

March 2, 2015
Revised March 18, 2015

Town of Fairfield
2014 Election Process Review Committee

Report to the Board of Selectmen

Background

On December 3, 2014 the Board of Selectman established a bi-partisan committee to study the 2014 November local election, to review issues and concerns that may have had an impact on the smooth operations of voting polling locations and the timely reporting of election results.

Committee Charge

The committee was charged to compile a list of concerns raised by citizens and volunteers relating to the election. The committee was also to review with both Registrars, to determine the cause of issues that were identified concerning the Election Day 2014. Additionally, if necessary the committee was to check with the Secretary of State's office, past Registrars and other towns for information to assist in answering and questions or concerns.

(Exhibit A – Committee Charge)

(Exhibit B – Complaints sent to the Frist Selectman's Office)

Committee Findings and Recommendations

In response to the inquires outlined in the Charge, and the committees review of the November 2014 election, the following issues or concerns were identified, followed by the committees comments and recommendations.

(Exhibit C – Meeting Minutes)

1. Opening of Polling Locations

State Statute Section 9-438 requires that all Polling Locations open promptly at 6am without exception. Procedures for opening Polling Locations are outline on page 56 of the Moderator's Handbook for Elections and Primaries. A copy of the Moderator's Handbook is attached with this report.

(Exhibit D – Moderator's Handbook)

It was reported by some members of the public that some Polling locations did not open on time at 6 am. After reviewing the Moderator's Logs for all ten polling locations, it was determined that district three (Dwight School) opened at 6:10 am, district four (Osborn Hill School) opened at 6:15 am, and district seven (North Stratfield) opened at 6:03 am.

Based on reading the Moderator's logs, the following reasons are reported for late openings:

District Three – Opened at 6:10 am and the log states that the “Machine jammed almost every tab. Assistant Registrar Tom Dupona No Show, called Town Hall, Okay to open by Matt/Holly- Save tape for inspection- Chris Lussen, Deputy Assistant Registrar Oversaw Opening.”

District Four –The Moderator's log reports, “Poll opened late at 6:15 am due to delay in setting up Tabulator, etc.”

District Seven – The Moderator's log show that the polls opened at 6:03 am and there is no reasons given for the late opening. Given the closeness to 6:00 am, this could have been a matter of a clock running fast as compared to the actual time.

Moderator Logs attached to this report are the first page of the logs from these districts. (Exhibit E – Moderator Logs)

Committee Findings

The committee considers this a chain of command issue and a lack of understanding by the Moderators of the statutory requirement that the polls must be open to the voters at 6 am promptly, regardless of any issues that may be happening at that time.

The committee concluded that this issue is a result of ineffective training from the Registrars who are responsible for training all Poll workers.

Committee Recommendations

1. A clear Chain of Command needs to be developed as part of Poll Worker Training and included in written materials given to Moderators for Election Day.
2. Registrars or their designee should receive a phone call from all Moderators at 5:30 am to confirm that all workers are present, and that everything is ready to open the polls at 6am.
3. After review of the Moderator's Logs the committee recommends that a uniform log format be developed by the Registrar's Office for future elections. The current format is a hand written log in a notebook and the committee did not find them to be consistent.

In addition to developing a uniform said format for the Moderator's Log, the committee also recommends that a lap top computer be provided to each polling location for the purpose of maintaining the log. This is for the purpose of the creation and maintenance of the uniformed moderator log.

In conclusion the committee found that the cause of these issues are the result of insufficient communication between the Registrars and lack of consistent training for all poll workers, most especially the Moderator's.

2. Complaints related to the Election

The committee sent out a press release to solicit comment from the public to voice concerns and/or problems, and reached out the State Elections Enforcement Commission. (Exhibit F – Press Release Committee Seeks Public Input on Recent Election)

Committee Findings

Some members of the public noted concerns about issues at the polls, upon checking with the State Elections Enforcement Commission (SEEC), it was reported that there were no actionable complaints filed with the SEEC concerning the 2014 election in Fairfield.

While there were no actionable complaints filed with the SEEC, there were members of the public that appeared before this committee commenting on concerns and issues they experienced. The committee understands that there will always be some sort of concern or complaint on a given Election Day, it is imperative that the elections run as smoothly as possible for the voters.

