



MAYOR AND COUNCIL Meeting Date: September 8, 2025

Agenda Item Type: ADOPTION

Department: CITY CLERK/DIRECTOR OF COUNCIL OPERATIONS OFFICE

Responsible Staff: SARA TAYLOR-FERRELL

Subject

Accept Consultant's Final Report on the Election Code Update

Department

City Clerk/Director of Council Operations Office

Recommendation

Staff recommends that the Mayor and Council accept the Final Report from the Gant Group on City Election Code update.

Discussion

Background

The Mayor and Council held a series of work sessions on city election reform, with Jason Gant of the Gant Group (election consultant) facilitating the discussions. The governing body provided feedback and guidance on various topics, including topical areas that were pertinent as the Gant Group worked to finalize the report with their recommendations.

Attached to this staff report is the Final Report from the consultant for your review and acceptance. Included in the Final Report are the consultant's recommendations. These include:

1. *Election Laws*

- The intermingling of the election administration and campaign finance sections needs to be separated into Section 8 Election Administration and Section 8A Campaign Finance. This separation will allow better interpretation of the laws and allow candidates to better understand what the rules are without having to hire an attorney to decipher the language.

2. *Election Process and Procedures*

- Establishing an Election Handbook, adding additional policies in categories of Pre-Election, Election Day, and Post-Election, would be helpful to clarify additional election administration activities to keep staff, BSE, candidates, and the public aware of various policies.
- Election Code changes should not be made in the twelve months leading up to an election.

3. *Campaign Finance*

- The city code has not kept up with the times in the world of campaign finance and needs to be updated.

- Campaign committee types need to be defined, contribution limits created, filing requirements established; increase the number of campaign reports, use real-world examples when completing campaign finance forms; develop independent expenditure rules, and enforcement procedures detailed with complaint forms, investigative authorities, and prosecution guidelines.
4. *Board of Supervisors of Elections*
- The BSE should continue its responsibilities to set policy, create forms, and oversee the overall administration of elections. New responsibilities would include hiring a legal counsel and election staff. The BSE should have clear guidance in the code to review, approve, deny, and penalize all campaign committees. The enforcement of fines and penalties should be at the Board's discretion, with its legal counsel, and allowed to hear appeals and make rulings on all violations.
5. *Ballot Measures*
- Allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote could be implemented for the 2027 election. There was considerable public support for the idea of increasing opportunities to vote for those age groups. Before final approval would be made, the city needs to verify with the County and the State that this new initiative would not cause any issues with the current partnership that has been in use for years.
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Mayor and Council History

The Mayor and Council held two work sessions with the election consultant on City election reform. The first worksession was held on May 19, 2025, and the second worksession on July 21, 2025.

Public Notification and Engagement

There were two community engagement sessions. The first session was held on Thursday, June 5, 2025, 7 – 9 pm, and the second session was held on Saturday, June 7, 9-12 pm. About thirty-five (35) people attended the first session and twenty-five (25) the second session. If members of the community were unable to attend either session, they were also encouraged to submit their comments to the City Clerk/Director of Council Operations.

Boards and Commissions Review

The consultant met with the Board of Supervisors of Elections (BSE) on April 24, 2025, where the board members provided input.

Next Steps

Following the presentation of the Final Report and recommendations, the Mayor and Council should move to accept the consultant's Final Report.

Attachments

Final Report



Rise Together

CITY OF ROCKVILLE

Election Review 2025

September 8, 2025

Final Report

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SCOPE OF WORK

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL # 16-25

- Review Rockville's election laws (Article III of the City Charter and Chapter 8 of the City Code) and suggest changes and best practices, including adoption of an entirely new law
- Review Rockville's election procedures and suggest changes and best practices to those procedures to improve the election process to among other things, promote diversity, equality, and inclusion
- Suggest a different and more effective procedure for enforcing those laws against violators
- Review the reporting requirements and suggest changes to make that process more effective and transparent
- Suggest ways to control expenditures from organizations and others making independent expenditures
- Suggest requirements for the disclosure of the source of such funds
- Consider options to redefine and clarify the role of the Board of Supervisors of Elections
- Consult with appointed staff and the BSE in formulating those suggestions
- Suggest appropriate responses to the four ballot measures presented to voters in the 2023 election
- Attend meetings of the Board of Supervisors of Elections to obtain its feedback and suggestions
- Attend working sessions with Mayor and Council and others to discuss changes to the City Code and election procedures
- Review and make recommendations for clarification of definitions within Chapter 8
- Attend community engagement sessions as necessary (no more than 3 meetings)
- Conduct final round of meetings with BSE and Mayor and Council and present final recommendations

TIMELINE

Events

STAFF VISITS

- Met with City Clerk Sara Taylor-Ferrell on April 24th
- Met with City Manager Jeff Mihelich on April 29th
- Met with City Attorney Robert Dawson on May 1st
- Various phone and video conferences in April, May, June, July, & August

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF ELECTIONS VISITS

- Met with BSE at their meeting on April 24th
- Various in person, phone, and video meetings in May, June, July, & August
- Met with BSE at their meeting on August 7th

MAYOR and COUNCIL VISITS

- Work Session on May 19th
- Work Session on July 21st
- Final Report Presentation on September 8th

COMMUNITY SESSIONS

- Session 1 on June 5th
- Session 2 on June 7th

MAYOR and COUNCIL & BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF ELECTION VISIT

- Joint Work Session scheduled for June 16th - cancelled

ELECTION LAWS

City Charter Article III

REVISE SECTIONS

- **Section 1. Voters**
Consider simplifying this section to mirror the State of Maryland voter registration guidelines to have a clear understanding that if you are registered to vote in the State of Maryland and a resident of Rockville that you may vote in Rockville elections. The one change would be if Rockville changes the voting age to 16.
- **Section 2. BSE (b)**
This section references newspaper publications and notices around the City. Consider adding social media, website, city newsletter, etc.
- **Section 3. Nominations**
Consider changing the deadline for petitions from 60 days prior to Election Day to 90 days. This would allow for more time in preparing ballots. Currently, ballots are to be mailed between 25-30 days prior to Election Day, thus only giving the BSE and Clerk 30 days to proof, print, and mail ballots.
- **Section 6. Recall Elections**
This section references the City Clerk as the filing and certification official, however Article III Section 3 references the BSE as the filing and certification officials. Consistency should be practiced for the approval or denial of petitions. Also, subsection (e) details how the recall ballot should look. This should be revised as tabulating machines will have specific regulations for the design of ballots.

City Code Chapter 8 Definitions

REVISE SECTIONS

- **Absentee ballot**
This definition can be removed due to no longer relevant.
- **Campaign material**
Add sections to include text messages, robocalls, and any other voice, image, or digital messaging.
A definition is needed for “principle or proposition” it is referenced numerous times throughout the Code.
- **Campaign committee**
A campaign committee should be defined as any candidate campaign committee, political action committee, candidate slate campaign committee, political party, or other campaign committee organized outside of the City.
Campaign reporting regulations should not be listed under the definition. Those regulations should be under a separate reporting section.

