new poll-workers.
9. Train poll workers in smaller groups and possibly use experienced Chief Inspectors to train (if we raise compensation).
10. Management staff in the Election Commission Office should be responsible for training.
11. Use a rotation of Election Commissioners to supplement training.

12. Evaluate poll worker testing and survey other cities on the testing issue. An open-book style with multiple opportunities may be a balanced approach.
13. Research other training styles, such as mock-elections.
14. Ask City Attorney and the State Elections Board to review training materials and internal poll worker procedures several months prior to elections.
15. Account for longer or more frequent training in compensation package.
16. Formally evaluate each poll worker following each election to provide feedback to both election management and poll workers.

Other Recommendations

Retention

Over the years not enough attention has been devoted to retention of the best of the City's qualified and committed poll workers. Following are ideas to retain poll workers.

1. Implement formal post-election survey of Chief Inspectors with a report to Mayor & Common Council Judiciary and Legislative Committee.
2. Schedule election wrap-up meetings to cover common errors or problems identified from surveys.
3. Schedule forum or learning seminars with return Chief Inspectors and regular poll workers during "off" years.
4. Host a recognition picnic or event in off-years that may also be a supplemental training event to cover issues from previous high-turnout year.

Election Day Process Improvement Recommendations

1. Use floaters and provide authority/flexibility to move or shift workers to busier (high turnout) wards.
2. Formally work with external groups on needs the Election Commission Office is more comfortable with – external greeters.
3. Develop an early poll worker "check in" system so the Commission knows early who's showing.
4. Have reserves at City Hall on Election Day.

5. Work with DPW Call Center/311 on tighter communication system to identify and address problems.
6. Pursue state legislation to equate Election Day comparable to Jury Duty.

Election Management Team Recommendations

The Election Management Team (see Attachment 5), appointed by Mayor Barrett to facilitate the Spring 2005 Election in the City of Milwaukee, literally worked side by side with the Election Commission Staff during several weeks leading up to the Election and for a short time afterward during some of the post Election activities performed by staff. While many of the issues, concerns and recommendations outlined in other areas of this report mirror the Team's recommendations and thus, will not be duplicated in this section, their experiences resulted in the following additional recommendations that address some areas not already articulated by the sub-committees of the Election Task Force.

1. Pre-planning and advance preparation. As identified in Section V. (page 33, 6.) the use of City Managers to supplement Election staff is a vital component which will ensure orderly voting and processing at the polls on Election Day. Since elections are cyclical in nature, there appears to be "down-time" between elections when Election staff could focus on the recruitment and training of City Managers for several key areas such as:

- a. Registrars at the polls
- b. Election Inspectors
- c. Quality Control Assurance Inspectors
- d. SPR Site Assistants

If these different duties were offered to City managers and pre-assigned teams were trained in advance, City managers would be aware of processes, procedures and expectations well before Election day. This advance preparation would minimize disruption to other City departments, provide welcome relief and assistance to regular Election staff and poll workers while allowing City managers to chose an area of functional expertise to specialize in, thereby encouraging their participation and feeling of "usefulness". This would replace the more chaotic atmosphere experienced by most City managers in the past wherein they were recruited and sent out on Election day (or shortly prior to) with little or no preparation.

2. Election Materials. Inconsistencies appear to exist in how Election materials distributed to polling sites are handled at the various sites. Updated materials, better training and enforcement of requirements of Chief Inspectors when closing the polls is needed to ensure the integrity of Elections and to facilitate post election activities and accuracy of reporting.

3. Post Election Activities. Five drop off points for election materials are utilized by the 202 polling sites at the close of Election day. Materials from one drop point are sent to the Election Commission office in City Hall, and the materials from the other four sites are gathered at the City's Warehouse on Hawley Road. The day following an Election, staff sorts and checks the returned materials at these two different staging areas and prepares the appropriate materials for distribution to the County. Working from two separate sites is confusing and adds valuable time to the process which is under a tight

turnaround time due to existing legislation. One centralized location should be established for all materials to be gathered at after they have been received at the various drop sites to facilitate a speedy and orderly organizing of materials for verification of Election results.

4. Record Keeping Tasks Between Elections. Establishment of and adherence to appropriate record retention schedules for various types of election materials is necessary to provide a more organized and orderly atmosphere in the Election Commission Office. For example, antiquated voter registration cards should be culled, miscellaneous stacks, and in some cases boxes, of various materials need to be sorted, filed and distributed to ensure that limited space in the office is used wisely and needed documents are easily accessible when needed and/or requested.

