

Report to the Common Council Organizational Committee
Challenges to City of Madison Election Processes
May 16, 2006

Mayor Cieslewicz is interested in working with the Common Council to address identified barriers to a smooth City election process. The CCOC asked for a report on the challenges to the City's election process and how Mayor Cieslewicz believes the new City Clerk can address them.

Most of the observations and recommendations included in this report are from Mayor's Chief of Staff Janet Piraino. Concerned citizens provided other information. The new City Clerk will be provided this information and directed to investigate these issues as well as identify other election process issues of concern. Mayor Cieslewicz will make it a priority to cooperate with the Clerk to remove any barriers to City election processes being smooth and easy to follow.

We believe that several major challenges the Clerk's office faced can be mitigated in the future with a bit more planning and cooperation.

1. Projecting the appropriate number and distribution of ballots.

- In spite of printing literally thousands more ballots than we thought we'd need, we still came dangerously close to running out at several polling places during the 2004 presidential election. Ballots must be ward-specific, making planning even more challenging.
- Problems can occur with over-estimating in addition to under-estimating the number of ballots needed at each polling place. Because the Clerk's office tended to overestimate the projected number of ballots needed at each polling place, the city came close to sending out most of the provisional ballots out to the polls, leaving inadequate numbers behind at the Clerk's office if one of the polling places ran low.
- We should always have a backup plan for the printing of additional ballots. We should always have the county printing shop on call for major elections so more ballots can be printed if we run out.

2. Better processing of and estimating the need for absentee ballots.

- Given state law changes relaxing requirements for absentee ballots, we can continue to expect large numbers of absentee ballots. The incredibly large numbers of absentee ballots during the fall of 2004 was behind two major challenges:
- The need to process such large numbers of absentee ballots created problems and sent us scrambling for additional staff in the days before the 2004 election. Either additional hourly staff should be hired in presidential election years or more advance planning needs to be done to borrow staff from other agencies or commit secretarial pool resources to the clerk's office in the weeks before the election. The Mayor and the Council should consider budgeting accordingly for in the future.
- We need to improve our ability to keep track of the number of absentee ballots by ward. Absentee ballots complicated the issue of ballot distributions because we are currently unable to track the number of absentee ballots by ward. Because ballot distribution is based on the total number of eligible voters, lack of knowledge about the number of absentee ballots by ward, made projections of the number of ballots needed per ward all the more difficult.

3. Better ways of identifying supply shortages at the polls on Election Day and delivering needed supplies in a timely manner.

- Many problems could have been avoided through standardizing ways of requesting and delivering supplies (ballots, bags, registration slips, absentee ballots, etc.) Volunteer runners to the polls could be lined up in advance.
- It would also be helpful to decentralize some of the responsibility on Election Day. For example, it would be wise to delegate the supplies requests and deliveries to one person who is not also dealing with hundreds of other demands.

4. Improve the review and action on issues such as handicapped access to polling places, functionality of polling locations, signage, poll worker training, use of the statewide electronic voter database, etc.

- The City Clerk should conduct an annual review on the major issues listed above. Appropriate action should be taken to address issues of concern.
- Experienced poll workers could be provided additional training and assigned to assist with problems to ensure uniform and efficient procedures.
- The Mayor is open to discussions on expansion of the role of the Board of Canvassers to address election issues or concerns.