City Code Chapter 8

REVISE SECTIONS

- **Section 8-3. Election districts**

This section should be updated at least every 10 years with the Census. This will allow the ten districts to be as up to date as possible with population shifts and city growth. There seems to be limited use of this data in the administration of elections, aside from reporting election results and recounts.

- **Section 8-4. Board of Supervisors of Elections**

Defining “adequate staff assistance” to the BSE is especially important, whether or not changes are made to the Board’s role. If no changes are made, then the Board will once again have to conduct the 2027 election without legal counsel unless legal counsel is provided to the Board by the Mayor and Council.

- **Section 8-5. Election judges**

Consideration should be made to exclude immediate family members.

- **Section 8-7. Preservation of ballots**

Remove Absentee references.

- **Section 8-8. Withdrawal of candidacy**

This section references the City Clerk, however other sections reference the BSE as the authority to place names on the ballot. The process should all be the Clerk or the BSE, but not both.

- **Section 8-41. Election procedures generally (a)**

The number and locations of vote centers and drop boxes should be reviewed following each election. Caution should be taken before locations are eliminated, as voters get used to going to certain places to vote. Population and transportation patterns change considerably every four years, and additional locations should be considered.

- **Section 8-41. Election procedures generally (c)**

May want to consider changing the first notice from 90 days to 60 days since the ballots are not mailed until 30 days prior and campaigns are most likely starting to advertise 60 days prior to Election Day.

Each of the notices should relate to current election activities. An example would be the first is general info about the upcoming election, the second is info about how to mark your ballot, the third is info about how to deliver your ballot, and the fourth, if needed at all, would be one final reminder the week before Election Day.

- **Section 8-41. Election procedures generally (d)**

Changing candidate order from alphabetical to random drawing would be seen as a more appropriate system.

- **Section 8-41. Election procedures generally (i)**

The word “manual” should be defined. Does that word mean manually hand recount or manually electronic tabulation recount? Tabulating machines have consistently proven to be more accurate than hand counting.

- **Section 8-42. Absentee and provisional voting (a)**

Remove Absentee voting references.

- **Section 8-44. Voter assistance (a)**

Remove Absentee voting references.

- **Section 8-71. Appointment of treasurer, ... (a)(3)**

Should be under a BSE section

- **Section 8-72. Candidates joining slates, ...**

Slates should be defined as “campaign committee” and should file as such.

- **Section 8-73. Appointment of chairperson ... (a)**
Requiring a chairperson of a campaign committee may not be required and just adds more bureaucracy on candidates.
- **Section 8-73. Appointment of chairperson ... (b) & (c)**
This section can be removed and added to a political action committee section.
- **Section 8-74. Campaign depositories; petty cash fund (b)**
This section can be removed and due to other sections requiring the record of all contributions and expenditures.
- **Section 8-76. Books, records and receipts of treasurer (b)**
This section can be removed as contributions are recorded in the campaign finance reports and again just adds more bureaucracy on candidates.
- **Section 8-78. Contributions and expenses of persons not candidates (d)**
A candidate campaign committee should be limited to accepting contributions of \$1,000 from individuals and \$10,000 for other campaign committees.
- **Section 8-78. Contributions and expenses of persons not candidates (e)**
If the \$1,000 and \$10,000 limits are created, then this section can be removed.
- **Section 8-79. Campaign communications...**
If the \$1,000 and \$10,000 limits are created, then this section can be removed.
- **Section 8-81. Election reports...**
This entire section needs to be replaced.
- **Section 8-83. Requirement of election reports...**
This entire section needs to be replaced.
- **Section 8-101. Prohibited practices (7)**
Campaign material disclaimer practices should be in the general campaign finance section and not in a prohibited section.
- **Section 8-102. Requirements concerning advertising; rates**
This section would be a starting point for the creation of an independent expenditure section.
- **Section 8-111. Violation of chapter...**
This section would be modified for a new enforcement section.

REPLACE/REORGANIZE SECTIONS

- **Background**
There has been confusion for the election administration with election procedures and campaign finance procedures intermingled into one section of the Code.
- **Options**
Split Section 8 into two sections. The first section would deal entirely with the administration of an election and the second section would deal with campaign finance. Splitting the sections will assist not only staff, but also voters, candidates, and campaign committees to be able to have a clearer understanding of how the Code applies to each of the areas.

CODE CHANGES DURING ELECTION SEASON

- **Background**
Concerns have been about past activities when election laws were changed near an upcoming election.
- **Options**
Election laws should not be changed during the 12 months prior to the next election. Any changes to the election code require numerous administrative activities. These administrative concerns can affect nearly all aspects of the election process and could cause delays in providing the correct information to voters, candidates, and election officials. Exceptions, in extraordinary situations, should be on a case-by-case basis and should be overwhelmingly necessary for the benefit of the City and the voters.

ELECTION PROCESS & PROCEDURES

Election Procedures

BALLOT DELIVERY – CHAIN OF CUSTODY – E-004

- **Background**

The City Clerk has developed a standard form listing number of ballots and individuals delivering and receiving the ballots.

- **Options**

A suggested change would be to add two individual's signatures to ensure that not just one person is counting and verifying totals of ballots. This would be important on the City Clerk side as well as the receiving official side.

BALLOT RECEIVING AND CANVASS STAGING

- **Background**

The City Clerk has developed an SOP for the receiving of ballots and preparation for ballot counting. MDVOTERS is used for the batching of envelopes into batches of 25.

- **Options**

This procedure is thorough with sufficient detail to provide the Election Specialists with their procedures leading up to Election Day.

BALLOT ACCOUNTING WORKSHEET

- **Background**

The verification and double verification of ballot counts is of the most importance. Ballot accounting shows number of ballots reissued, issued at nursing homes, other, and spoiled ballots.

- **Options**

This system is very meticulous and is a general part of all elections to verify where all of the ballots have been utilized.

CANVASS TEAM INSTRUCTIONS

- **Background**

The City Clerk has an exact step by step process for opening and sorting the ballots that have been received in the mail. The process has security measures built in to ensure voter privacy in that their name and their cast ballot are not visible when preparing to be counted. Keeping the batches in sets of 25 helps to keep ballot counts accurate and provides a manageable number to double check and make sure a ballot isn't missing.

- **Options**

This process is spot on and should be commended. With most procedures, an after-action questionnaire/survey of Officials is always a good idea to continue to fine tune the process for additional efficiencies.

CONDUCTING CANVASS

- **Background**

The procedure of opening of ballot envelopes and the counting of ballots is well detailed.

- **Options**

An Election Official never wants to create the perception of any mischief during the counting of the ballots. More and more observers are starting to attend this process. The observers should be welcomed and informed of the process. The City should strive to ensure that the opening of the ballots is viewable to the public. The public should not be able to see the cast ballots, and especially not the names on the envelopes. However, a meeting room should be chosen where there is sufficient room for the Election Officials to do their job, but also enough room for the observers to see the work taking place. Setting up a rope line or line of tables that provide a physical barrier should be utilized without obstructing the view.

