



Election Commission

Commissioners
Stephanie Findley
Carmen Cabrera
Jess Ripp

Executive Director
Claire Woodall-Vogt

Dear Committee Members,

Enclosed is a series of questions and responses that were provided to the Wisconsin Elections Commission in August. I believe they provide a thorough overview of the Milwaukee Election Commission's plans and strategies for the November General Election.

Additionally, I am including a condensed summary for your convenience.

Expand Absentee Ballot Drop Boxes

Every Milwaukee Public Library and City Hall will have 24-hour drop boxes for absentee ballots. These will be promoted and emphasized to voters, especially if a voter is returning their ballot within the last two weeks of the election. These drop boxes will be available up until 8pm on Election Day, November 3rd.

Increase Assistance Provided at Libraries

The City offered 5 weeks of voter registration and absentee application assistance at 9 Milwaukee Public Libraries prior to the August 11th Partisan Primary. We have expanded this assistance for November to be 5 days a week (Tuesday – Saturday), for 6 weeks (September 8th – October 14th) from 10am-4pm. These were promoted using the second SafeVote post card mailing, which went out the week of September 7th.

Increase Efficiency and Reduce Errors with Absentee Ballot Mailings

Given the tremendous volume of absentee ballot requests and processing tasks, we have automated and expedited the assembly and mailing of requested absentee ballots. We have purchased a high-speed, envelope printer, a top-of-the-line folding machine, and a high quality folding and inserting machine. This will reduce staff costs and eliminate the use of absentee labels, by enabling the City to print directly onto inner and outer envelopes. This will also increase quality controls by ensuring that all voters receive the correct ballot and accompanying inserts. This automation enables the City to eliminate the assembly delay no matter the volume of daily absentee requests, allowing experienced election workers and previously trained election temporary employees to be re-deployed to voting assistance and early voting sites as supervisors and lead workers.

Simplified Absentee Instructions

We worked with the Center for Civic Design and Ideas42 to create simpler absentee instructions so that voters feel confident when completing their certificate envelope and also know their options for returning the ballot. The hope is that with clearer, easy to understand instructions, we will have less ballots that have to be cured due to a lack of voter signature, witness signature or witness address.

Eliminate Third-Party Mail Vendor

The City of Milwaukee will mail all absentee ballots directly without the intervention of a third-party that is used for all other City of Milwaukee mail. A business permit account will be used and ballots will be delivered directly to the post office on St. Paul Avenue, allowing for greater transparency and accountability with absentee mailing.

Expanded In-Person Absentee Voting (Early Voting)

18 early voting sites will be operated from October 20th through November 1st. Midtown remains the most popular early voting location. Council recently approved the addition of Fiserv Forum and Miller Park, which will greatly expand safe early voting options. Clinton Rose Senior Center is a notable addition in District 6 which I think will be popular among voters who would have previously chosen to not vote or wait to vote on Election Day.

Voter Education and Outreach

After a competitive RFP process, Creative Marketing Resources has been selected as the communication firm that will help the Milwaukee Election Commission launch a broad-reaching voter education and outreach campaign. This campaign will focus not just on getting out the vote, but also on voter education.

Increase Central Count Capacity

Extensive strategic planning has been taking place in preparation for counting absentee ballots at Central Count. This includes purchasing and leasing more tabulators, increasing staffing, increasing training, and increasing the number of shift workers so that we have a strong second shift and ensure that results are available as soon as feasible without compromising voter access.

August 20, 2020

Meagan Wolfe, Administrator
Wisconsin Election Commission

Dear Ms. Wolfe,

Please find the below answers in response to your August 17, 2020 email. Additionally, I have attached strategic planning documents, communication memos to the City of Milwaukee Common Council, and my own communication with the House Committee on Administration.

1) Please provide a detailed narrative on any changes Milwaukee is making to absentee by mail, including answers to the following questions:

a. What measures are being adopted to ensure ballots are sent in accordance with statutory timelines? This includes fulfilling the deadline of sending ballots by the 47th day prior to the election and then filling subsequent requests within 24 hours.

