

**Election Commission
Meeting Minutes
May 18, 2015**

Present: Jan Huffman, Nancy Levine, Marjorie Butler, John McDermott - Chair

Also Present: Ward 1 Alderman Alison Leary; Ward 8 Aldermen Rick Lipof and Cheryl Lappin;
City Clerk David Olson & Assistant City Clerk Eneida Tavares

To Approve the Minutes of the April 27, 2015 meeting.

The minutes from the April 27, 2015 meeting were reviewed. The list of those present at the meeting was amended to remove Marjorie Butler as having been present and a motion to approve the minutes as amended was made and seconded. The minutes were approved unanimously.

To Discuss and Approve Changes of Polling Locations at the Following Locations:

- Ward 8, Precinct 2: Memorial Spaulding School
- Ward 8, Precinct 3: Countryside School
- Ward 6, Precinct 1: Bowen School
- Ward 1, Precinct 2: Fire Station #1

Clerk Olson introduced Assistant Clerk Eneida Tavares who presented the research that was undertaken in determining the effectiveness of each polling location. The results of the research were used to determine if a polling location should be considered to be moved. She went over the criteria that were used for rating the effectiveness of our current polling locations. Each polling location was evaluated on Handicap Accessibility, Parking, Visibility, Walking Distance, Bathroom Access, Function of Space, Security, Public Safety, HVAC, and Exclusive Use. A copy of her presentation is attached to this report.

Eneida explained that the five lowest rated locations were the Bowen School, the Memorial Spaulding School, Fire Station #1, Church of the Redeemer and the Peirce School. At this meeting the discussions would be focused on the Bowen School, Memorial Spaulding, Countryside School and Fire Station #1.

Asst. Clerk Tavares began with the Bowen School. The area has only enough parking for the poll workers. Also of issue is that the polling location has been moved out of the gym and into the Teachers' Lounge in response to security concerns from the school. The Teachers' Lounge is small and made even smaller by the fact that the furniture normally in the space is not removed from the room on Election Day. It is pushed to the perimeter making it a very tight space with only one way in and one way out. She provided a list of other locations that were looked at in considering a move. The locations included the Andover-Newton Theological School, the MacKenzie Center, Brown Middle School, Oak Hill Middle School, the Lutheran

Church in Newton Center, the Baptist Church in Newton Center, and Newton South High School. Of all of these locations, the best option was Newton South High School.

Asst. Clerk Tavares then moved on to the Memorial Spaulding School. She went over the difficulties with the space currently in use at Memorial Spaulding. It is a very narrow room with only one way in and one way out. The room gets extremely hot. She presented a list of other locations that were considered including Temple Beth Avodah which is across the street, Story Heights Church, Newton South High School, Mt. Ida College, Brown Middle School and the Oak Hill Middle School.

Asst. Clerk Tavares then presented information on the Countryside School. Although this location is not one of the five lowest rated locations, it is being included here as the Parent Teacher Organization has met with the Election Commission and requested that the polls be moved out or Countryside for student safety concerns. Asst. Clerk Tavares stated that although the polling location is contained, there is a door at the end of the hallway outside the room that provides access to the hallways of the school. This is why consideration of moving is being given to this otherwise good location. The other locations looked at include the Andover Newton Theological School, Newton South High School, NewTV, and Mt. Ida College.

The proposed solution to all three of these problem locations is to consolidate the polling locations into the Newton South High School gym. Asst. Clerk Tavares showed the location of the parking lot that was just outside the entrance to Gym B which could be used as a polling location for all three of the previously mentioned locations: Bowen School, Memorial Spaulding School and the Countryside School. The three locations are in adjacent precincts and are about the same distance from the High School. Gym B, the smaller of the two gyms at Newton South, is large enough to accommodate all three polling locations. Additional parking is also available in a smaller parking lot to the rear of the gym.

