

## Madison Election Advisory Committee Annual Report for 2008-09

### Introduction

This report covers the period from October 2008 – December 2009. The report reflects information shared, outreach initiated, and discussions regarding city election processes held among committee members, city and state officials, and election staff. The committee was generously supported by the City Clerk, Deputy City Clerk, and our liaison from the Mayor’s Office.

### Election Statistics

Three elections were held during this period: November 2008 presidential and congressional elections, February 2009 spring primary, and April 2009 general election. Statistics are provided for this year and last to demonstrate the overall patterns.

|  | <b>February<br/>2008</b> | <b>April<br/>2008</b> | <b>September<br/>2008</b> | <b>November<br/>2008</b> | <b>February<br/>2009</b> | <b>April<br/>2009</b> |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| <b>Voters</b>                              |                          |                       |                           |                          |                          |                       |
| Number of Voters                           | 87,992                   | 35,087                | 9,870                     | 141,649                  | 13,362                   | 44,649                |
| Voter Turnout                              | 54%                      | 22%                   | 6%                        | 78%                      | 7%                       | 23%                   |
| Absentee Ballots Issued <sup>1</sup>       | 7,193                    | 5,149                 | 3,250                     | 32,012                   | 2,277                    | 6,364                 |
| Absentee Ballots Counted at Polls          | 4,847                    | 2,629                 | 1,872                     | 28,669                   | 1,317                    | 3,825                 |
| Election Day Registrants                   | 25,043                   | 396                   | 806 <sup>2</sup>          | 25,000                   | 253                      | 825                   |
|  |                          |                       |                           |                          |                          |                       |
| <b>Election Officials</b>                  |                          |                       |                           |                          |                          |                       |
| Election Officials on Payroll <sup>3</sup> | 850                      | 550                   | 564                       | 1,119 <sup>4</sup>       | 555                      | 544                   |
| Training Sessions                          | 20                       | 12                    | 6                         | 27                       | 22                       | 32                    |
|  |                          |                       |                           |                          |                          |                       |
| <b>Polling Sites</b>                       |                          |                       |                           |                          |                          |                       |
| Number of Polling Sites                    | 79                       | 79                    | 79                        | 80                       | 80                       | 80                    |

<sup>1</sup> This is the number of absentee ballots requested and issued. However, not all ballots are returned to the Clerk’s office and then counted at the polls.

<sup>2</sup> Election Officials registered 806 voters at the polls. Of these registrants, 494 voted in the September election and the remaining 312 registered but did not vote in the September election.

<sup>3</sup> This number excludes those election officials who served as unpaid volunteers or who were paid by their employer to work at the polls.

<sup>4</sup> This number also excludes high school poll workers.

Voting increased substantially for the presidential election and generated a 78% voter turnout. Election officials (poll workers) for the presidential election on the payroll numbered 1,119, and additional service was provided by numerous unpaid volunteers (including those paid by their employers to work at the polls) and high school poll workers. The absentee voters were approximately 20% of the ballots cast for this election. For the spring general election, turnout varied citywide. Many wards ran out of printed ballots and used Xerox copies of the ballot to complete voting. These concerns are reviewed in more detail below.

### **In-person Absentee Voting:**

In the days preceding the November 2008 election, the clerks' offices in most Wisconsin large cities were overwhelmed with voters wanting to vote before election day, in a process known as "in-person absentee" voting. In Madison, there was typically a 90-minute wait to vote due to the high numbers. The City Clerk and her staff worked an extraordinary number of hours in October 2008 to keep the office open for extended periods of absentee voting, including late nights and weekends, prior to the presidential election. The Wisconsin Government Accountability Board has extensively studied the issue and it appears that at their December 2009 meeting they will recommend minor improvements in the process, but no major changes are on the horizon.