The same should be in place for the scanning of the ballots. Whether it is the same viewing area for the envelope opening, or another area for the scanning, either way there should be a physical barrier with sufficient viewing opportunity.

CONFIDENTIAL BALLOT DELIVERY – CHAIN OF CUSTODY

- **Background**

The City Clerk has developed a standard form listing number of ballots and individuals delivering and receiving the ballots.

- **Options**

A suggested change would be to add two individual's signatures to ensure that not just one person is counting and verifying totals of ballots. This would be important on the City Clerk side as well as the receiving official side.

DUPLICATING PROCESS

- **Background**

There will always be some ballots that have deficiencies. Should a ballot not be accepted by the counting scanner, then the BSE must decide as to duplicate or reject the ballot.

- **Options**

Duplicating of a ballot must be exact. After one BSE member reads the original ballot and the second BSE member completes the new ballot, a third and fourth BSE members could do a double check and triple check to ensure accuracy.

E-001-BALLOT COLLECTION – DROP BOX

- **Background**

The ballot collection procedure is necessary to explain how ballots are collected each day from the drop boxes. The procedure requires two individuals for this process which is critical.

- **Options**

Using a city vehicle with clear markings identifying the vehicle as a City vehicle would be an option to create more awareness and limit the chance of confusion that an unmarked vehicle was collecting ballots. An added security measure would include collecting at different times of the day and using different streets to and from drop boxes and City Hall.

E-002-BALLOT COLLECTION – POST OFFICE

- **Background**

This procedure is a simple set of rules similar to Drop Boxes.

- **Options**

Categorizing by Drop Box and Post Office are excellent data resources in determining plans for future elections.

E-003-PREP AND SECURE BALLOTS FOR TRANSPORT

- **Background**
Ballots received are locked into special blue ballot bins with seals and signed by both transport officials.
- **Options**
Changing up the transport officials would be another security measure so that different people are working together, thus limiting the chances of mischief.

E-004-BALLOT DELIVERY – SECURE PROCESSING CENTER

- **Background**
The City Clerk and the City Police transport the blue ballot bins to the processing center where the chain of custody forms are signed and completed.
- **Options**
Utilizing the City Police is an added security measure adding secure transport and additional ballot security.

ISSUING REPLACEMENT BALLOTS

- **Background**
During elections, there will be times when a replacement ballot is requested for various reasons. This procedure details the process to reissue a ballot as well as the verification of blank ballots utilized. A reminder that ballots must be received by Election Day is also very helpful to the voter.
- **Options**
This procedure is well written and clear on the process.

Pre-Election

CANDIDATE BALLOT ORDER

- **Background**
City Code Section 8-41(d) states that candidates shall be “arranged in alphabetical order.”
- **Options**
Another option is to draw names out of a hat or have each candidate draw a number for ballot order. Utilizing a drawing method would eliminate any perceived benefit, whether real or not, based off of a candidate’s last name and position on the ballot.

CANDIDATE NAME NICKNAMES

- **Background**
During the 2023 and 2013 elections, a candidate was allowed a nickname in parentheses on the ballot.
- **Options**
Allowing for a nickname on the ballot when the issue of official name of James but uses the nickname of Jim is considered perfectly acceptable. The issue becomes when a candidate wants a type of political name as their nickname, John (The Best Candidate) Smith. Setting up specific rules would alleviate potential challenges in the future. With an increasing immigrant population, consider allowing the BSE to approve or disapprove of nicknames for the ballot would also be helpful.

OFFICIALLY A CANDIDATE

- **Background**

The Nomination Petition for the Mayor and Council includes the necessary information for the BSE to certify that the candidate has submitted more than the minimum number of signatures to be on the ballot.

- **Options**

The Nomination Petition could be simplified by creating multiple petitions for each necessary language instead of trying to incorporate two languages into one form. This would allow the flow of the petition to be clearer without multiple languages on one form and allow for possibly five more names. This would also allow for the creation of 3-4 additional petitions for other prominent languages.

It is important for clear direction to the BSE when approving or denying petition signatures with the official voter registration list.

CANDIDATE WITHDRAWAL

- **Background**

City Code Section 8-8 clearly explains the process for a candidate to withdraw or if a candidate dies before the filing deadline to be removed from the official ballot.

- **Options**

The section clearly articulates the process to withdraw from the ballot. A sample withdrawal affidavit could be added to the website.

CANDIDATE DEADLINES

- **Background**

Nomination Petitions – 60 calendar days prior to Election Day

Withdrawal of Nomination Petitions – 60 calendar days prior to Election Day

- **Options**

The timeline of 60 calendar days prior to Election Day is a reasonable amount of time for ballots to be designed, tabulating machines programmed, and other final election preparations.

VOTER LIST VERIFICATION

- **Background**

Rockville depends on the voter registration list from the County/State in order to determine who is and is not eligible to vote. This list is critical for the City to know who should be mailed a ballot.

- **Options**

When the Rockville city boundary limits changes, it is important for that information to be confirmed with the State and County to ensure that voter registration lists are updated. This usually isn't something that happens often, but when it does this change needs to be shared and reviewed. A sampling of the voter file received should be compared with various boundaries, precinct, other jurisdictions, etc. If the State continues with a procedure of emailing ballots, then verifying whether those names are on the official voter list will be important as well.

CANDIDATE FORUMS

- **Background**

During the 2023 election, candidate forums took place 6 weeks, 4 ½ weeks, and 3 ½ weeks before Election Day with ballots being mailed approximately 4 weeks before Election Day.

- **Options**

This seems like a well-planned schedule of hosting candidate forums. If changes are being requested, an option would be to change the schedule to 4 ½ weeks, 3 ½ weeks, and 2 ½ weeks prior to Election Day. This would allow the first forum to coincide with the mailing of ballots and would create additional advertising about when voting would begin. It would also all for the final forum to be closer to Election Day when most voters are making up their minds on whom they will be voting for and still leaving enough time for ballots to be mailed and received before the deadline.

PUBLIC ADVERTISING, PUBLIC OUTREACH, & VOTER EDUCATION

- **Background**

Rockville currently mails up to four postcards with information about the upcoming elections as well as voter registration drives, and door hanger placements.

- **Options**

Each of the notices should relate to current election activities. An example would be the first is general info about the upcoming election, the second is info about how to mark your ballot, the third is info about how to deliver your ballot, and the fourth, if needed at all, would be one final reminder the week before Election Day.

WEBSITE

- **Background**

The existing elections page on the city's website includes great information but could use some updating.

- **Options**

The main components of an election website should include the following areas:

Campaign Finance – How to file; When to file; What to file; and Filed reports search

Candidacy – How do become a candidate; Responsibilities of a candidate; and Important deadlines

Elections – Current election information; and Past election information. Under current election, you want to have sections for how to vote; where to return ballots; when ballots are mailed; ballot return deadline; maps of drop box locations; info on voter assistance options; how ballots are collected; options to vote on Election Day; how ballots are counted; and what to do if a voter needs a replacement ballot

Voter Registration – Links to the State; A special 16- and 17-year-old section

The website needs to contain all information regarding elections in a way that is easy to navigate and can be categorized to assist voters in finding the info they are looking for quickly.