- i. Given the tremendous volume of absentee ballot requests and processing tasks, we are automating and expediting the assembly and mailing of requested absentee ballots. We have purchased a high-speed, envelope printer, a top-of-the-line folding machine, and a high quality folding and inserting machine. This will reduce staff costs and eliminate the use of absentee labels, by enabling the City to print directly onto inner and outer envelopes. This will also increase quality controls. This automation enables the City to eliminate the assembly delay no matter the volume of daily absentee requests, allowing experienced election workers and previously trained election temporary employees to be re-deployed to early voting sites as supervisors and lead workers.

The City of Milwaukee Election Commission has been able to fill all absentee requests within the 24 hour period due to the changes made to the MyVote request system. Automating the assembly process will ensure that ballots are also mailed within that same 24 hour period.

b. What internal processes or chain of custody procedures are in place to ensure all ballots requested by voters are issued? Please describe any third-party mailing vendors involved in the process. If there are not vendors, please describe the process from the time a request is received in your office until the time that a ballot hits the mail stream.

- i. The MEC enters or processes all absentee requests within 24 hours of receipt (whether from MyVote or via mail, email or fax). We then utilize batches within WisVote to generate ballots. We have worked with the WEC to create a report from these batches that will allow us to print directly onto the voter's inner envelope instead of adhering labels. These are counted and compared to the original batch to ensure that all voters within the batch are accounted for, as well as to have a manual count of how many absentee ballots per ward are issued within each batch. Then, one ward at a time, ballots are loaded into an inserter/folder machine (DS-200i by Quadient), along with the inner envelopes

and absentee ballot instructions. This machine stuffs the inner envelope, ballot, and letter into an outer envelope. Using the barcode from the voter's inner envelope and the corresponding WEC report, it then prints the voter's mailing address on the outside and seals the envelope. These are then put into bins and transported directly to the USPS St. Paul Avenue branch with accompanying paperwork documenting how many ballots are being delivered. These hit the mail stream that same day/evening.

c. What measures are being take to identify previous issues with mail vendors and to implement a fix to address issues?

- i. MEC has decided to eliminate our third party mail vendor so that there are only two parties involved – our office and the United States Postal Service. Our new automation will tell us exactly how many piece of mail have been processed by ward, which will be compared to our batch log and then documented upon transferring to USPS. The USPS requires us to submit a daily log of how many pieces are being delivered to them, which they then compare to actual ballots delivered.

d. If a problem is identified (voters not receiving their ballots, ballots not tracking) what will be done to identify the issue and the ensure it's not a result of an internal workflow error?

- i. We track the number of ballots by ward in a batch from the time we export the report, print the inner envelopes, assemble the absentee package, and then document the number of ballots per ward being handed over to USPS. A discrepancy in our workflow would be encountered and remedied during the assembly process. All absentee activities after exporting the report will be conducted in one central location within our warehouse under video surveillance, leaving little doubt as to whether there was a human error or intervention during the assembly process.

e. How is Milwaukee coordinating with the USPS ahead of November?

- i. We maintain continual communication with USPS at both the Juneau Ave station (where our mail is received) and at St. Paul Ave (where our outgoing mail will be taken). On Election Day, the Juneau station ensures multiple deliveries directly to Central Count so that all ballots that are at their station are counted on Election Day.

f. Where will Milwaukee voters be able to drop off their absentee ballots on election day?

- i. The Milwaukee Election Commission will have 15 drop boxes set up across the City of Milwaukee for the duration of absentee by-mail voting. These drop boxes will be at every Milwaukee Public Library, in addition to City Hall. On Election Day, voters will have until 8pm to return their ballot at any drop box or at Central Count, 501 W Michigan St. Ballots will not be accepted at polling places.

