

Madison Election Advisory Committee Annual Report for 2011

Introduction

This report covers activities throughout 2011, a year in which new legislation brought about significant changes in the voting process and new challenges for election administration. The report reflects information shared, exploration of priority topics selected by the committee, and discussions regarding city election processes held among committee members, staff in the clerk's office and other city officials. The committee was generously supported by the City Clerk and her staff, along with our liaison from the Mayor's Office.

Election Statistics

Four elections were held during this period: non-partisan February spring primary/April general election and a special July primary/August election for Assembly District 48. Statistics are provided to demonstrate the overall patterns.

	February 2011	April 2011	July 2011	August 2011
Voters				
Number of Voters	38,589	93,976	7,389	4,047
Voter Turnout	22%	54%	28%	15%
Absentees Issued	3,133	8,531	875	2,298
Absentees Counted at Polls	2,457	7,842	476	321
Absentees Rejected at Polls	39	23	1	2 ¹
Election Day Registrations	731	6,628	132	66
Election Officials				
Election Officials	557	826	82	82
Training Sessions	35	37 ²	0 ³	0
Polling Places				
Number of Polling Locations	80	80	12	12

¹ Absentees rejected because voters cast their ballots at the polls instead.

² Online training also offered prior to this election, and generated positive feedback from Election Officials.

³ Instead of offering a formal training session, Clerk met one-on-one with Chief Inspectors prior to the election.

Each polling place also had a guest Chief Inspector from a polling place that did not have a special election to allow the Chief Inspectors to provide each other with their insights, experiences, and strategies.

It was a busy year for staff in the Clerk's office and election officials (poll workers). Voter turnout was unusually high for the spring nonpartisan elections. Following the April election, there was a statewide recount of votes in the Supreme Court election. The City Clerk reported that the continuity that City of Madison chief inspectors provided throughout the eleven-day recount period added to the smooth flow of the process. The Dane County Clerk oversaw the recording of minutes as well as security measures as each reporting unit within the county presented materials for the Board of Canvassers to certify. Many observers were present during the recount.

Former Assembly Rep. Joe Parisi was elected County Executive in April, which spurred a special election and primary for District 48. These elections were held under a new election law, 2011 Wisconsin Act 23, which was enacted in May. The new law called for new procedures including a "soft implementation" of the new photo ID requirement, changes in absentee voting deadlines and a requirement for voters to sign the poll book before obtaining a ballot. This required implementations of new procedures and retraining of election officials by the Clerk's office for the special elections.

The biggest change as a result of Act 23 will be the photo ID requirement which will go into effect in 2012. Preparing for this has been a top priority for both the committee and the Clerk's office. This effort involves voter education, training of election officials and the implementation of new procedures to make voting possible for all eligible citizens in Madison and maintain a smooth flow of citizens through the voting process.

The Clerk's office has scheduled 199 [and counting...] outreach sessions with diverse community organizations to educate voters about the recent changes in state elections law. The Clerk's office partnered with other city departments to educate voters, including _____. [Note from Andrea: I'll type these in, if the committee thinks they should be mentioned in the annual report.] The committee offered suggestions of groups to reach out to, including student organizations as well as community groups serving or representing the elderly, disabled, and people of color. Committee members spread the word of the outreach sessions to groups they know, and also assisted in distributing the brochures developed by the Clerk's office: *Recent Changes to Wisconsin Election Law; Obtaining an ID Card to Vote*; and a brochure for college students.

The Clerk's office offered online training for election officials in 2011, generating positive feedback from the officials. To prepare chief inspectors in the Assembly District 48 to conduct the July/August special elections under the new state law, the Clerk's office met with them one-on-one and paired them with chief inspectors from other districts (which were not having elections). To prepare for the 2012 elections with the new photo ID requirement, the Clerk's office held two "mock" elections – one in the City-County Building and one on the UW-Madison campus – with timed trials for a number of different possible procedures for moving people through the voting process.

2011 Priorities for MEAC

In discussion with the City Clerk, MEAC members worked with the staff to explore opportunities in four priority areas:

(1) Diversity of election officials with an emphasis on outreach to under-represented population groups

The City Clerk's office and the Department of Civil Rights held a civic engagement forum in October at the Urban League of Greater Madison on S. Park Street. People who attended the forum were encouraged to become election officials, as one way to participate in city government. Committee members suggested several community organizations to reach out to for election official recruitment. The committee also discussed the need for diversity in the committee membership.