DROP BOX & VOTE CENTER LOCATIONS

- **Background**

City Code Section 8-41(a) details the locations of each vote center and each of the six drop box locations.

- **Options**

Listing the locations of the vote centers and drop boxes in Code is a normal practice and should be continued. The locations of the vote centers and drop boxes should be reviewed after each election to ensure maximum use of the locations. Traffic patterns, population shifts, and other factors can play a role in ensuring adequate access to voting services. The BSE should recommend to the Mayor/Council of any changes that are necessary. The locations should be set at least 18 months prior to the next election and should only be changed if an extraordinary event takes place.

USPS COOPERATION

- **Background**

Rockville elections use a vote by mail system and cooperation with the USPS is critical for a successful election.

- **Options**

Building a relationship with the Postmaster well before election season will help to build trust between the USPS and the City. Providing an election timeline of when ballots are to be sent and how replacement ballots are to be sent will allow time for the preparation of such a large mailing at one time. The relationship will also be helpful on the days and hours leading up to the ballot return deadline to ensure that all mail can be picked up and/or delivered on Election Day night. The USPS may also have advanced technology available with special zip codes or special markings on the envelopes in addition to the USPS's official election mailing label.

LAW ENFORCEMENT COOPERATION

- **Background**

The Rockville Police is utilized for the transport of ballots and is integral in the security of ballots prior to counting.

- **Options**

A close working relationship is critical not just for the transport of ballots, but also the security surrounding vote centers, ballot drop boxes, and tabulating centers. By providing the police department with maps of all election locations, times of pick up, and various election procedures, a solid working relationship will result in a successful election. It is also important to have County, State, and Federal law enforcement contacts should an election crime take place that needs additional law enforcement assistance.

STATE AND COUNTY COOPERATION

- **Background**

Rockville utilizes numerous resources from the State and County election divisions. From voter registration lists to tabulating machines to voter assisted ballot marking devices, the City relies on extensive cooperation from these entities.

- **Options**

Whenever major changes are made to the City's election administration, it is important to keep in mind any challenges that may come about that would require new or additional services from the County or State. Should the City want to implement a new initiative that is contrary to existing County or State procedures, there could be instances where those entities would not be able to help the City.

BALLOT DELIVERY

- **Background**

City Code Section 8-41(b) details that ballots are to be mailed between 25 and 30 days prior to Election Day to all registered voters in Rockville.

- **Options**

If any changes were to be made, it would have a ripple effect on other areas of the election process. Four weeks is a reasonable timeframe for voters to have time to complete and return their ballots.

BALLOT SECURITY

- **Background**

The BSE and the City Clerk have numerous procedures in place to ensure security of the blank ballots and the cast ballots once they are returned. There are also procedures in place to ensure the privacy of the voters cast ballots through placing envelopes in one stack and cast ballots in another. They also utilize the City Police to transport ballots.

- **Options**

The protection of ballots is the most important part of any election. Utilizing secure totes with seals and stored in locked areas help to ensure to the public that the election is run in a secure manner.

BALLOTS ADA COMPLIANT

- **Background**

City Code Section 8-44 details opportunities for voters requesting assistance with casting a ballot. There are also requirements of election judges to assist voters near a vote center and forms to complete for those assisting others with casting a ballot.

- **Options**

With existing law and the new option in 2027 of having a ballot marking device for those blind, limited vision, or limited mobility available, Rockville is utilizing numerous options for all voters.

PROCESS FOR ADVISORY OPINIONS ON BALLOT

- **Background**

Advisory opinions must be placed on the ballot at least 90 days prior to Election Day by either a Council resolution or by a citizen initiative through petition signatures.

- **Options**

An advisory opinion has no official binding action; however, it does give the Council and the public an idea of whether the voters are interested in a particular idea. The challenge is there are minimal to no campaign activities to support or oppose a particular issue which are extremely beneficial to the public through education on the particular issue. The pros and cons of utilizing advisory opinions are equal on both sides.

Election Day

PROTECT ELECTION WORKERS

- **Background**

Election workers are temporary employees hired specifically for city election related activities.

- **Options**

Adding additional language in the Code to specifically list protections for election workers, is sometimes seen as going too far. Instances of harassment, bullying, or acts creating fear are challenges that all election workers face when conducting the election in face-to-face interactions with some voters. If other parts of the Code would not adequately protect election workers, then additional language should be added to the election code.

IN PERSON VOTING LOCATIONS

- **Background**

City Code Section 8-41 lists City Hall and Thomas Farm Community Center as vote centers for in person voting on Election Day, and City Code Section 8-45 details the 50-foot requirement for electioneering. The 50-foot requirement is also a requirement around drop boxes.

- **Options**

Utilizing locations for voting on Election Day is a good policy to continue as there will be people who are skeptical of mailing a ballot and would instead prefer to cast their ballot directly into a ballot box. After each election, a review of the usage of all vote centers and ballot drop boxes should be reviewed to determine if changes will be needed for the next election.

Post-Election

POST-ELECTION AUDIT

- **Background**

City Code Section 8-41(j) discusses during a recount, if one is requested, that two districts are randomly selected to be counted a second time. Currently it appears that is no post-election audit conducted.

- **Options**

Rockville should consider adding a provision, if a recount is not requested, then a post-election audit will take place. Two districts and one race should be randomly selected, and those ballots should be counted a second time. This process creates additional trust in the electoral process. The post-election audit would take place a week or two after the official results of the election have been certified and published in the Council minutes.

BALLOT PRESERVATION

- **Background**

City Code Section 8-7 details the preservation/retention of ballots cast and related ballot materials for six months.

- **Options**

The timeline of six months should be adequate for recounts, court challenges, or other matters. Ensuring that every ballot box, tote, or other container used is properly sealed with unique identification numbers and locking seals or other locking devices. As well as placed in a secure room with limited access by staff.

CANVAS PROCESS

- **Background**

The canvas process includes batching of ballots, verifying ballot counts, verifying oaths, opening envelopes, ensuring privacy, and preparing the ballots for counting.

- **Options**

This process is well detailed and includes processes for any potential problems with ballots and should result in successful elections.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

Code Revisions

DEFINE COMMITTEES

- **Background**
The existing Code has information about candidate campaign committees but lacks in the clear definitions of other campaign committees.
- **Options**
A campaign committee should be defined as any candidate campaign committee, political action committee, candidate slate campaign committee, political party, or other campaign committee organized outside of the City. Each of these types of campaign committees should then be defined.