- g. **Will Milwaukee voters be able to drop off their absentee ballots at polling places on election day? What will be the process for getting those ballots to central count?**
 - i. No. The City of Milwaukee will not allow absentee ballot drop off at polling places since we utilize a Central Count process. Instead, voters will be able to deliver their ballot to 15 drop boxes across the City or to Central Count, 501 W Michigan Street. The polling place staff will have handouts with the locations of these drop boxes available for voters who bring a ballot.
- h. **Will there be drop boxes or other drop off opportunities for voters?** See above.
- i. **What steps has Milwaukee taken to tell voters about absentee opportunities, requirements, and deadlines?**
 - i. The City of Milwaukee already mailed every single household a SafeVote post card earlier this year, encouraging absentee voting by-mail and offering assistance at Milwaukee Public Libraries in addition to promoting MyVote. The City of Milwaukee will send out a second post card the first week of September and staff all libraries 5 days a week to provide voter registration and absentee ballot application assistance.

2) Please provide a detailed narrative on Milwaukee’s plans for in-person absentee ahead of the November Election, including answers to the following questions:

- a. **What dates and hours will in-person absentee be offered?** In-Person Absentee Voting will be available from Tuesday, October 20th, through Sunday, November 1st; Monday through Friday, 8am-7pm; Saturday and Sundays from 10am-4pm.
- b. **How many locations will be offered?** The City of Milwaukee will operate 15 in-person absentee voting locations, as published on June 11th. At this time, Manitoba School will be by appointment only due to it being a Milwaukee Public School and the possibility of school being in session.
- c. **Will there be drive-thru, curbside, or drop off opportunities available?** Per state law, curbside voting is available at all voting sites, whether at polling places on Election Day or at in-person absentee voting. We are still working on the feasibility of drive-thru voting at two of our in-person absentee voting locations and will publicize if and when plans are finalized. Due to the WEC’s July 24th interpretation and guidance on Wis. Statute 6.855, we have not been able to expand to expand and relocate IPAV sites to be more conducive to drive-thru voting.
- d. **Will there be any drive-thru or alternative options available?** See above.

3) Please provide a detailed narrative on Milwaukee’s plan for in-person polling places on Election Day, November 3, including answers to the following questions:

- a. **How many polling places will Milwaukee have on November 3?** 170 polling places are confirmed for November 3rd as of today, August 17, 2020.
- b. **What changes were made to polling locations to ensure social distancing can be maintained or to accommodate other CDC recommendations?** Plexiglass shields were at every table at every receiving table and registration table at City of Milwaukee



polling places. Polling places were provided with proper PPE for disinfecting surfaces, encouraging frequent hand sanitizing, etc. All workers were required to wear a mask, strongly encouraged to wear a face shield, and were trained on CDC and Milwaukee Health Department recommended practices.

- c. **How was the decision reached on how many polling places Milwaukee will have in November?** We strive to open all 180 regular polling places on November 3rd; however, this relies on the willingness of our private site partners to participate. We continue to have conversations and meetings to reopen as many sites as possible.
 - d. **What considerations were weighed in terms of number of polling places and locations?** Priority was made to open as many neighborhood polling places as possible under my leadership.
 - e. **Will there be any drive thru or alternative methods available?** Curbside voting is available at all polling places for voters unable to enter the building due to a disability.
 - f. **What line management or mitigation efforts will be used at your polling places to avoid long wait times for voters?** Given current trends, we expect that only 25%-30% of voters will prefer to vote in-person at their polling place on Election Day. We will staff at full capacity (2400 workers), which will ensure a fast and safe voting experience on Election Day.
 - g. **What poll worker recruitment efforts is Milwaukee embarking in to prepare for November? What contingency plans does Milwaukee have for a lack or poll workers on election day or emergency needs?** The City of Milwaukee had tremendous success in partnering with community organizations this summer and will continue to infuse resources into our poll worker recruitment. We will have a professional communications firm help the MEC with recruitment messaging, have brought on additional staff to help with recruitment, as well as staffed additional temporary office assistants to ensure that every application is processed and workers are contacted for training. Additionally, we are working to rewrite our training manual to be more user-friendly and up-to-date, as well as enhance virtual training opportunities to be more interactive and visual. It is my opinion that our election workers will feel confident and excited to staff the polls on November 3rd if they have received training that instills confidence and the importance of their role.
- 4) **Please provide a detailed narrative on preparations is Milwaukee making to Central Count ahead of November 3, including answers to the following questions:**
- a. **What process/personnel changes are being made?** Please see attached strategic planning document.
 - b. **What security measure are in place or being changed at central count to ensure that only authorized personnel have access to the ballot.**
 - c. **What changes are being made to accommodate larger numbers of absentee ballots being returned on election day? With the process change because of the larger volume of absentees that are likely to be returned on election day?**