Finally, Asst. Clerk Tavares presented the polling location at Fire Station #1. The issues here are parking, safety and space. The parking lot attached to the fire station is very small and filled with staff from the fire station. The space that is used for voting within the Fire Station does not work very well as it is in the fire truck bays along with the fire trucks. If there is an emergency, there could be problems. The other locations considered to replace the fire station were Whole Foods, the Lincoln Eliot School, the Pellegrini Playground Field House, the YMCA (which would have been an ideal location, but they do not want voting there at this time), the Evangelical Baptist Church, the Eliot Church, the Sons of Italy (the issue here is that it serves alcohol), and Grace Episcopal Church. Grace Episcopal Church is more than willing to accommodate a polling location and is the proposed solution.

The Grace Episcopal Church is only .35 miles away from the current location and is within easy walking distance of the fire station. Asst. Clerk Tavares showed images of the entrance, the parking lot and handicap parking, and the space that would be used for voting.

Asst. Clerk Tavares asked if there were any questions.

Commissioner Levine asked if the Grace Episcopal Church was handicap accessible. Asst. Clerk Tavares said that it was and that there were bathroom and storage facilities right there attached to the room. Commissioner Levine asked if there would need to be booth lights for the voting booths. Eneida noted that the room was a little dark.

Ald. Leary noted that parking would be a little tight at this location, but it was an improvement over the Fire Station. She would rather it be at the Grace Church. She stated that when school is in session, parking on Eldridge Street is nonexistent. She noted that there is parking on Richardson Street and in the Richardson lot.

Ald. Leary asked why Newton does not close schools on Election Day like many other communities do, especially if you are having polling places in the schools. Clerk Olson responded that the option has not been pushed hard because there has been some communication from the School Department that they were not interested in doing that. If there was enough support for trying to push the School Department and the School Committee to close schools on Election Day, that is definitely an option. Ald. Leary noted that she would like to see some data about the benefits of closing schools on Election Day and why other communities are doing it, and have a discussion about it.

Ald. Lipof asked if we are trying to move out of schools, why are we moving locations into Newton South. Asst. Clerk Tavares stated that Newton South is a High School so there are no young children there and the Gym is contained. Ald. Lipof thought the location was great.

Ald. Lappin stated that the only problem about moving it out of the elementary schools is that a lot of people vote, who would not normally vote, when they come to pick up their kids. Ald. Lappin questioned why Memorial Spaulding was being considered for a move, because it seemed to have good numbers in the chart that was presented. Asst. Clerk Tavares noted that the overall function of the space was not great. Commissioner Levine also noted that they had visited the location at the last election and the poll workers were beside themselves with the place. It was very hot in September and freezing in November. A barrier had been put up to try to keep some of the cold air from coming in. The door is right off the parking lot and with the open and closing of the door, it was drawing fumes in. Because there is only one entrance door, people were trying to go in and out the same door. It is just a completely dysfunctional room.

Ald. Lappin noted that in trying to get out of the elementary schools it is logical that the locations be moved to Newton South. She asked how people would be notified of the change of location. Clerk Olson stated that the same procedure that was used when the Cabot and Zervas School locations were moved would be used here. A bright colorful postcard will be made up and be mailed directly to the voters in the effected precincts to let them know that the change has occurred. On Election Day, large A-frame signs will be placed at the old polling locations that will include a reminder that the location has changed as well as a map on how to get to the new location. The Clerk's Office will also be working with the NewtonTAB to get an

announcement of the change in the newspaper. Ald. Lappin also asked that something be put on the City website and that the polling place look-up on the website be updated with the new locations. Clerk Olson noted that the Secretary of the Commonwealth's election website also has a look-up feature and the locations will be updated there as well. He noted that at the last meeting of the Election Commission, Commissioner Huffman had made the suggestion that each polling location at Newton South be not only identified by the Ward and Precinct, but also by the name of the school that it was formerly at. This will help those that may not remember their ward and precinct number, but do remember that they voted at a particular school.