Campaign Funds & Independent Expenditures

CONTRIBUTION LIMITS TO COMMITTEES

- **Background**
Rockville has a limit of \$1,000 and the State of Maryland has a limit of \$6,000.
- **Options**
Once the campaign committees are created, then the contribution limits can be created by committee. A candidate campaign committee can accept up to \$1,000 from an individual and up to \$10,000 from political action committees, candidate slate committees, political parties, or other campaign committee organized outside of the City. The contribution limits for political action committees, candidate slate committees, political parties, or other campaign committee organized outside of the City would be unlimited or based off of the State or Federal government rules. There would be an option to create limits individuals could contribute to political action committees and candidate slate committees that are organized through the City.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE INSTRUCTIONS

- **Background**
The BSE and City Clerk publish a candidate packet that includes an enormous amount of information for individuals interested in becoming a candidate for public office from nominating petitions to campaign finance reports. There are also extensive step by step procedures for completing the campaign finance forms online. Training sessions are also conducted for candidates and treasurers to assist in filing campaign finance reports.
- **Options**
The instructions are well laid out and include great education on how to complete the forms.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE FAQ

- **Background**

A frequently asked questions section provides additional real reporting scenarios to assist candidates and treasurers on completing the forms.

- **Options**

Using real examples from previous election would be a great starting point to gather the various issues and concerns from previous elections that more than likely will come up again during the next election. Taking time between elections to gather other potential questions and concerns about campaign finance would also be helpful. The State is going to have many examples of questions and issues with their own campaign finance reporting system, that the City may be able to use those to create additional scenarios for the City level.

REGISTRATION OF COMMITTEES

- **Background**

A candidate is required to create a campaign committee when petitions are approved or when they have raised and/or spent \$300.

- **Options**

Adding requirements for political action committees and candidate slate committees to be required to file upon raising any funds would increase transparency.

REPORTING DEADLINES

- **Background**

Rockville requires two campaign finance reports, one 30 days and one 7 days, prior to Election Day. Also required is a post-Election Day report due on January 15th and an annual report due on November 8th if funds or expenses still exist.

- **Options**

Increase the number of finance reports to three prior to Election Day to include 60 days, 30 days, and 7 days. A great deal of campaign activity is going to take place 30 days prior to Election Day as that is the deadline for ballots to be mailed to voters. Consider a supplement report of any contribution of \$1,000 or more during the 7 days prior to Election Day, to be filed within 24 hours of receipt of the contribution.

INDEPENDENT EXPENDITURE REPORTING

- **Background**

The Federal Election Commission defines an independent expenditure as “an expenditure for a communication that expressly advocates the election or defeat of a clearly identified candidate, and which is not made in coordination with any candidate or their campaign.” Rockville has minimal regulations when it comes to an independent expenditure. The State of Maryland requires any independent expenditure of \$5,000 or more to register with the State. The State also requires reporting within 48 hours after expending \$10,000, with the report including the name of the candidate they are supporting or opposing, the names and addresses of any donors who made donations of \$6,000 or more, and the identity of the person exercising direction or control over the activities.

- **Options**

Following a similar set of rules as the State would set up an easier explanation for those who may be considering making an independent expenditure. Consideration should be made to modify the State’s regulations and change the \$5,000 to \$2,500 and the \$10,000 to \$5,000. This would be completely acceptable with Rockville being on a smaller scale than the State.

CAMPAIGN COMMITTEE ORGANIZED OUTSIDE THE CITY

- **Background**
There are minimal requirements in City Code regarding outside contributions to City candidates.
- **Options**
Setting up requirements for City candidates to only be allowed to accept contributions from political committees that are registered with the City. Contribution limits can be set under the candidate committee regulations. Creating reporting requirements of outside committees to file with the City to include contributions and expenditures related to the City, the government entity the outside committee normally files and their website filing address.

STATE CAMPAIGN FINANCE LAWS

- **Background**
The State of Maryland State Board of Elections has extensive listings of information and regulations for candidates for state office, political action committees, etc.
- **Options**
Rockville can utilize select State laws and regulations when determining the next steps in upgrading City Code. There are a number of prime areas to consider including contribution limits, independent expenditures, complaint forms, etc.

Campaign Activities

USE OF DISCLAIMERS

- **Background**
Section 8-101(7) details when a disclaimer is to be used on a political communication.
- **Options**
A specific section within Code should be established to create a clearer understanding of when a campaign disclaimer is to be used. The most common campaign activities such as postcards, yard signs, billboards, websites, etc. are known to require disclaimers and the public is also aware of this requirement. The challenges are the new and innovative ways campaigns are trying to gain support or opposition. The new Code needs to include communications such as robocalls, text messages, and broad enough language to include what will come next.

SIGNS IN PUBLIC RIGHT OF WAY

- **Background**
Section 25.18.16 details that signs are prohibited on public right of ways.
- **Options**
All cities have this challenge of prohibiting signs in the public right of ways, and not just political campaigns. While driving around the City, there are open house signs, garage sale signs, and during election season, political signs.

DEFINE CAMPAIGN ACTIVITY

- **Background**

The Federal Election Commission details common campaign activities to include “directly contributing to a candidate and their campaign committee, volunteering on behalf of a candidate, producing public communications such as independent expenditures, and using a computer or digital device for campaign activity.” The IRS defines political campaign activity “is directly or indirectly participating or intervening in any political campaign on behalf of or in opposition to any candidate for elective office. This includes making contributions to political campaign funds or making public statements in favor of or in opposition to any candidate for public office.”

- **Options**

Using either the FEC or IRS definitions, or a variation of both, would provide clarity in the campaign finance section of the Code.

Enforcement

CLEAR POLICY LANGUAGE

- **Background**

Section 8-83 details the payment of late filing fee of \$10 per day up to \$360. Section 8-111 details misdemeanors, municipal infractions, and ineligibility from holding office.

- **Options**

Consider increasing the \$360 max penalty if that amount fails to be a deterrent for campaign committees to file on time. There would also be the opportunity to have one set of penalties for candidate campaign committee and another for other campaign committees.

HOW ARE COMPLAINTS RECEIVED

- **Background**

Complaints of campaign finance violations are currently brought by members of the BSE. The State of Maryland has a special form on their campaign finance website for anyone to file a complaint with the State board.

- **Options**

The City Clerk and the BSE should create a similar complaint form and place it on the City's website. This would allow for a clear and simple way for the public, other campaigns, and members of the BSE to file a complaint about a possible campaign finance violation.

RESOLUTION TO COMPLAINTS TIMELINE

- **Background**

With limited direction from the City Code, the BSE has to try and determine a timeline for complaints of campaign finance violations.

- **Options**

A section of Code should be established to detail a timeline the BSE should follow to ensure that complaints are resolved swiftly. The challenge with a specific timeline is that complaints may vary and require more or less time and resources to investigate. A starting point would be within five business days, the BSE would respond to the complainant. The response could be no violation was determined, more information has been requested, or a violation appears to have taken place, and the complaint is forwarded to the next level.

PROCESS TO RESOLVE COMPLAINTS

- **Background**

Currently, the BSE attempts to resolve complaints through campaign finance reporting filing deadlines and municipal infractions. Section 8-111(b) provides the BSE with the authority to issue municipal infractions, and the infractions are prosecuted by the City Attorney.

- **Options**

There will be frustrations from both the BSE and the City Attorney's office regarding the conclusions of potential campaign violations. A board of elections will be disappointed when their hands are tied, and only minor results occur because their mission is to ensure a proper and fair election without infractions. Boards believe that strong results will help to prevent others in the future from committing further infractions. A city attorney's office is dealing with major legal issues possibly affecting the city and only have election issues for about sixty days every four years. This is understandable from a city attorney's office standpoint, that an issue of not placing a disclaimer on a ballot is not of importance compared to a multi-million-dollar lawsuit against the City.

