

**Clean and Open Elections Task Force  
First Meeting  
November 14, 2017**

*In attendance:*

**Members:** Joe Beckmann, Nate Clauser, Vishal Doshi, Ariel Horowitz, Josh Rosmarin, Sara Oaklander, Nick Salerno

**Staff:** Annie Connor, Andrew Levine

*Not in attendance:*

Alderman Maryann Heuston

***I. Start Ups***

**Task Force's Charge - Annie**

- Annie is the Legislative Liaison for the Mayor – along with Eric Weisman, she has staffed the launch of this Task Force. Eric intends to come to these meetings too.  
Impetus behind task force
- Not a commentary on elections department!
- More of an interest the Mayor has always had on national and local level
- Municipal level a good test lab for different ideas.
- Want to know how to increase the vote
- Find ways to decrease barriers for those running for office

**Introductions**

**Sara Oaklander** spoke to the role of chair, which for her is about facilitation of a process, not driving the content or work of the group. She will rely on the group taking shared responsibility for the task force's success. As facilitator, will work to facilitate a useful, productive process

**Andrew Levine** is staffing the task force, including recording and transcribing key notes from meetings.

Task Force members introduced themselves by name and profession. Brief bios of the members were shared when the membership was announced.

***II. Setting the Context: Introduction to Elections in Somerville – Nick***

4 Commissioners (only one full time)

**Voting Locations**

- 7 wards, each has 3 precincts – at one time there were 46, now 21 (4.2 square miles)

- Have consolidated a few precincts around the city – would like to do more but would probably get a lot of pushback
- Voting in fire stations isn't preferable – would like to get out of them – Down to only two now
- Every time a polling location is changed it's at the will of the board of aldermen
- Could add a precinct, but would be very difficult to add a ward
- Range of voters in each precinct – 3,500 – 4,500 voters
- 51,300 voters
- Would like more consolidation going forward – other than parking, could put all 21 precincts into the gymnasium at the high school

#### **Early voting** – pressure to have multiple locations but only did one

- Early voting in aldermen chambers was easy – never a problem with parking
- Borrowed state computers – voter registration information system – instant access to voter file
- 32% in Somerville early voted this year; 80% turnout
- No support from legislature – very difficult for the election commission

#### **Census and Registration**

- Very significant role
- If people don't answer city census, can be placed on inactive voters list (Yellow List – not done if person votes or signs a petition during the year)
- Follow up with a postcard to everyone who hasn't responded to census – get about a 60% response now for census at best
- Somerville a transient community – hard to get everyone
- All these inactive voters tie up the lines
- Census – City charter, and state law that they have to do it
- What percentage of population is eligible to vote? What percentage of that is registered? We don't know people who don't fill out census and don't register to vote
- Could be non-citizens or maybe felons
- Still may have responded to census though

#### **Election Stats/Voting Results**

- Had results 14 minutes after closing.
- Electronic system that was secure and fast
- Lots of information in this presentation
- How many people show up to vote but aren't on the rolls?
- Captain and 21 police officers go out with sealed ballots and sealed voting machine; Minimum of 6 people work at polling location; all get machine/ station ready.
- Voting machine set up; get two-way radio and cell phone that goes back to main office
- Lots of information going across – will get calls that person not in voter rolls
- Have backup information – most can get information they need

#### **More...**

- Everything around voting (with exception of who you voted for) is public record
- Lots of data here we can play with – demographics of voters and potential voters
- Voter who is yellow-listed has to fill out affidavit saying they've been here and then show ID
- If you don't vote in two presidential cycles, you're removed from the voter rolls
- Number of children a person has is not released – public safety information not shared

### ***III. What else do we want to know/learn?***

Also see Google Doc at [this link](#).

- Who are the people who turn up to vote but are not registered or otherwise unable to vote?
- What are the demographics of voters (including age) in different elections (national, state, local)
- How many additional eligible voters are there, and what are the demographics of eligible voters?
- What is the percentage of participation by precinct in federal, state, and local elections?
- What are the turnout trends over the recent years?
- How many students are eligible to vote? How many are registered? To what extent are the different schools represented?
- Post census purge – how does it work? How is it decided? Who is purged? How long before people are purged? More about the nonrespondents, “inactive” voters, yellow list voters.
- What are the early voting ratios by precinct? How predictable would this have been in municipal election had we had early voting?
- Want to know more about legislation that governs who is kicked off voter rolls and when? Who regulates/implements?
- Need to know more about laws that govern/regulate all levels of elections – municipal, state, and federal
- What governs timing and locations of polling places?
- Budget – how much do elections cost? How much did they cost in the past?
- Would like to interview new aldermen and get a sense of how election went for them

### ***IV. Logistics***

#### **Timeline**

- Generally, a task force like this would stick to a 6-8 month timeline so that the effort doesn't linger on. This would suggest May/June. It can be pushed back but would prefer not to.

#### **Meeting Regs/Transparency**

- We are not a public body; not subject to open meeting law. Still, to be consistent with Somerville's emphasis on transparency, it would be good to operate by these laws.

- The public is welcome to come to the meetings, although they would not be participants.
- The group agreed to the idea of setting up a landing page for the task force – to list meeting dates and locations, minutes, names of members (as long as members are ok with their names being listed)
- Written communications about this cannot get FOIA'd

### **Bibliography/Resources**

The group agreed to maintain content related to the task force in two ways:

- An online library with links to information/articles/other resources will be a tab on the group's landing page. Send materials to Annie for posting.
- A Google drive for the task force's use only

### **Meetings**

The group agreed to set the second Tuesday of each month 6:30-8 pm as a regular monthly meeting day and time through the first half of 2018. Longer meetings may come into play later on. The location preference is near to Davis Square so Annie will try to reserve the same room in the Tufts Admin building for future meetings.

### **Alderman Representation**

- Although Alderman Heuston was not re-elected, Annie recommended – and the group agreed – that she be invited to serve on the Task Force so that we can benefit from her wealth of knowledge about the subject.
- Annie will also seek an official representative the Board of Alderman once the new Board is seated in January

### **Decision Making**

The group agreed to seek consensus whenever possible (defined as landing in a place that may not be everyone's first choice but that everyone can support). The fallback will be a majority vote.

### ***V. Meeting Evaluation***

<p>+</p> <p><i>What worked well</i></p>	<p>▲</p> <p><i>It would be even better if...</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Good data</li> <li>▪ Room set up</li> <li>▪ Facilitation</li> <li>▪ Good questions asked</li> <li>▪ Good energy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ We knew each other better</li> <li>▪ We had gotten a better sense of our direction</li> <li>▪ We got even further information about the context and charge for the task force</li> </ul>