Ald. Lappin asked about the parking lots at Newton South. She wondered if the lots were student lots and if the students were paying for those spaces. Clerk Olson noted that Chief of Operations at the Schools, Mike Cronin, felt that there were plenty of spaces and that students would just move around the site. Clerk Olson did not know if the students were paying for spaces. She was concerned that if students were paying for their spaces, would they need to be reimbursed for the day.

A poll worker from the Hyde Community Center noted that there were two polling locations at the Hyde Center and it was astonishing how difficult it was to get people to get in the correct line. She suggested that there be enough guidelines, barriers, and color-coding to help people get in the correct line. She suggested the postcards be color coded to match the lines to help people find the correct line. Ald. Butler suggested that an extra person could also be stationed at the door to greet and assist people.

Ald. Leary asked if prior years' polling location changes had gone smoothly. Clerk Olson noted that there were no complaints filed when the locations at Cabot and Zervas schools were moved. They went very smoothly. Ald. Leary asked if these changes would be in effect for the September preliminary election. Clerk Olson stated that they would.

Clerk Olson reminded the Commissioners that the Election Commission would make a recommendation to change the polling locations, but it will be the Board of Aldermen that will have the final decision.

Commissioner Butler asked that the parking situation be confirmed at Newton South. Asst. Clerk Tavares said she would look into it and talk with Mike Cronin. It was also asked what would be happening with the programs that are in the gym that day. Asst. Clerk Tavares noted that the good thing about Newton South is that it also has the Field House which could be used.

Ald. Leary wanted to make sure that there were no issues with parking around Grace Church. Specifically, the parking during the day on Eldridge Street. She suggested guiding people to the Richardson Street Lot which is a long block away. She was worried about traffic jams.

Ald. Lappin suggested sending announcements of the location changes to the PTO's at the schools and to the Aldermen so that they can send to their neighborhood lists.

Clerk Olson asked Ald. Leary if she had any ideas for other locations for a polling location in the area of the Fire Station. She suggested looking at the stone church on the corner of Centre and Richardson Streets as a possibility.

Commissioner Levine asked that the Board of Aldermen put some pressure on those non-profits that have said no to being a polling location, or want to charge for the use of space, that they should provide the space as a PILOT payment.

Closing the schools on Election Days, or scheduling Teacher In-Service days on Election Days, was discussed again as a possibility for the schools. The question was raised as to whether the schools were closed, or had in-service days, for all elections, including special elections, or if we just seek to close schools on presidential election days. Would we close only those schools that we use as polling locations, or all schools?

Ald Lappin was glad to hear that the Commissioners were trying to find the least worst solution.

Commissioner Levine asked if there were any contested races to date for the fall election. Clerk Olson stated that he did not know definitively, but noted that there were six individuals who have pulled papers for Alderman-at-Large in Ward 2. If they all return their papers, then there will be a city-wide preliminary election in September. They have until July 30 to return their papers.

Clerk Olson asked the Commissioners if they were ready to vote to make a recommendation to the Board of Aldermen about the four locations.

Commissioner Levine asked if the Korean Church was a possibility. Clerk Olson stated that it may be a possibility, but there are some issues with site including that it shares its parking lot with the Funeral Home next door. If there were a funeral on Election Day, there may be some issues. Asst. Clerk Tavares felt that the parking would be better at Grace Episcopal Church.

Ald. Levine moved that the Commission recommend to the Board of Aldermen that the polling locations discussed tonight be moved as discussed. The motion was seconded and approved unanimously.

Clerk Olson stated that he would docket the recommendation with the Board and get it scheduled with the Board's Programs & Services Committee meeting. He will let the Commissioners know when it is scheduled so that they can attend if they would like.

The next meeting will be after the September Preliminary to certify the election if one is held. He will let the Commissioners know if a meeting will be needed in September.

A motion to adjourn was made, seconded and Approved by the Commissioners.

Submitted by: John McDermott, Chair