In summary, though a huge amount of energy and enthusiasm is needed to reshape the Election operations, it is not an insurmountable task. As recommendations in the Task Force Report are implemented, not only will the public trust and pride in the City's election process be restored, but the morale of Election staff will rise to once again motivate a hard working and productive team that plays a critical role in the citizens right to vote.

Key Legislative Recommendations

Most of the recommendations in this official report of the City of Milwaukee Election Task Force can be implemented by making management and operational changes. However, some of the recommendations would require legislative action. Key legislative proposals follow:

- **Prohibit payment to deputy registrars based on the number of registrants.** Many voter registration groups compensate deputy registrars they engage based on the number of people they register. Prohibiting this quota system will eliminate the financial incentive to cheat by forging signatures or registering the same voter multiple times.
- **Establish earlier cut off date for pre-registration.** (13 days earlier than the current deadline). Massive voter registration drives make it extremely difficult for the Election Commission to manage enormous surges in voter registration cards associated with peak elections. The current cut off for pre-registration is 13 days before an election. Changing the deadline would greatly reduce delays and errors in processing voter registration cards and ensure more accurate poll lists. Citizens who fail to meet the cut off would not be disenfranchised because they would still be allowed to register at the polls and vote on Election Day.
- **Advance the statutory due dates for –**
 - **County submittal of ballot forms to City** (or make City of Milwaukee as the State's only first class municipality responsible for printing its own ballot forms).
 - **Voter submittal of absentee ballot request applications.**
 - **City mailing of ballot forms packet to absentee voter.**
 - **Voter submittal of completed absentee ballots.**

Clearly, the current deadlines – particularly the Friday before election deadline for submitting an absentee ballot request – are unrealistic for large municipalities and compound the problems related to accurate polling place voter counts and thorough, accurate absentee ballot processing. With more time to resolve problems with requests, rejection rates for these ballots should decline dramatically.

- **Change statutes to allow the processing of Absentee Ballots centrally rather than at the polls.** This change would greatly simplify absentee ballot processing, at the same time lowering the costs and confusion associated with absentee voting. A central staff would examine and count all ballots in a consistent manner, properly recording each absentee ballot with the voter (in a secure location). Because ballots can be recorded as to voter (but not opened) before Election Day, this would enable the recording of the existence of an absentee vote associated with a given voter on the polling list before the lists are sent to the polling place. There would need to be an opportunity to allow potential challenges to absentee ballots at the central location, but this could be addressed through statutory changes as well.

- **Providing adequate funding for elections.** Guaranteeing that municipalities receive adequate funding to conduct elections must be a high priority for local, state and federal officials. The 2000 election exposed the many problems in the election system and resulted in passage of the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA) and subsequently Wisconsin Act 265. To date, Wisconsin has received approximately \$43 million under the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA). The law provides funding in fiscal year 2003, 2004 and 2005. Although funds can be carried over and spent in subsequent years, HAVA funding is not authorized permanently.

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- ❖ Michelle Mendosa (Wisconsin Citizen Action)
- ❖ Monica Murphy (Wisconsin Coalition for Advocacy)
- ❖ Cheryl Oliva (Election Management Team)
- ❖ Genevieve O’Sullivan Crowley (Office of City Attorney)
- ❖ Ryan Ranker (Election Commission)
- ❖ Mary Reavey (Election Management Team)
- ❖ Alicia Sidman (Wisconsin Coalition for Advocacy)
- ❖ Donna Skenadore (Election Management Team)
- ❖ Amy Stenglein (Department of Administration)
- ❖ Melanie Swank (Office of City Attorney)
- ❖ Kathy Thornton (Election Commission)
- ❖ Denise Walton (Election Commission)
- ❖ Phyllis Whitley (Election Commission)
- ❖ Barbara Zack Quindel (Election Protection)
- ❖ Kathryn Zalewski (Office of the City Attorney)

Attachments

Election Commission Task Force

Mission, Goals and Objectives

Ensuring fair and unrestricted access to the ballot box for all Milwaukee residents is a top priority for the Mayor and his administration.

Toward this end, a task force has been formed to review the operational aspects of the Election Commission (EC) and strengthen processes and procedures that have proven inadequate or outmoded. The task force will recommend and implement specific, practical changes that will improve the EC and its processes in measurable ways to the electorate. In addition to making recommendations on the operational aspects of elections, the task force will offer suggestions for legislative changes if necessary. The goal is simple – ensuring and encouraging the exercise of voting rights for all eligible voters in the city of Milwaukee.

