



Request for Committee Action from the Office of City Clerk

Date: August 17, 2014

To: Hon. Jacob Frey, Chair, Elections & Rules Committee

Subject: Proposal to Expand Absentee Service Hours

Recommendation:

- 1.) Authorize extended service hours for in-person absentee voters during the two-week period prior to the 2014 General Election;
- 2.) Authorize the Director of Elections & Voter Services to schedule additional staff hours to serve in-person absentee voters as needed.
- 3.) Report back to the Elections & Rules Committee after the 2014 General Election with details about the actual impact of extended in-person absentee hours to determine if and how in-person absentee voting hours should be managed, including both policy and operational issues or recommendations, for application in future elections.

Prepared by: Casey Joe Carl, City Clerk – 612.673.2216 Presenter in Committee: Casey Joe Carl, City Clerk
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Background Information: The City has been contacted by nonprofit, community-based organizations advocating for increased ballot access; specifically, for expanded in-person service hours in conjunction with Minnesota’s new “no excuse” absentee voting law. In response, City policymakers have requested an analysis on the potential impact within the following parameters:

- Increase service hours each weekday during the two-week period leading to the General Election from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., which corresponds with plans identified by Hennepin County for service hours;
- Retain existing service hours on the two Saturdays immediately prior to the General Election, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; and
- Add service hours on the two Sundays immediately prior to the General Election, from 12 noon to 4 p.m.

According to the existing schedule, the Elections & Voter Services Division expects to provide a total of 278 service hours during the 46-day absentee voting period, which begins Friday, September 19. The proposal would add two and one-half hours each day during the regular work week for a total of 25 more service hours. Adding Sunday service hours, as proposed, would gain another 8 hours, with 1 additional service hour on Monday, November 3, the day before the general election. The proposal does not change the number of service hours on the two Saturdays prior to Election Day. Thus, if approved, the proposal would increase the overall number of services hours for voters from 278 hours to roughly 312 hours during the 46-day absentee voting period, an increase of roughly 10 percent.

Beginning with the 2012 Presidential Election, the Elections & Voter Services Division enhanced its in-person absentee service by establishing a “polling place” at City Hall, located in the Rotunda. This polling place is staffed every working day during the absentee voting period by a core team of permanent and

seasonal staffers and elections judges. The Elections & Voter Services Division is concerned about the potential for errors caused by stress, fatigue, and burnout among the small core team who administer all aspects of each election. Therefore, staff proposes to establish two shifts to cover expanded service hours, and requests that the Director of Elections & Voter Services be authorized to assign additional workers to cover the City Hall polling place as needed to meet service demands from day to day. The City would benefit from active assistance by partner agencies in recruiting potential election judges.

Financial Impact: Staff estimates a potential fiscal impact of approximately \$10,500 to cover the expanded service hours included in the proposal (see report for more detail). Staff is not requesting additional appropriation at this time, but will work with the Finance & Property Services Department to track expenditures and include costs and additional recommendations as part of its report on the 2014 Gubernatorial Election. At this point, staff proposes to use the 2014 general election as a “test” for expanded service hours to determine applicability in future years as part of the larger policy objective of increasing access to the ballot box.

Staff Recommendation: Authorize the expansion in service hours and authorize the Elections Director to assign additional workers to cover the City Hall polling place, as needed, to meet daily demands.

Attachments:

1. Report – Proposal to Expand Voter Service Hours: An Analysis & Recommendations