In addition to issues regarding late poll openings, two major complaints reported to this committee involved; wrong ballots given to voters and delay in results being reported at the end of Election Day to the public. (Exhibit G – Fairfield Citizen Article – Elections panel reviews complaints 2/13/15)

In voting locations where there were multiple voting districts, it was reported that voters received the wrong ballots. These districts included: district three handed out incorrect ballots for two minutes until it was identified and corrected, district four this occurred for 24 minutes and in district seven for 31 minutes. (Exhibit H – Ballot Discrepancies in Districts 3, 4, 7 and 8)

Reporting election results and the timing of such will vary from election to election. The 2014 election results were not available to the two local party organizations as early as they have customarily been in past elections. The registrars have been asked to provide an explanation of what occurred in 2014 and how it compares to what happened in 2013.

The registrars could not agree on the general principals of the election such as the budget, auditing, and central or district absentee ballot counting, leading to administrative issues and a chaotic election.

(Exhibit I – Roger Autuori’s Package State Statues, Email, Statements)

Committee Recommendations

The committee recommends that signage be created and be posted at each polling location, informing the public for any issues or concerns relating to the voting process of who to contact. An email, website, or phone number to be listed for voters to communicate issues, excluding registrars.

The committee recommends that different colored ballots to be utilized in polling locations where multiple districts are present.

Although the committee notes that all ten moderators need to be additionally trained in absentee ballot counting for district counting verses one moderator for counting centrally. District counting takes away from regular work at the polls and requires a greater number of personal to train.

3. Machinery

Committee Findings

After review the committee found that there were no major issues with the machinery during the day of the election. The deployment of machinery (tabulators) to polling locations was adequate (two per district and eight backups), but training with regard to breakdowns and how to handle them was insufficient.

Committee Recommendation

The committee recommends that sufficient training with who to contact for breakdowns of machinery.

4. Absentee Ballots

The State Statute 9-147 requires that absentee ballots be counted in the voting districts. The statute also provides that absentee ballots MAY be counted in a central location. In the event the registrars do not agree on how to count the absentee ballots, the statute states that they will be counted in the districts.

(Exhibit J – Procedure Manual for Counting Absentee Ballots)

Committee Findings

Fairfield has counted the absentee ballots in a central location for the past several elections.

For election year 2014, Mr. Waggner, Democratic Registrar proposed counting the absentee ballots in the districts. Mr. Autuori, Republican Registrar supported counting them centrally and based on this disagreement, the absentee ballots were counted at the ten voting locations.

When the committee asked the two registrars about this issue, both registrars had different views. Mr. Waggner reported that there was a savings of about \$3,000 by counting at voting locations. Mr. Waggner noted that one of the issues to be refined in the future; will be getting the results out to the two party headquarters earlier. Mr. Waggner also reported that counting the ABs in the districts assisted in helping to complete the work of Election Day sooner. This said, counting the ABs in the districts did result in more work for the Moderators and ultimately, a longer work day for them at the Polling locations.

When questioned on this issue, Mr. Autuori noted that he would recommend returning to the practice of counting the absentee ballots centrally. Mr. Autuori noted that other larger towns like Fairfield count the ABs centrally. Mr. Autuori is correct other towns with a population similar to Fairfield or larger do count ABs centrally.

(Exhibit K – Matthew Waggner’s Cost Associated with Absentee Ballot Counting)
(Exhibit L – Roger Autuori’s Package with Budget, Fees, and Invoices)

Committee Recommendation

The decision regarding how to count Absentee Ballots rest solely with the Registrars per the State Statutes, therefore, the committee declines at this time to make recommendations about how to count these ballots. The committee feels that regardless of how absentee ballots are counted in the future, training is essential for a smooth process, and that the issues that occurred with all training in 2014 had a direct impact on this process.

The committee also notes that anytime a new procedure is implemented, there will be a learning curve. This is why it is essential to have thorough, and consistent training for all persons responsible for carrying out this work.