A formal report will be issued and made public after the task force completes its work.

Task Force Membership

Sharon Robinson (Director, Department of Administration)
Linda Burke (Deputy City Attorney, Office of the City Attorney)
Allen Campos (Chairman, Election Commission)
Frank Cumberbatch (Assistant to the Mayor for Economic Development, Office of Mayor Tom Barrett)
Mike Daun (Director of Financial Services, Office of the Comptroller)
Randy Gschwind (Director, Information Technology and Management Division, Department of Administration)
Jennifer Meyer (Budget Division, Department of Administration)
James Michalski (Auditing Manager, Office of the Comptroller)

Support Staff:

Robert Juhay, Department of Administration
Amy Stenglein, Department of Administration

Scope of Work

The Election Commission Task Force will conduct its review of the operational aspects of the EC and will focus primarily on reviewing and strengthening processes and procedures related to:

- Registering Voters

- Processing New Registrations/Voter Registration Cards
- Determining Voter Eligibility
- Updating Polling Lists/Ensuring Accurate Address Listings
- Organizing Polling Sites
- Providing Poll Workers
- Preparing, Distributing and Counting Ballots (including absentee)

More specifically, the task force will concentrate attention on a number of key issues including, but not limited to:

- Staffing/Facilities
- Data management (improving internal technology and implementation of the state-wide voter registration system)
- Independent voter registration efforts and their impact on the EC's ability to process new voter registration cards
- Purging voter registration lists
- Voter education and outreach
- Assessing polling locations
- Age and training of poll workers and polling location supervisors
- Accessibility (elderly and handicap access, language barrier)
- Poll worker training, orientation and compensation
- Processing absentee ballot requests
- Managing on-site absentee voting and Election Day delivery of absentee ballots

Meetings

The task force will convene a number of meetings. The scope of the work is intended to include public input. The task force will seek input from key groups actively involved in the election process including election officials, poll workers, attorneys and residents.

Anticipated Deliverables

The task force will issue a written report on practical changes suggested for the city's election processes and procedures. The report will first be presented to the Judiciary and Legislation Subcommittee of the Common Council and then made available to the public.

Time Frame

The meetings will be scheduled throughout the winter months. The task force will begin its preparation of the formal written report immediately after the meetings and other information gathering processes conclude (ideally by no later than June 30, 2005).

**Election Commission Task Force
Subcommittees**

Subcommittee on Voter Registration:

Linda Burke, Office of City Attorney (Chair)
Randy Gschwind, ITMD, Department of Administration
Jennifer Meyers, Budget Division, Department of Administration
James Michalski, Office of Comptroller

Subcommittee on Absentee Ballots:

Al Campos, Board of Election Commissioners (Chair)
Linda Burke, Office of City Attorney
Michael Daun, Office of Comptroller
Sharon Robinson, Department of Administration

Subcommittee on Polling Locations:

Randy Gschwind, ITMD, Department of Administration (Chair)
Frank Cumberbatch, Office of the Mayor
Sharon Robinson, Department of Administration

Subcommittee on Poll Workers:

Jennifer Meyers, Budget Division, Department of Administration (Chair)
Frank Cumberbatch, Office of the Mayor
Al Campos, Board of Election Commissioners
Sharon Robinson, Department of Administration

**Election Commission Task Force
Meeting Schedule**

Meeting 1 (City Hall, Room 101)

Date: Friday, January 21, 2005 (9:00 a.m. to Noon)

Topic: Registration

- Implementation of Statewide Voter Registration System
- Processing of Voter Registration Materials
- Maintenance of Voter Registration Lists/Purging
- Clarification of Voter Eligibility
- Voter Registration Groups

Meeting 2 (City Hall- Room 301A)

Date: Friday, February 11, 2005 (9:00 a.m. to Noon)

Topic: Absentee Ballots

- Processing of Requests
- Processing of Completed Ballots
- Absentee Voting in City Hall
- Sorting, Packaging, Distribution of Completed Ballots

Meeting 3 (City Hall – Room 301A)

Date: Friday, February 25, 2005 (9:00 a.m. to Noon)

Topic: Polling Locations

- Assessment of locations including elderly, handicapped, language barriers
- Election Day set up of locations

Meeting 4 (City Hall – Room 301B)

Date: Friday, March 4, 2005 (9:00 a.m. to Noon)