(2) Appreciation of election officials

For both the City Clerk and MEAC, communicating appreciation to poll workers across the city for their commitment and good work was a high priority. For several years, the Clerk has rewarded polling place teams who have "perfect paperwork" with praise during in-person training discussions, personalized "blue ribbon" notes (i.e., Congrats! 7th consecutive perfect paperwork!) and candy in the blue totes. She now includes a "thank you for your service" letter along with paycheck mailings. The Clerk initiated a service award for chief inspectors, selecting individuals whose contributions included such distinctions as extraordinary years of service, expertise and resilience in working ad hoc at any location, or recruiting the most new poll workers. Election officials who volunteered to work in the recount received certificates of appreciation for extra-duty, along with an invitation to join the Clerk's Office staff for coffee and cookies to celebrate a successful recount and to debrief on their experiences. MEAC commends the Clerk's leadership and enthusiastic creativity in letting poll workers know throughout the year that they are fundamental to the success of our local elections.

(3) Quality control at polling locations on election days, for which data would be collected in February

Procedures have been greatly improved in 2011. In the past, problems have arisen from the practice of splitting the voter slip pads and giving out non-sequential voter slips. There was only one large polling location that still did this in the April 2011 election.

Providing for smooth election administration was a priority of those drafting redistricting proposals in 2011.

Longer lines are expected at the polls in 2012 because of the photo ID requirement. More people will be needed at the polls to maintain the flow of voters, as well as in the Clerk's office to fulfill the administrative requirements for absentee balloting.

In addition, the Clerk predicts there will be relatively high numbers of provisional ballots in the 2012 elections because of the new ID requirements. To have their provisional ballots counted, citizens will have to present proper ID at the Clerk's office by the Friday following the election. The process for dealing with provisional ballots may also result in

challenges by the candidate committees. All of this involves staff time in the days and possibly weeks following each election.

The committee discussed these challenges at each meeting and offered support and suggestions for dealing with them.

(4) Monitoring of legislation at the state level that may affect local election processes

2011 was a tumultuous year for election administration law changes in Wisconsin. About 30 election bills were introduced, and although only a few passed, the ones that passed amounted to the most significant changes in memory.

Act 23 requires photo ID, but also shortens the number of days for absentee voting in the clerk's office; eliminates corroboration for proof of residence for Election Day or late registration; and increases the difficulty of using university housing lists as proof of residence for Election Day registration. This act is having a significant impact on municipalities' budgets.

Acts 39, 43, and 44 form the suite of redistricting bills, and also retroactively changed the progression of redistricting steps. Act 45 moves the presidential primary from February to April (to conform to the two major parties' new policy on primary dates). Act 75 changes the fall primary to August (to conform to the federal MOVE act), and also changes the deadline for receiving absentee ballots to the Friday after the election, as long as they are postmarked on election day or before.

SB-267 was authored by Senator Joe Leibham and has been passed by the Senate. This is a technical change that would allow municipalities to combine reporting units. In certain circumstances this will have the practical effect of reducing waste, and enhancing secrecy of the ballot. The Madison Election Advisory Committee discussed this in July 2009. The City of Madison and the League of Wisconsin Municipalities have registered in favor.

AB-895 is a bill that would take a step towards modernizing voter registration. It would allow eligible voters who hold a driver's license or Department of Transportation ID card to complete voter registration online, without a paper form. The bill requires instant checking of name, date of birth, and ID number against the DOT database. The bill is authored by Representative Terese Berceau, and has 22 co-sponsors. It is similar to systems in nine other states, and has reduced their costs of data entry. In many of these states, the legislation received broad bi-partisan support. The League of Wisconsin Municipalities has not taken a position on this bill.

Appendix

Charge

The Madison Election Advisory Committee was created in 2006 with the following charge:

- Evaluate current procedures for elections.
- Make recommendations for improvements in registration, polling places, voting equipment, election official training, ballots, absentee ballots and tabulating votes.
- Monitor elections for optimal and appropriate accuracy, convenience, fairness and legality.
- Evaluate and make recommendations on State and Federal law changes if they relate to elections.
- Recommend methods to maintain proper balance between the security of elections, openness of the process and the right to a secret ballot.
- Solicit public comments and recommendations.
- Forward an annual report to the Council, Mayor, or City Clerk.

Membership

As of December 2011, the Committee consists of six (6 out of 7) appointed citizen members and two non-voting members, the City Clerk and the County Clerk.

Andrea Kaminski, Chair

Nicci Fite, Vice-Chair

Sybil Better

Rosa Garner

Paul Malischke

Jennifer Rubin

Karen Peters (Ex-officio, non-voting)

Maribeth Witzel-Behl (Ex-officio, non-voting)

Members who served earlier in 2011: Mark Borns