5. Training and Operations

Committee Findings

After questioning the Registrars concerning Poll Workers training and upon hearing from one Moderator, the committee learned that training for all workers did not take place at the same time and in the same place. Training for the workers recruited and hired by Mr.

Autuori (the Republican Registrar) and the workers recruited and hired by Mr. Wagner (the Democratic Registrar) took place at different times. When the committee asked why this happened the Registrars had different information to offer and to the best of the committee's ability to understand what happened, it appears that the Registrars were unable to work together in order to conduct joint training.
(Exhibit M –Election Day Procedures Counting Opening and Closing)

As the committee continued to question the Registrars on training and the operations for the Registrar's Office, both Mr. Autuori and Mr. Wagner cited difficulties and/or concerns with working together.

Committee Recommendations

The committee recommends that it is essential that all training for Poll Workers be conducted at the same time in the same location by job. This is necessary to ensure that workers get consistent training and that all workers have the same information, regardless of which Registrar hires them.

The committee recommends that it is important to have continuity of information coming from the Registrar Office and believes that the current office configuration is problematic. Currently the two Registrars are in separate offices. The Republican Registrar is off site in another office.

After studying the Registrar Office space, the committee recommends that their needs to be a reconfiguration of the space in order to provide a more productive workspace for the three people. The current layout has the three workers sitting too close together. Should someone be on the phone, it is an interruption to the other people working as they can't avoid hearing the person's conversation on the phone.

Concluding Committee Comments

Through the review process the committee has found the breakdown in the ability of the Registrars to work professionally and collaboratively, directly impacted the November 2014 election process in Fairfield. Their inability to train Poll Workers together resulted in misinformation and misunderstandings that caused mistakes. These preventable errors were not limited to major elections issues but also affected the day to day operations of the Registrar Office.

(Exhibit N – Fairfield Citizen Articles Registrars' Rocky Relations 2/19/15 and Fairfield wins election turnout 2/27/15)

Given the registrars are nominated by their political parties, which ensures automatic election to the office by the voters, the committee notes that there is little that can be done in the form of reprimand. There is no recall process for Registrars in the event the two Registrars are unable to work together.

The committee looked at possible ways the Registrars can work out of the same office, which included reconfiguring the work space and staggering their work hours. The Committee further recommends that Election Day protocols be augmented to delineate a clear chain of command containing all Election Day personnel with both registrars at the top of the chain. This protocol will provide clarity for all personnel as to whom to contact should issues or concerns arise and place ultimate responsibility with both registrars on Election Day.

While these adjustments may help, the committee notes that until the two Registrars can work professionally and collaboratively, for the good of the voters of Fairfield, issues like those that occurred in the November 2014 election will continue to happen.

Documents submitted at 03-18-2015 Board of Selectmen Meeting

The following document was submitted at the March 18 2015 Board of Selectmen meeting:

- Roger Autuori's Response on Delayed Election Results (Exhibit O)

Attachment Exhibits

- A. [Committee Charge](#)
- B. [Complaints sent to the First Selectman's Office](#)
- C. [Committee Meeting Minutes \(Dec 15, Dec 22, Jan 5, Jan 12, Feb 11, Feb 17, Mar 2\)](#)
- D. [Moderators Handbook](#)
- E. [Moderator Logs \(First Page for Districts Three, Four and Seven\)](#)
- F. [Press Release \(Committee Seeks Public Input on Recent Election\)](#)
- G. [Fairfield Citizen Article- Elections panel reviews complaints 2/13/15](#)
- H. [Ballot Discrepancies in Districts 3,4,7and 8](#)
- I. [Roger Autuori's Package \(State Statutes, Email, Statements\)](#)
- J. [Procedure Manual for Counting Absentee Ballots](#)
- K. [Matthew Waggner's Cost Associated with Absentee Ballot Counting](#)
- L. [Roger Autuori's Package with Budget, Fees, and Invoices](#)
- M. [Election Day Procedures \(Counting, Opening and Closing\)](#)
- N. [Fairfield Citizen Articles \(Registrars' Rocky Relations 2/19/15 and Fairfield wins election turnout 2/27/15\)](#)
- O. [Roger Autuori's Response on Delayed Election Results \(Received at 3-18-15 BOS Meeting\)](#)