Topic: Poll Workers

- Poll Workers Recruitment
- Orientation and Training
- Compensation

Meeting 5 (Department of Administration – Room 606)

Date: Friday, April 15, 2005 (10:30 a.m. to Noon)

Topic: Election Management Team De-Briefing

- Spring 2005 Election
- Strengths of the Election Commission and areas of concern

***** AGENDAS FOR EACH PUBLIC MEETING FOLLOW *****

PUBLIC NOTICE
ELECTION COMMISSION TASK FORCE MEETING

January 21, 2005
9:00 a.m.
City Hall, 200 East Wells Street
Room 101

Ms. Sharon Robinson, Department of Administration (Chair)
Lisa Artison, Elections Commission Director
Linda U. Burke, Deputy City Attorney
Allen Campos, Election Commission
Frank Cumberbatch, Office of Mayor Tom Barrett
Mike Daun, Office of the Comptroller
Randy Gschwind, Information Technology Management Division
Jennifer Meyer, Budget and Management Office
James Michalski, Office of the Comptroller

Meeting Topic: Voter Registration Issues

Key issues to address:

- Implementation of Statewide Voter Registration System
- Processing of Voter Registration Materials
- Maintenance of Voter Registration Lists/Purging Files
- Clarification of Voter Eligibility
- Voter Registration Groups

- I. Call meeting to order
- II. Presentation by Lisa Artison (Executive Director, Election Commission)
- III. Presentation by Genevieve O'Sullivan Crowley (Assistant City Attorney)
- IV. Presentation by Kevin Kennedy (Executive Director, State Elections Board) and Barbara Hansen (State Voter Registration Project Director)
- V. Presentation by Michelle Mendoza and Ivory Green (Wisconsin Citizen Action, Coordinators for Voter Registration and Get-Out-The-Vote)
- VI. Other Business
- VII. Adjourn

Upon reasonable notice, efforts will be made to accommodate the needs of persons with disabilities through sign language interpreters or auxiliary aids. For additional information or to request this service, contact Council Services Division ADA Coordinator at Room 205, City Hall, 200 East Wells Street, Milwaukee, WI 53202.

PUBLIC NOTICE
ELECTION COMMISSION TASK FORCE MEETING

February 11, 2005
9:00 a.m.
City Hall, 200 East Wells Street
Room 301-A

Ms. Sharon Robinson, Department of Administration (Chair)
Lisa Artison, Elections Commission Director
Linda U. Burke, Deputy City Attorney
Allen Campos, Election Commission
Frank Cumberbatch, Office of Mayor Tom Barrett
Mike Daun, Office of the Comptroller
Randy Gschwind, Information Technology Management Division
Jennifer Meyer, Budget and Management Office
James Michalski, Office of the Comptroller

Meeting Topic: Absentee Ballots

Key issues to address:

- Processing of Requests
- Processing of Completed Ballots
- Absentee Voting in City Hall
- Sorting, Packaging, Distribution of Completed Ballots

- I. Call meeting to order
- II. Presentation by Ryan Ranker (Absentee Ballot Coordinator, Election Commission Office)
- III. Presentation by Melanie Swank (Office of City Attorney)
- IV. Presentation by Kevin Kennedy (State Elections Board)
- V. Discussion
- VI. Other Business
- VII. Adjourn

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PUBLIC NOTICE
ELECTION COMMISSION TASK FORCE MEETING

February 25, 2005
9:00 a.m.
City Hall, 200 East Wells Street
Room 301-A

Ms. Sharon Robinson, Department of Administration (Chair)
Lisa Artison, Elections Commission Director
Linda U. Burke, Deputy City Attorney
Allen Campos, Election Commission
Frank Cumberbatch, Office of Mayor Tom Barrett
Mike Daun, Office of the Comptroller
Randy Gschwind, Information Technology Management Division
Jennifer Meyer, Budget and Management Office
James Michalski, Office of the Comptroller

Meeting Topic: Polling Locations

Key issues to address:

- Accessibility of Locations (elderly, handicapped, language barriers)
- Election Day Set-up of Locations

- I. Call meeting to order
- II. Presentation by Phyllis Whitley (Election Commission Office)
- III. Presentation by Kathryn Zalewski (Office of City Attorney)
- IV. Presentation by Barbara Zack Quindel (Election Protection)
- V. Presentation by Alicia Sidman (Wisconsin Coalition for Advocacy)
- VI. Discussion
- VII. Other Business
- VIII. Adjourn