The Madison Election Advisory Committee will evaluate the issues below in order to prepare for in-person absentee voting for the November 2010 election:

- What hours and days should in-person absentee voting be available?
- Should the clerk's office' licensing duties be paused during the 2 weeks before the election?
- Should poll workers be hired to supplement the clerk's office personnel during this pre-election period?
- Should there be a public relations campaign to encourage voting on election day?
- Can the process become more efficient by purchasing equipment or supplies, or by rearranging the workspace?
- Can security measures be improved?
- Is there a role for volunteer help, such as members of the League of Women Voters?

### **Printed ballot shortages:**

In the April 2009 election, there was an extreme ballot shortage at many Madison polling places. Ballot shortages involved the following problems:

- 30 minute wait for voters because there were no ballots, or voters needing to make a return trip.
- Copied ballots were significantly smaller than the original ballots, making them harder to read.

- The Automark ballot-marking terminals for voters with special needs could not be used, since there were no original ballots left. Xeroxed ballots do not function in the Automark.
- It took longer to service each voter, as the unusual circumstances (small ballot, not inserting it into the tabulator) needed to be explained.
- Voters had less confidence in the tally of ballots and Madison's ability to properly administer elections.
- Poll workers had to travel to other polling places to try to borrow ballots, instead of helping voters.
- Poll workers who had worked all day had to stay late to hand-count ballots.
- Poll workers had received no prior training on the best method to tally votes.
- The combination of hand-counting and machine counting can lead to errors in addition, or forgetting one batch entirely.

The Committee consulted with Dane County Clerk Bob Ohlson to understand the process for estimating number of ballots printed. Mr. Ohlson updated the Committee on the potential for ballots to be printed on demand by the current printing contractor with the purchase of new equipment. This could provide a significant cost savings and this new system will be utilized and will continue in 2010.

The Madison Election Advisory Committee will evaluate the causes and possible remedies. We will consider:

- Who has the final decision on the number of ballots printed?
- What data is used to determine the number of ballots printed?
- Should there be a written plan describing the methodology used to determine ballot numbers?
- Should a plan be part of the budgeting procedure?

**Cost savings:**

Expense of replacing the Automark cartridges was reduced when Clerk's Office staff developed a process for re-inking the pads.

**Resolution to the Mayor and Common Council** (attached):

- July 2009 – Support for legislation enabling online voter registration in Wisconsin
  - <http://legistar.cityofmadison.com/detailreport/?key=16979>

**Outreach:**

**Government Accountability Board (GAB)**

The Committee met with Nat Robinson and Mike Haas on January 13, 2009 to review the GAB's "Guiding Principles" and "First Year Accomplishments," as well as to discuss urgent concerns for improving the elections process, in particular absentee voting and registration practices and challenges to using the statewide database for production of poll lists for Madison and the State of Wisconsin.

**Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD)**

The Committee met with Steve Hartley, MMSD Chief of Staff, on July 14, 2009, to discuss the possibility of aligning in-service or early release days with election dates to maximize use of public school buildings as polling sites and minimizing the impact of this civic process on students, teachers, and staff. In Madison, 28 schools serve as neighborhood polling sites. Mr. Hartley informed the Committee that the school calendar is part of collective bargaining and is established 3 years in advance. There is some flexibility in scheduling on full in-service day each year. The Committee requested that MMSD keep the November presidential election dates in mind when scheduling in-service dates in future years.

This report was approved by the Madison Election Advisory Committee at its December 14, 2009 meeting.

## **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 November 2009, the Committee consists of seven appointed citizen members and two non-voting members, the City Clerk and the County Clerk.

Rosa Garner, Chair  
Andrea Kaminski, Vice-Chair  
Sybil Better  
Marlena Deutsch  
Paul Malischke  
Christian Odom  
Marilyn Williams

Bob Ohlsen (Ex-officio, non-voting)  
Maribeth Witzel-Behl (Ex-officio, non-voting)  
Janet Piraino (Liaison with the Mayor's office)