

Alder Guide for Establishing New Polling Places

Why we may need new polling places

- We want to make voting accessible. We try to set up polling places as close as possible to the residents they serve, ideally within walking distance. Having polling places that are in the neighborhoods they serve gets us closer to one of our goals: when a voter goes to their polling place they should know or recognize at least one of the Election Officials working there – hopefully more than one.
- Voters can be disenfranchised by long lines. Our goal is that, once we get through the initial line of voters at 7 a.m., no voter will need to stand in line for more than 15 minutes.
- Voters can be disenfranchised by being issued the wrong ballot. Having multiple wards at a polling location increases the likelihood that a voter will be given the wrong ballot. As a best practice, we try to have no more than two populated wards assigned to a single polling location. Single ward polling locations work best.
- From time to time we lose a polling place due to changes in the leadership of the organization that controls the space.
- Sometimes we need to find a better location because the voting population in that ward has outgrown the space available at the current polling location.
- Sometimes we need to leave a polling place due to intolerance on the part of the organization that controls the space.

Not an easy ask

- We are guests at all our polling places and are subject to the needs of our hosts
- We do not compensate polling locations for letting us use their facilities.
- Being a polling place means between a few hundred and possibly 2,000+ voters will be walking through their facility.
- Voters will use up parking around the facility making access more difficult for the day-to-day business functions of that location.
- Polling places need to be welcoming to voters.
- We need access to the facility from 6 a.m. until the election night paperwork is complete (usually by 9 p.m., but can be much later for high-turnout elections). This means someone will need to unlock and lock the location, or the Clerk's Office will need keys.
- We need to be able to drop off election equipment between the Thursday and Monday before the election and pick it up either the Wednesday or Thursday after the election.
- Polling places need to be at minimum 500 square feet (hopefully much larger than that).

What we are seeking

- ADA accessibility requirements met such as: adequate width of doorways and halls, space to maneuver a mobility device around the voting area.
- Within the ward (or one of the wards) served, if possible.
- Large enough to accommodate the number of voters anticipated (we are proud of the relatively short voter lines at our locations compared to other places in the state).

- Interior space allows for smooth flow of movement of voters from one station to another as they complete the process.
- Doors to building and to the voting area are opened for election officials at 6 a.m., and remain open to the public from 7 a.m. until the tally is complete on election days.
- Tables and chairs are available for election officials to move and use as needed to accommodate tasks.
- A locked space for storage of the tabulator and accessible ballot marking machines from the delivery date (1-5 days prior to the election) through 6 a.m. Election Day, and at the end of Election Day through the time it is picked 1-2 days following the.
- If the location does not have an accessible door, we **do** have a bell call device available (a button on a stick that sounds an alert inside the polling place so someone can go catch the door).
- A space to store folded booths and signage (usually in the back of a closet) between elections.

Timing

- When determining when an Ordinance or Resolution changing a polling location should be introduced, we strive to minimize voter confusion. For example, if a polling location will change for an April Election, we will not introduce the Ordinance or Resolution until after the February Primary.

Why we need you

- You know your district better than we do.
- We have traditionally gotten the best results when the Alderperson approaches the facility about becoming a polling location.
- An Alder using their blog/newsletter/social media outlets to inform voters of polling place changes helps alleviate voter confusion and anxiety. Voters know the information is from a trusted local source.
- To add or change a polling place, an Ordinance or Resolution change is required, and we ask the local Alder to sponsor the Ordinance or Resolution.

Suggestions

- When operating in your district, be on the lookout for potential polling places, you never know when we might lose one and need to replace it.
- It always helps to know who is in charge of the location so a name, contact info, etc., are a big help when we are setting up a new location. We will also need the contact information of an individual we should call to alert when we are dropping off or picking up equipment, if necessary.
- Be honest when asking an entity to host voting, we strive to be as transparent in our operations as possible.
- Community space should be a consideration as the City of Madison grows. Without community space, it is difficult to establish polling locations.

Communicating with voters

- We send postcards to all registered voters if they are going to a new location two weeks in advance of the election.

- It helps when the Alder mentions polling place changes in their blog or aldermanic social media accounts.
- On Election Day, we also post signage at the previous polling location, in case voters show up at the wrong location.