CITY STAFF, BSE, MAYOR/COUNCIL

- **Background**

Enforcement of campaign violations is with the BSE, however only the City Attorney can prosecute.

- **Options**

Setting up a type of fire wall between City staff and the BSE would help alleviate any potential conflicts of interest. If there was a time when a current Council member was accused of a violation, there is the potential that political pressure could be placed upon the City Clerk, the City Attorney, or even the City Manager. Creating a process where the BSE wasn't reliant on City staff, would help to create a separation and allow the BSE to issue violations regardless of who committed the violation.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF ELECTIONS

Current Role and Responsibility

NUMBER OF MEMBERS

- **Background**

The Charter details the BSE to consist of five members with two-year staggered terms, and they shall not be candidates or actively engaged in the election or defeat of candidates.

- **Options**

A five-member board is an adequate number of members to administer the current responsibilities of the BSE. Should changes to the BSE's responsibilities take place, there may be a need for more members with the increase in responsibilities and duties.

QUALIFICATIONS OF MEMBERS

- **Background**

The Charter details that the BSE members be registered voters of Rockville, not be a candidate for office during their term, and make an oath.

- **Options**

When selecting new members of the Board, selecting individuals who have experience in elections, whether as a candidate, former official, campaign manager, etc. is very helpful to add as much experience to the Board as possible. It is not easy to gain election experience, so when an individual with experience presents themselves, they would be good choices to appoint.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF MEMBERS

- **Background**

The Charter details that the BSE is in charge of registration of voters, nominations, and all City elections. The BSE is also responsible for publishing notices of elections and advertising about the upcoming election. As well as the authority to appoint election clerks and other employees to assist in its duties.

Section 8-1(3) BSE receives campaign notices

Section 8-1 *Runoff election* BSE shall conduct

Section 8-4 BSE shall supervise elections, enhance voter participation

Section 8-5 BSE appoints judges of elections, receive appeals from election judges, and available to hear appeals

Section 8-6 BSE develops procedures for voter registration, forms establishing residency, and affidavits of residency

Section 8-22 BSE conducts special elections and determines the date

Section 8-23 BSE places advisory opinions on ballot and verifies petitions for citizen advisory

Section 8-41 BSE manages vote centers, pays for ballot postage, provides four public notices, create replacement ballot form, verify votes cast for a candidate, conduct manual recount, announce unofficial results as soon as possible on election night, accept challenges to the election, resolve all challenges, and decisions may be appealed

Section 8-42 BSE establishes procedures for provisional ballots

Section 8-44 BSE establishes procedures for physical assistance forms

Section 8-45 BSE manages the 50-foot requirement of electioneering

Section 8-71 BSE establishes campaign finance forms

Section 8-73 BSE establishes campaign finance forms

Section 8-76 BSE establishes campaign receipt forms

Section 8-78 BSE establishes reporting schedules

Section 8-81 BSE establishes campaign finance forms

Section 8-82 BSE establishes campaign finance forms

Section 8-83 BSE establishes campaign finance filings, notices of overdue filings, notify campaign committees, certify that all filings are complete, and issue late filing fees

Section 8-111 BSE issue municipal infractions and declare person ineligible for office

- **Options**

The BSE has a tremendous number of responsibilities through the Charter and the City Code. With this amount of responsibility, the BSE would be more efficient if staffed accordingly. The administrative duties fall upon City staff, especially in the City Clerk's office. During the 24 months leading up to an election, the Clerk's office should have 3-4 staff members to handle the workload. The BSE desperately needs legal counsel to ensure compliance with over thirty pages of election rules and regulations within the City, plus all of the applicable State and Federal laws regarding election administration. The legal counsel needs to be available to the Clerk's office, the BSE members, and attend BSE meetings.

Roles and Responsibility Options

CITY STAFF TO ASSIST BSE

- **Background**

Currently the BSE relies almost exclusively with the City Clerk's office for all administrative concerns. There is very limited support from the City Attorney's office.

- **Options**

The Mayor and Council owe it to the BSE to provide them the resources necessary to carry out their roles and responsibilities. The BSE needs additional administrative staff to prepare for and to conduct elections. In order for the BSE to appropriately interpret City Codes, they also need legal counsel. Legal counsel would assist the BSE in ensuring that they follow the various Codes and offer legal opinions on some of the more complex issues such as campaign finance, petition signatures, and ensuring correct procedures are in place for ballot counting.

INDEPENDENCE OF MEMBERS

- **Background**

The members of the BSE are prohibited from being candidates and involved in campaigning as well as taking an oath to uphold the highest principles. The Mayor and Council have the responsibility to appoint new members to the BSE as well as remove members from the BSE.

- **Options**

The guidelines regarding the responsibilities of the BSE members are clear and create as much independence as possible. However, a lack of independence can be created by the Mayor and Council not ensuring that the BSE has necessary resources. If the BSE requests more assistance in the election administration, and the Mayor and Council deny the additional resources, then the independence is limited. If the BSE requests legal counsel regarding a campaign finance issue, and the Mayor and Council refuse to direct the City Attorney's office to assist or the Mayor and Council deny requests for outside legal counsel, then the independence is limited further.

SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES

- **Background**

The BSE is responsible for administering elections, creating election forms, creating campaign finance forms, issuing penalties to campaign committees, determine campaign finance violations, approve petitions, count ballots, advertise the upcoming election, and on and on.

- **Options**

Determining the next steps with the BSE is important to avoid the problems from the 2023 election. Implementing new Code language to clear up responsibilities of the City as well as the campaign committees will further increase or decrease the roles of the BSE.

ENFORCEMENT AUTHORITY

- **Background**
Once the BSE issues an infraction, it is up to the City Attorney's office for prosecution.
- **Options**
Create a process where campaign complaints are sent to the City Clerk. The City Clerk then determines the complaint's validity through minimal investigation and presents to the BSE. The BSE determines if more investigation is required or if more information can be obtained from the accused campaign committee. The BSE would have the option to conduct an administrative hearing, issue penalties, or other actions. The BSE would have a legal counsel assist them in the implementation of all actions. The City Attorney's office would only be involved if the complete escalated to a Court proceeding.

MEMBER STIPEND

- **Background**
Currently the BSE is not compensated for time or mileage.
- **Options**
If no changes are made to the BSE's responsibilities, then just compensation is needed. The City is asking too much of a Board to not be compensated for their work and responsibilities. A review of all City Boards should be reviewed to determine fair compensation for all Boards.

INVESTIGATIVE POWERS

- **Background**
There are minimal regulations within the Code about investigative powers of the BSE. The Code details issue penalties for late filings and municipal infractions.
- **Options**
Providing the BSE with clear guidelines on how and when to investigate complaints would drastically reduce confusion around obvious campaign violations. Allowing the BSE to hire legal counsel would provide them assistance in investigating what violation may or may not have happened. A Code that lays out various violations in a matter the designates the BSE as the responsible party with additional authority to prosecute violators according to the Code.

