

Tompkins County Board of Elections

2011 Annual Report

INTRODUCTION

2011 was a “local” year; that is we had over 50 positions up for election throughout the county. That meant about 100 candidates plus their campaign managers, treasurers, and supporters calling us and stopping by for advice on petitions, campaign finance or election rules and regulations. It also meant a lot of work for our techs in programming rather complicated ballots.

One thing that became very obvious in 2011 is that our staff is getting better and better at using in-house resources to save time and money. We now produce almost all signage for the poll sites. We can print (and laminate, if needed) large signs, posters and sample ballots. We can also design and print our own absentee and affidavit ballots.

POLL SITE CHANGES

Voter privacy has been a big concern ever since we switched to the optical scan machines. In the early part of 2011 we re-examined all poll site layouts and changed set ups and procedures as needed to help ensure that all voters would feel that their ballot was private and secure. Our changes seem to have worked, as there were hardly any concerns expressed by voters last year.

As part of the above initiative, we found a few poll sites just weren't big enough to accommodate all the poll booths and the voting machines while ensuring privacy. Therefore we had to change six sites. This meant finding new appropriate spaces, certifying the site for HAVA compliance and arranging for any needed changes, measuring the site and producing set up drawings, and getting all the contracts signed.

In the City of Ithaca we moved Ward 1, Districts 1 & 2 from Chemung Canal Bank to Lehman Alternative Community School. We also moved Ward 2, Districts 1 & 3 back to GIAC. (It had been temporarily at Lifelong while GIAC was closed for repairs.)

In Danby we went from the Town Hall to the Danby Fire Station.

In Enfield we went from the Elementary School to the Volunteer Fire Department.

In Lansing we went from the Crash Fire and Rescue building to the Ithaca Reform Temple.

And in Ulysses we went from the Jacksonville Methodist Church to the West Hill Community Church.

The transition to the new sites went well. We worked very hard to publicize the moves through our web site, press releases and mailings, so that voters would know their site had changed. We also placed signs at the old sites to direct voters who went there.

ELECTIONS

On March 15 we ran Village Elections in Cayuga Heights, Dryden, and Groton and Trumansburg. On April 26 we ran the Village of Lansing election. In May we provided machines and support for the Ithaca City School District election (see below).

Throughout the year we also provided support (voter lists, poll books, etc.) to many other school and fire districts.

On September 13 there was a Primary election for the Democratic candidates for City of Ithaca Mayor and Ward 1 Alderperson. Republicans in Enfield voted for their Town Supervisor candidate, and Ulysses voted for Town justice.

The Mayoral race in Ithaca generated a lot of activity, including complicated petition hearings which required a lot of work and research. One was for a non-citizen whose petitions for mayor were successfully challenged. Three Democrats contested the primary, and five candidates were on the ballot in November.

The General Election was held November 8. 16,753 people voted, for a turn out rate of 34.13%.

ITHACA CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

We entered into an agreement that saves Ithaca City School District a tremendous amount of money and resources for their elections. We programmed and provided our optical scan voting machines and support material for their election on May 17. They have indicated that they will contract with us for all their future elections. This is also a source of revenue for us.

School districts are being allowed to use the old lever style machines through the end of 2012. It's possible other school districts may ask us to provide optical scan machines and support in coming years.

ELECTION NIGHT RESULTS

We worked with the Sheriff and other local police departments to receive our results in a timely manner on election night. Without their assistance, results would not have been recorded for several hours after the polls closed. As it worked out, we had completely accurate results online in less than an hour and a half after the polls closed.

SECURITY BAGS

New heavy duty reusable security bags were purchased for poll workers to put their election related material into. The bags are used to transport information back to the BOE while maintaining a secure chain of custody.

IMPROVED MATERIALS FOR INSPECTORS

We improved or produced a number of items to help poll site workers. We developed illustrated color check lists for opening and closing the poll site. The workers found these aids very useful, and it meant less problems and calls to the office. We also redesigned our training manuals and presentations.

TEST DECK VIDEO

We produced a very simple in-house video to train the workers who help us run test decks for each election. (Test decking involves running a stack of pre-voted ballots through a voting machine to ensure that it is programmed correctly.)

IMPROVED VOTER EXPORTS

Our Senior Clerk Laura Norman developed an Access program making it easy to manipulate exports of our voter data base. This enhanced version allows us to bring in more revenue and makes it easier for people to work with our data.

TRAINING

Our office worked with a consultant to utilize Smart Training initiatives to assist us in machine preparation, training and daily tasks. The lessons we learned are being applied in many ways to streamline processes and save time and money.

Everyone in the office also took Level Two Tech training for our voting machines. Our theory is that even though our Techs do the majority of the voting machine work, there

are times when all of us are required to pitch in and help, so the more people that understand the machines, the better.

WEB SITE

Our web site continues to be a major help in carrying out our mission. We are one of the most visited sites on the County server, with over 5,800 visitors and 282,000 hits in 2011. We often receive compliments for the information we provide and the ease of use.

Last year we completed a project to add interactive Google Maps to each Poll Site's web page. Voters can also follow a link to allow them to get directions from their house to each site.

FACEBOOK

In 2010 we created a Facebook Fan page for the Board. We're still slowly building up a following. It's one of those things where the more people that use it, the more useful it can be. We'll keep working on it, and thinking about any other social media that might help us interact with and inform voters.

LOOKING AHEAD

2012 will be a big year for us. We get a huge jump in registrations, absentee applications, and voter activity in Presidential years. It also means about 500 overseas Federal voters will be getting ballots for a number of elections.

Village elections for Cayuga Heights, Dryden, Groton and Trumansburg will be March 20. New York State will have its Presidential Primary on April 24 (the same day as the Lansing Village Election). We will run the Ithaca City School Board Election on May 15.

The State has been involved in a court case for non-compliance with the MOVE Act, and since our State Legislators couldn't agree on a date, a judge has set the Primary for Federal offices for June 26.

As of this writing, there is some uncertainty about the date for the Primary for other offices. Unless the State Legislature acts, we are scheduled to have another Primary on Sept 11 for State and local offices. This would have a significant negative impact on our budget (and the budgets of BOE's across the State) as we expected to have just one other Primary besides the Presidential Primary.

The General Election will be November 6.

All in all it will be a very busy and at times stressful year, but we have a well-seasoned staff, and are confident we can meet all our challenges and ensure all voters in Tompkins County have a good experience at the polls, and all votes are counted in an accurate and timely manner.

2011 BY THE NUMBERS

Voter Database:

Active Voters	48,022
Inactive Voters	10,381
New Registrations Processed	3,027
In County Address Changes	3,483
Enrollment Changes	596
Name Changes	529
Registrations Cancelled	1,737

Inspectors:

Inspectors Appointed & Trained	367
Classes Held	18

Mailcheck:

(Used to verify voter's residence and mailing address, notify them of election dates and their polling site, and recruit inspectors.)

Mailed out	44,847
Returned	3,404

Absentee Ballots Out:

Sept. Primary	167
Nov. General	1,099

Petitions Received:

Designating	22
Independent	19