In-Person Absentee Voting (IPAV) in Satellite Locations in the City of Madison

Background. City of Madison issued 66,834 absentee ballots in the 2016 General Election, truly shattering all previous records. The November 2016 election saw over *twice* the number of issued and returned absentee ballots as any previous election. The number of pre-registered voters prior to Election Day was also at a record high. That these numbers occurred in the context of Wisconsin's strict photo ID law is more remarkable, but this would not have been the case without In-Person Absentee Voting (IPAV) occurring at satellite locations across the City of Madison. Of the 66,834 total absentee ballots, 51,053 (or 76%) were issued at satellite IPAV locations, with an additional 6,207 being issued at the downtown City Clerk's Office. The thirteen off-site locations included City of Madison public libraries, a municipal engineering office and locations on the UW-Madison and Edgewood College campuses.

The Clerk's Office took advantage of the strategic locations of Madison's nine public libraries, and where a library was not conveniently located, the Madison's eastside engineering department hosted absentee voting. The Clerk's Office harnessed the existing geographic landscape of municipal libraries, but also the library mission of providing access to information and encouraging community involvement. The relationship is a natural one. The same is true for hosting absentee voting at UW-Madison's Student Activity Center and at Union South. Implementing IPAV at satellite locations is not without its challenges. However, the alleviation of the intense bottle-necking at the City Clerk's Office, the convenience and accessibility for voters and the vast expansion of voter education and outreach far outweigh the challenges.

Finally, in reviewing voter turnout in the November 2016 election between Wisconsin's largest two cities, Milwaukee and Madison, an argument can be made that the robust IPAV program facilitated higher turnout in the City of Madison.

November Implementation. The roll out of IPAV satellite sites for the November 2016 election was rapid. The Clerk's Office had only a two week time period to prepare for it.

- **Volunteers.** The satellite IPAV locations relied on volunteers (special registration deputies, members of the League of Women Voters and members of the Friends of Madison Public Libraries) who were further trained and deputized on behalf of the Clerk's Office.
- **MyVote Wisconsin.** It also relied on the MyVote Wisconsin website which can verify a voter's registration and appropriate ward in order for the correct ballot to be issued. If voters were not registered or needed to update their registration, they could register and then immediately vote in-person. These IPAV volunteers had access to a dedicated phone number

in the Clerk's Office, which was answered by clerk staff immediately, so that questions can be answered and issues resolved on the spot.

- **Courier System.** IPAV concluded 30 minutes prior to the library closing for the day and a courier (either a clerk staff person or a volunteer poll worker) would pick up *all* materials – registration forms, absentee ballots – and secure them in tamper-evident bags and deliver them to the City Clerk's Office.

Challenges and Changes.

- **Volunteers → Hiring Staff.** Building on the experience from November election, the Clerk's Office hired chief inspectors for the 2017 spring elections to be trained on WisVote, the official registration system. Staffing 12 satellite locations cost $16,000. This change produced tremendous benefit, in that chief inspectors know exactly what is required for an absentee ballot to be processed and counted at the polls.
- **MyVote Wisconsin → WisVote.** MyVote is a public-facing website and while it will display the information needed to carry out IPAV, its searching capability is not robust and a data entry error could result in the staffer not being able to locate valuable information. Having chief inspectors trained in voter registration and absentee ballot functions of WisVote allowed for more accurate on-site processing. The voter's record in WisVote was immediately updated upon a voter voting an IPAV ballot at a satellite location.

Conducting IPAV at satellite locations is a large undertaking. The courier system must occur every evening for every satellite location in order to securely store election materials. All ballot styles are ideally available at all locations, so that if a person votes at the library near his or her place of work, daycare center or home, the appropriate ballot is available. Accessible voting devices, such as the AutoMARK or ExpressVote, should also be available at these locations. The Clerk's Office staff must be immediately available for questions by phone. But this voter activity, which is now spread out geographically, is alleviating the occurrence of acute bottle-necking from thousands of people coming to a single location of in-person absentee voting located in a downtown office building as well as voter lines at the polls on Election Day.

Benefits and Stories.
Libraries are open in the evenings and on the weekends. They have Wi-Fi to facilitate electronic proof of residence documents (for the purposes of registering) and to operate WisVote on certified laptops. Libraries are accessible buildings, and because they are usually places of convenience, if a voter did not have accessible photo ID or a proof of residence document, they can more easily return to the library to complete the IPAV process than a single downtown location. In-person voter education and outreach was readily available to residents all across the city for the weeks prior to the election. Many comments from the staff at libraries repeatedly stressed this aspect of voter education.

Feedback from library staff and chief inspectors has been overwhelmingly positive. Stories from the frontlines include assisting the blind, hard of hearing and persons with other disabilities in the voting process.

> *Most voters told me they were so happy we were offering [IPAV], especially because getting out to the polling location was hard to access and the lines were long.*

> *We had so many elderly come in because it was easier parking and getting into our location than it was at their polling location.*

> *A man last voted in 1983 was able to vote again. He had difficulty writing and had low vision which made filling out the voter registration and ballot itself a challenge. He was extremely happy and excited to be able to participate once again in an election.*

> *Many times we became the one stop shop – someone would register, vote and get a library card. Other times someone would vote and checkout materials or pick up a hold. So many variations occurred through the 6 week process.*

> *We were even able to help even non-Madison residents by telling them where they could vote and the hours available.*

UW-Madison IPAV. Hosting two satellite IPAV sites on the UW-Madison campus was beneficial in an additional manner. Because the UW-Madison student ID does not meet the requirements of photo ID for purposes of voting, the university will issue a separate compliant card (with the student signature and expiration date two years from issuance) upon student request. While 989 voting compliant ID cards were issued on November 8, Election Day, an additional 6,356 compliant IDs had been issued during the period of IPAV. Having two campus satellite IPAV sites – Student Activity Center and Union South, which combined issued 9,023 IPAV ballots – contributed to the voter education specific to students: the requirement of compliant photo IDs and how to obtain one.

IPAV and Increased Voter Turnout. While this memo cannot assert an exact causal relationship between satellite IPAV sites and turnout, there is evidence that IPAV supports a higher overall turnout. This is clear when reviewing Madison and Milwaukee's voter turnout in the 2012 and 2016 November elections.[1] In the 2012 presidential election, the Cities of Madison and Milwaukee had a turnout of 78% and 66%, respectively. This was with no photo ID laws in effect. Conversely, in the 2016 presidential election, now with photo ID requirements fully enforced, Madison saw a slight depression in turnout at 75%, while Milwaukee's turnout dropped ten percentage points to 56.4%. There could be a variety of reasons for this difference in turnout, but the widespread use of satellite IPAV sites by Madison is very likely one of them.

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[1] Using WEC voter turnout statistics: http://elections.wi.gov/elections-voting/statistics