BALLOT MEASURES 2023

VOTING AGE

- Currently you must be 18 years old to vote. Should Rockville allow 16–17-year-olds to vote in City elections?
Yes – 3,601 – 28.77%
No – 8,665 – 69.23%
- **Options**
Implement allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote could and should be completed in the next six months in preparation for the 2027 election. Further study is needed on the needed administration to make this successful, however it should move forward ensuring all resources from the State are still available. A public education campaign should be implemented in September/October of 2027 in the local high schools.

NON-CITIZEN VOTING

- Currently only U.S. citizens who live in Rockville can vote in City elections. Should Rockville allow residents who are not U.S. citizens to vote in City elections?
Yes – 4,208 – 33.89%
No – 7,926 – 63.84%
- **Options**
Allowing Non-Citizens to vote is going to have a number of challenges and potential legal challenges.

TERM LIMITS

- Currently there are no term limits for Mayor and City Council members. Should Rockville limit the Mayor and City Council members to 3 consecutive terms?
Yes – 9,267 – 74.09%
No – 2,786 – 22.27%
- **Options**
Term Limits have been utilized in all levels of government. The challenge will be handling the potential for an entirely new Council to be elected; however, it is also possible today for a completely new Council. The choice becomes whether two terms or three terms should be utilized. Many governments use eight years as the standard similar to the President.

REPRESENTATIVE DISTRICTS

- Currently, City Council members are elected at large. That means the entire city votes for all 6 members. Should some or all of the 6 council members be elected by representative districts?
Yes – 5,090 – 40.84%
No – 6,378 – 51.18%
- **Options**
Some of the best uses of Districts is a hybrid version such as creating four districts that each have one Council member and then elect two at-large Council members. Thus, allowing for both neighborhood representation as well as citywide representation.

ADDITIONAL IDEAS

RANKED CHOICE VOTING

- **Background**

Rockville does not currently use Ranked Choice Voting, however during our community meetings, there were many voices supporting RCV. RCV is used in a number of cities across the nation, and the basics of RCV allows voters to “rank” their candidates choice 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and so on. Candidates who receive above the minimum threshold are declared winners. Candidates who receive the least number of votes are withdrawn and those ballots then runoff and count their 2nd choices and so on until all winners are determined.

- **Options**

Implementing an entirely new voting system will have tremendous challenges. Voter and candidate education alone will take a considerable amount of time and energy. Rockville was extremely successful in implementing vote by mail over the past two elections, which leads to the possibility that a transition to RCV is possible. The biggest hurdle to implementing RCV could be the State. If the State isn’t going to or be able to support RCV, then Rockville may not be able to utilize the State’s resources in City elections. This would cause major problems with the administration of elections and possibly delay election night results by many hours. Starting with an advisory question in 2027 gives the public a voice in the process and then allows for time to implement for the 2031 election.

TECHNOLOGY – SIGN PETITIONS ELECTRONICALLY

- **Background**

Currently, Rockville has nominating petitions on paper for Mayor and Council.

- **Options**

Requesting petitions on paper is not deterrent for voters wanting to become candidates. The costs and administration of implementing such a system to be only used once every four years may be too much. There is a real possibility that the State may consider implementing such a system, then there may be an opportunity for Rockville to use their system and avoid the expenses.

TECHNOLOGY – BALLOT DELIVERED BY INTERNET

- **Background**

Currently, Rockville mails ballots to all registered voters in the City.

- **Options**

Implementing a ballot via the Internet program will have a significant cost to hire a vendor to implement such a system. If the State is willing in the future to allow cities to utilize their system, then that would be an opportunity that the City should absolutely pursue.

CHANGE ELECTION DATE TO PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION YEARS

- **Background**

Rockville elections are currently held the year before a Presidential election, 2023, 2027, 2031, etc. Maryland Governor elections are currently held in off-Presidential election years, 2022, 2026, 2030, etc.

- **Options**

Adding Mayor and Council elections to the Presidential election ballot would save the City a tremendous amount of money, but City candidates would be competing for attention with the many other races already on the ballot. The current system allows for City candidates the most attention as there are no other elections taking place on that day.

COUNT BALLOTS RECEIVED AFTER ELECTION DAY

- **Background**

Currently, cast ballots must be received by the time polls close on Election Day to be counted.

- **Options**

Counting ballots received after Election Day would require additional implementation questions to consider. Would the policy be to accept ballots that are postmarked on or before Election Day for the next 7 days, 10 days, or 14 days? When would ballot counting begin? Would Election Night results still be announced that night? There are a couple states that do allow ballots postmarked by Election Day and received after to be counted. Those states tend to be in headline news as accusations of various misconduct and conspiracies run rampant. Rockville's current process is clear and straightforward.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

- **Background**

Rockville prints ballots in multiple languages, provides information on candidates in multiple languages, provides interpreters at vote centers on Election Day, and provides nomination petitions in multiple languages.

- **Options**

Rockville is actively engaged in various DEI programs and with the continued increase in immigrant populations, the challenges will continue. The City must ensure that various election activities are focused on the entire city population and not just the way things have been done in past elections.

PUBLIC FINANCING OF ELECTIONS

- **Background**

The Montgomery County and Maryland's public financing programs give some context for what has worked in the region. These models have spent millions (\$5.3 million in 2018 and \$3.7 million in 2022) on elections, so understanding how to scale these systems for Rockville will be key. A public financing system could democratize the process by reducing the influence of big-money donors, which aligns with the goal of increasing small donations and broadening candidate diversity. However, it will require careful planning to avoid confusion or administrative overload.

- **Options**

The phased approach (advisory question, study, guidelines, implementation) seems wise. It would allow ample time to evaluate public sentiment, study various models, and carefully craft the program. A thorough education campaign will be crucial to avoid confusion. Many voters and candidates might not be familiar with public financing or its benefits. Starting with an advisory question in 2027 gives the public a voice in the process and then allows for time to implement for the 2031 election.

DEMOCRACY VOUCHERS

- **Background**

The City of Seattle implemented a democracy voucher program in 2015. The program allows all active voters the ability to "donate" a democracy voucher to any candidate who has qualified to follow the voucher program rules. There are a number of rules that a candidate must abide by to qualify to receive the vouchers. Seattle increased property taxes by \$3 million dollars to fund the program annually and provides vouchers with a value of \$100.

- **Options**

This type of program creates more involvement, and possibly excitement, in city elections with all voters having the ability to contribute, not just their vote, but also a monetary contribution. Creating a similar program in Rockville would be achievable utilizing Seattle's system and modifying it accordingly. The largest challenge will be creating a fund with taxpayers funds to pay for this type of program. If the City chose to implement such a program, establishing the rules and determining the funding amount would be the first steps and then presenting the idea and the funding plan to a vote of the people.

PLAN FOR THE FUTURE

- **Background**
Election administration is always changing and progressing as new ideas are developed and tested. The Federal government provides various grants to States to develop new ways of voting and areas of making voting easier.
- **Options**
Rockville should always be on the lookout for any opportunities to partner with the State or County on new ideas and initiatives. With Rockville's current election cycle every four years, there becomes ample time to model new initiatives off of similar initiatives implemented by other jurisdictions.