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PUBLIC NOTICE
ELECTION COMMISSION TASK FORCE MEETING

March 4, 2005
9:00 a.m.
City Hall, 200 East Wells Street
Room 301-B

Ms. Sharon Robinson, Department of Administration (Chair)
Linda U. Burke, Deputy City Attorney
Allen Campos, Election Commission
Frank Cumberbatch, Office of Mayor Tom Barrett
Mike Daun, Office of the Comptroller
Randy Gschwind, Information Technology Management Division
Jennifer Meyer, Budget and Management Office
James Michalski, Office of the Comptroller

Meeting Topic: Poll Workers

Key issues to address:

- Recruitment
- Orientation and Training
- Compensation

- I. Call meeting to order
- II. Presentation by Kathryn Zalewski (Office of City Attorney)
- III. Presentation by Edie Greene (Election Commission)
- IV. Presentation by Pat Ciezki, Chris Czubakowski and Lenore Matthews (Long-standing Poll Workers and Temporary Clerks – Election Commission)
- V. Presentation by Sheila Cochran (Election Protection and Milwaukee County Labor Council)
- VI. Discussion
- VII. Other Business
- VIII. Adjourn

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PUBLIC NOTICE
ELECTION COMMISSION MEETING

April 15, 2005
10:30 a.m.
City Hall, 200 East Wells Street
Room 606

- I. Call to Order
- II. Election Management Team Updates - Spring 2005 Election and recommendations for improving election processes and procedures related to:
 - * Registration - Cheryl Oliva
 - * Absentee Ballots - Lori Lutzka
 - * Poll Workers/Polling Locations - Mary Reavey
 - * Campaign Finance - Donna Skenadore
- III. Other Business
- IV. Adjourn

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ELECTION MANAGEMENT TEAM

Background Statement:

In November of 2004, the City of Milwaukee experienced an unusually high voter turnout, a record number of absentee voters and many questions surrounding how the election was conducted. The Mayor immediately formed an Election Task Force to study the election process in Milwaukee to address problematic areas. The recent February election in Milwaukee had a low voter turnout and few problems. However, the April election is approaching rapidly and a significantly higher voter turnout is expected.

Objective:

Given the issues that surfaced during the November 2004 election, the Mayor is committed to ensuring that the April election runs as smoothly as possible and provides all citizens of Milwaukee the opportunity to vote and have their vote counted.

Proposed Solution:

While the Election Task Force Committee is continuing to study the various issues surrounding the November election to recommend changes that need to be made to how elections are administered in the City of Milwaukee, an Election Management Team will be formed to be appointed by Mayor Barrett to manage the April Election. This proactive approach will require four City employees who have demonstrated strong management and organization skills to participate on this team to focus on four of the primary areas of concern.

Specific Recommendations:

- Four areas of focus
 - Absentee ballots
 - Voter registration
 - Poll workers/Polling Locations
 - Campaign Finance
- Five team members (One individual will be designated to work on-site at the Election Commission Office through the April 5, 2005 election)
 - Sharon Robinson (Team Leader)
 - Cheryl Oliva (Voter Registration)
 - Mary Reavey (Polling Locations and Poll Workers)
 - Donna Skenadore (Campaign Finance)
 - Lori Lutzka (Absentee Ballots)
- Critical component for expertise of operations
Permanent Election Commission Staff:
 - Kathy Thornton (Customer Service Representative)
 - Edie Greene (Poll Worker Coordinator)
 - Ryan Ranker (Absentee Ballot Coordinator)
 - Denise Walton (Administrative Assistant)
 - Phyllis Whitley (Election Supplies and Equipment Coordinator)

- Common elements of all areas that need improvement:
 - Organization
 - Quality control issues
 - Timeliness
 - Planning
 - Advance preparation where possible
 - Communication
 - Coordination
 - Documentation of procedures/establishing procedural manuals
- Additional needs for success:
 - Commitment of all available City resources.
 - City department heads may be asked to loan at least one employee to the management team for election purposes effective March 1, 2005.
 - City departments may be asked to loan additional employees on a part-time basis as needed up to and during the election.
 - Citizens will be encouraged to volunteer to serve up to and during the election on one of the four critical areas.
(Department heads designees' and citizen volunteers should be encouraged to contact the appropriate management team leader directly for assignments.)

A comprehensive de-briefing will be held with the management team leaders after the election to advise the Election Task Force on strengths and specific areas of concern.