

City of Somerville

Board of Elections Commissioners Meeting

02:30 p.m. 20 November 2025

Meeting held in City Hall, Council Chambers

Elections Commissioners
Nick Salerno, Chair
Kelly Cooper
Austin Brower, Secretary

Absent:

Agenda:

- Discussion of Previous Meetings
- Recap of 2025 Municipal Elections, September 16, and November 4th
- Old Business
- New Business
- 2026 Municipal Annual Census

Minutes:

The meeting was called to order.

City Elections staff has been working on certifying signatures for 2026 ballot measures, last night was the deadline for submissions of petitions for certification. Next Monday is the certification deadline.

There's a broad set of statewide petitions which have been very active.

~39% turnout in November; uniformly positive feedback from community members about elections staff and poll workers.

The Commissioners shared gratitude for staff and each other's support throughout the election proceedings in November.

The incoming Mayor has initiated a transition plan, including pre-engagement with city Elections staff.

For the 4th of November election, near the end of the day, some very busy polling places began to run short on ballots. Elections moved ballots and provided hand-countable ballots where needed.

In preparation for the preliminary elections, enough ballots were ordered for 50% of enrolled voters - 60% for early, mail-in, absentee, etc. and 40% for day-of voting. The trend had been moving toward a greater amount of absentee.

In preparation for the 4th of November election day, enough ballots were ordered for 60% of enrolled voters - 40% for early, mail-in absentee, etc. and 60% for day-of voting. This shift was driven by a change in the overall trend observed during the preliminary.

Intra-day cast ballot totals were collected twice in the day. The EC discussed that the 6pm intra-day cast ballot totals were significantly higher than typical, indicating a late-day increase in voting rates. Overall, this was a difficult election to forecast turnout. Kelly Cooper and Austin Brower expressed curiosity whether the ES&S tabulators could report on intra-day totals for cast ballots in some kind of report.

There was a single polling place (Ward 6-2) that exceeded the ballots they were issued and used 22 hand-counted ballots.

The 150' rule was often discussed during this election. Elections staff pre-marked many of the polling places with spray chalk. In locations where an existing boundary exists, spray chalk was not needed. While this generally works well, there is concern that it may not be clear to Wardens and Police Officers. Kelly and Austin suggested that a printed map be provided to the Warden for each ward and precinct and Nick will work with Elections to determine the approach.

Kelly recounted concerns about "vote for N" sections of the ballots (in September and November) leading to some voters being confused about what they're required to complete in a ballot section. Nick will research whether we can make changes based on any state code or regulation.

Identification of write-ins was raised as a long-standing challenge for poll workers to appropriately identify and segregate for hand-counting at close of polls. This can lead to extended time for hand-counting. Austin discussed what he had seen in other regions, but the Commonwealth may prescribe the process. Nick will engage with ES&S and Commonwealth staff to determine whether other options exist.

Currently, poll workers are not regularly surveyed about their experiences on election day. Kelly suggested that the Elections department evaluate whether a feedback form or survey can be administered, because long-term engagement from poll workers could lead to higher retention rate. Generally, Wardens and Clerks develop a lot of local knowledge and it would long term benefit Elections that their knowledge is shared and appreciated.

Nick shared that long-term engagement between Elections, School Department, and Department of Public Works has been beneficial to the orderly elections process overall. There are ebbs and flows as polling places move and staff changes.

Current state of day-of training and operational manuals is excellent, with continuing improvement. This year the EC received very positive response on checklists and the manual.

Early voting dates and times are shared on the website, social media, and publicly posted in City Hall, across the City, and in newspapers. Generally, early voting has not been growing as mail in voting has increased. Elections has continued to adapt and will continue to as voting trends change.

Voting location updates: Cummings School. DPW did a fantastic job renovating the new polling location which was formerly a cafeteria. The site was well signed (redirecting voters), had good outbound communications including a robo-call, and generally we received good feedback. There were three concerns: the parking lot just outside the polling place is not well lit (this was identified late and will be evaluated for future work), the doors may not be fully ADA compliant due to lack of automatic opener, and the site may need shades or curtains.

Overall, the procedural change that could come of these concerns is a revisit of Elections site checklist to ensure it includes details around outdoor lighting and time-of-day evaluations. ADA evaluations should always be top-of-list.

Austin and Kelly suggested that training or manual include City standardized language around gender identity and self identification, particularly since election workers are often turning over or newly hired.

Training items:

Re-training wardens and clerks on public relations around elections operations, including how to handle questions from press.

Upcoming primary election is September 1st, 2026 with Election Day falling on November 10th, 2026.

Regarding the 2026 Municipal Annual Census, the printer has been engaged and anticipate in the first half of January issuance of about 45K for the first round of Census.

New Business

Communications Plan, both day of and in advance, and it's co-development with the Communications Department.

Community Engagement planning, particularly driving voter turnout up and engaging prospective voters early.

Motion made by Austin Brower to adjourn.

Seconded by Kelly Cooper

The motion passed unanimously.

Meeting ended at 04:16 p.m.

Submitted by Austin Brower