5) Please provide a detailed narrative on preparations the City of Milwaukee is making for November 3, including answers to the following questions:

- a. **Communications plans? How will Milwaukee communicate their preparation efforts to the public? How will issues on election day, during absentee, etc be communicated? efforts to the public? How will issues on election day, during absentee, etc be communicated?** The City of Milwaukee Election Commission has identified strong and clear needs for voter outreach and education within its voting communities, with a particular emphasis on reaching voters of color, low-income voters without reliable access to internet, voters with disabilities, and voters whose primary language is not English. This outreach is particularly necessary given the voter confusion that ensued in the lead-up to the April election, and voters' concerns and questions about voting during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is understood that our communities of color do not necessarily trust the voting process, and that there is need to work to earn trust. The Election Commission through transparency and openness seek to educate the public about what happens behind the scenes in elections, and what options are available for casting a ballot.

The Election Commission is seeking a communications firm or firms to create and implement a comprehensive voter education and election worker recruitment campaign for the November 2020 Presidential Election. We are investing \$250,000 to this project. This effort will focus on appealing to a variety of communities within Milwaukee, including historically underrepresented voting communities. Additionally, part of the campaign will focus on the recruitment of new election workers, taking into consideration and communicating the unique job role during a pandemic, as well as the creation of professional training videos.

- b. **What changes have been made to MEC staff training? Chief inspector or election inspector training?** Under my leadership, it was essential that we take a very critical look at election worker training, as well as staff training. I immediately sought the creation of a 9th position within the department to focus on consistent, documented processes and procedures around voter services such as registration and absentee voting. An existing staff member was promoted into this position and is already working hard to improve cross training within the office and establishing routine procedures that were previously undocumented.

Additionally, we are currently redesigning our election worker manual to be more user friendly, up-to-date, and ensure that all workers (whether chiefs or election workers) have access to a useable manual. COVID19 has required that some of our election workers serve as co-chiefs or chiefs at a moment's notice. It was imperative that we operate and train with one manual.

- c. **How will Milwaukee communicate and changes to poll locations? To voter? To the state and other parties who rely on the data to populate polling place look up tools?** We contact registered voters via post card to convey any polling place changes. We also update MyVote and Where Do I Vote? (City's portal) to have current information. Additionally, signage is placed at previous voting sites to direct voters to the correct site on Election Day.

- d. **Given the larger volume of absentee ballots, will you be able to process all of your absentee ballots on election night? If you believe tallying will extend beyond election night, what is you plan for processing absentees that may span over multiple days?** We do not anticipate that counting absentee ballots will extend into days unless a court ruling determines otherwise (such as allowing ballots postmarked on Election Day to be counted). At most, processing will continue throughout the night and be completed on Wednesday. We will provide constant communication to the media and the WEC on any delays. We will also communicate in advance of Election Day, as I already have been doing during media interviews. Accepting ballots until 8pm on Election Day at our drop boxes will mean that results will not be immediately available. However, we are staffing drop boxes to be picked up throughout the day every two hours so that the 8pm returns will have minimal effect. We will continue to encourage voters to return their absentee ballot prior to Election Day as well.

Sincerely,



Claire Woodall-Vogg
Executive Director