RUNOFF ELECTIONS

- **Background**
Runoff elections take place when no candidate receives at least 50% plus 1 of the votes cast. The example would be if three candidates were running for the Southwest Council District and none of the candidates received 50% plus 1 of the votes cast, then the top two candidates would advance to the runoff election, which is generally 30-45 days following the election.
- **Options**
Utilizing a runoff election process in Rockville would only be applicable for the office of Mayor since there are no City districts and the Council is all elected at-large. Should the City wish to implement this type of election, then six Council districts would need to be established with near equal populations.

ELECTION DAY CHILDCARE

- **Background**
There are a number of nonprofits that provide Election Day childcare for voters. During the 2024 General Election, there were services offered in Baltimore where voters could sign up to request childcare while they went to vote.
- **Options**
Rockville utilizes a vote by mail process where ballots are mailed to all registered voters at least 25 days before Election Day. Rockville also provides paid postage to mail the cast ballot back as well as various ballot drop box locations across the City. Investing City resources in this type of service may not be in the best interests of Rockville.

GENERAL COMMENTS

ELECTION PROCESS

- Drop Boxes
- Law Enforcement cooperation
- Election Day voting locations
- Canvas
- Use ballot tracking
- Make voting easier
- Website update
- Utilize State and County resources
- SOPs
- Use more technology
- Implement Ranked Choice Voting
- Love mail in voting
- Names alphabetical on ballot
- Collaborate with USPS
- Ballots more ADA accessible
- Protect election workers
- Public advertising
- Ballot security

ELECTION LAWS

- Election code definitions
- General municipal infractions vs election infractions
- Election Districts needed
- Count ballots received after Election Day
- Need to be simple and easily understood
- No changes during election season
- Complete an entire re-write of the code
- Better layout of code

STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

- Enforcement Authority
- Who has final say

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- More involvement needed
- More education on voting

BSE

- Number of members
- Appointment
- Qualifications
- Staff needed at meetings
- Need more authority
- Should be more independent
- Authority should be limited
- Stipend
- Create clear responsibilities
- Enforcement authority

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

- Needs overhaul
- Define what a campaign activity is
- Reporting deadlines
- Outside campaign funds
- Independent expenditures
- Require more disclaimers
- Define what a PAC is
- Lower campaign contribution amounts
- How to find outside expenditures
- Force reporting by independent groups
- More transparency
- Registration of independent groups
- Violations need 48-hour turnaround
- Violations simple like a speeding ticket
- More regulation needed
- Less regulation needed
- Mirror State campaign laws
- Public financing of campaigns

BALLOT QUESTIONS

- Support all questions
- Oppose all questions
- Waste of time to vote on if nothing done
- Add more ideas to the ballot

FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

ELECTION LAWS

- Overall, it is clear Section 8 needs to be updated. Numerous sections have been identified in needing both small updates to complete rewrites. The intermingling of election administration and campaign finance sections needs to be separated into a Section 8 Election Administration and Section 8A Campaign Finance. This separation will allow better interpretation of the laws and allow candidates to better understand what the rules are without having to hire an attorney to decipher the language.

ELECTION PROCESS & PROCEDURES

- Minor modifications to the existing policies and procedures should always be done before each election season as there are always administrations that can improve. Establishing an Election Handbook adding additional policies in categories of Pre-Election, Election Day, and Post-Election would be helpful to clarify additional election administration activities to keep staff, BSE, candidates, and the public aware of various policies. The website is a resource that should contain simple navigation of election concerns, simple explanations categorized for candidates and voters will alleviate confusion. There will never be a perfect election, and there will always be minor issues that need to be resolved leading up to Election Day. The goal of election officials is to plan and prepare for all scenarios and be ready to quickly remedy these situations. Election Code changes should not be made in the twelve months leading up to an election. Additional policies, with clear direction will assist all with understanding the overall policies and procedures.

CAMPAIGN FINANCE

- The Code has not kept up with the times in the world of campaign finance. The first step is to separate campaign finance into its own Section of Code. Campaign committee types need to be defined, contribution limits created, filing requirements established, increase number of campaign reports, use real world examples in completing campaign finance forms, create independent expenditure rules, and enforcement procedures detailed with complaint forms, investigative authorities, and prosecution guidelines.

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS OF ELECTIONS

- The BSE should continue their responsibilities to set policy, create forms, and the overall administration of elections. New responsibilities would include hiring a legal counsel and election staff; have clear guidance in the Code to review, approve, deny, and penalize all campaign committees; enforcement of fines and penalties should be at the Board's discretion with their legal counsel; and be allowed to hear appeals from campaign committees and make rulings on all violations. Other options would be the BSE would continue to set policy and be limited in administration. The BSE has great responsibility currently in the Charter and Code. In order to move the BSE into more of a policy board versus an administrative board, numerous changes are needed to be made. The BSE should be involved during election policy decisions and readily available during the election season but limited in duties and responsibilities in the non-election season. The City Clerk's office will need to take on the additional administrative duties. And a final option of the BSE would be limited to creating forms per the Code and certifying the election results. The City Clerk would have added duties of campaign finance, complete election administration, ballot counting, public announcements, approving petitions, etc. Campaign violations would be filed directly with the City Attorney and fines and penalties would be issued per the City Attorney.

BALLOT MEASURES 2023

- Implementing allowing 16- and 17-year-olds to vote could be implemented for the 2027 election. There was considerable public support for the idea of increasing opportunities to vote to those age groups. Before final approval would be made, verification with the County and the State that this new initiative would not cause any issues with the current partnership that has been in use for years.

NEXT STEPS

COMPLETE REWRITE OF ALL ELECTION REGULATIONS

- Section 8 of the City Code and Article III of the City Charter need a complete top to bottom rewrite to implement new election procedures and campaign finance procedures.
- Steps to Implement
 - a. Create a Committee consisting of at least the City Clerk, BSE member, and an election law attorney
 - b. Set a timeline to complete Sections
 - i. September – Mayor and Council create and appoint members to the Committee
 - ii. October – Committee works on only election procedures
 - iii. November – Committee presents draft changes to Mayor and Council
 - iv. December – Committee works on only campaign finance procedures
 - v. January – Committee presents draft changes to Mayor and Council
 - vi. February – Committee prepares final draft including all changes
 - vii. March – Committee presents final draft changes to Mayor and Council
 - viii. April – Committee presents final changes to Mayor and Council
 - ix. May – City Clerk begins updating all policies and procedures based off new Code
 - x. June – BSE approves all new policies and procedures
 - xi. July – Implementation begins for the November 2027 election
- An aggressive timeline is needed to begin the 2027 preparations. The Committee must adhere to the schedule to keep the process moving forward. Each new section cannot be completed until all areas have been reviewed and discussed. The current Code is intertwined with both election administration and campaign finance regulations. This will cause the need for potential changes during additional section reviews. Ideas and cross references will become clearer later in the process as actual scenarios are discussed with the final draft versions.