

Tompkins County Board of Elections

2012 Annual Report

INTRODUCTION

Past experience has shown Presidential Election years to be extremely busy ones for our office. Earlier in the year we were a little concerned that we weren't seeing the normal rise in registrations and absentee requests we expect in Presidential years. We figured either voters weren't as interested this year, or else they were waiting until closer to the election.

Turned out they were just waiting. The two months before the election saw the expected surge, which kept the staff extremely busy processing all the paperwork and requests.

2012 also had more elections than usual, with three separate Primaries: Presidential, Federal and State/local. Add in Village Elections, School Board Elections, NCOA and Mailcheck processing, redistricting, and oh yes, the General Election, and it made for a very full year, indeed.

Anticipating the extra demands on staff time, we temporarily increased the work hours of our two Senior Techs, who are normally part time employees. This allowed them to assist the office staff with administrative functions, such as voter registration and absentee requests, once their technical work was done. This proved to be a very successful plan, saving us from paying for a lot of overtime wages, as well as lowering the staff's stress level (at least by a little!) A lot of the work we do is so specialized, it's hard to bring in temp office workers, so having the use of the techs, who already know a lot about our procedures, was a boon.

ELECTIONS

On March 20 we ran Village Elections in Cayuga Heights, Dryden, and Groton and Trumansburg. On April 24 we had the Presidential Primary and the Village of Lansing election. In May we provided machines and support for the Ithaca City School District election. Throughout the year we also provided support (voter lists, poll books, etc.) to many other school and fire districts.

June 26 we had a Federal Primary for Republican US Senator and Democratic Representative for the 23rd Congressional district. State and local Primaries were September 13. (In the past these two Primaries were held on the same date, but the NY

State Legislature failed to reach agreement on a date that could have combined these two Primaries while meeting the new Federal requirements. It thus cost us many thousands of dollars to run the extra election.)

Finally, on November 6, we had the General Election. Presidential years always have a large turnout, and 2012 was no exception, with 39,913 voters, for a turn out rate of 76%. (That wasn't quite as high as 2008, which had 42,493 voters and a 78% turnout, but certainly much better than the 2011 General Election, which had 16,753 voters, for a turn out rate of 34%.)

Despite the increased demands of all these elections, we came in under budget on voting machine technician hours because of new programs written in house to save time and increase efficiency.

REDISTRICTING

We provided assistance with Redistricting throughout the year, working with City and County committees. Some of the Statewide changes went into effect in 2012. (The whole county is now in Congressional District 23, and State Senate District 53 is now 58.) Whenever districts change, we have a lot of database work to do to implement the changes.

In 2013 other redistricting changes will come into play. Our County Legislature will go from 15 districts to 14, and the City Ward lines have been redrawn. We will thus have to modify election districts accordingly.

In 2012, working with Groton Town officials, we reduced the election districts there from 5 to 4. This allowed us to even out the districts and reconfigure poll sites to offer more privacy to voters.

HURRICANE SANDY

While Tompkins County was spared the wrath of Hurricane Sandy, other counties were not so lucky. One result was an Executive Order by Governor Cuomo issued at 5 pm the day before the General Election that allowed displaced voters to vote affidavit in other counties. This created a lot of confusion with voters, and a lot of work for our staff as we prepared for the impact locally. A total of 515 voters from the nine affected counties cast their vote by affidavit ballot here. We then had to log, sort and send the ballots to the appropriate counties.

A Presidential Election is normally very busy for the staff, but partly because of Sandy and the Executive Order, 2012 was exceptionally so. We received around 1000 phone calls on Election Day alone.

POLL SITE MANAGER ASSISTANT

In 2012 we began a pilot program to provide tablet computers to poll workers. We purchased 10 HP Slates, and then Senior Clerk Laura Norman programmed them with customized voter look up databases; open and close check lists; voter flow charts; poll site maps; and all sorts of useful information. Since we only had 10 Slates, for the General Election Laura also programmed flash drives with much of the same information for use by any poll workers who could provide their own laptop and our IT department loaned us 9 laptops as well.

The overall effort was a great success, but we're reviewing the hardware requirements for 2013, and may eventually augment the Slates with Netbooks or a different brand of tablet computer.

MOVE ACT

There were many changes regarding the handling of Military and Federal Absentee Voters this year, as covered by the MOVE Act. (Military and Overseas Voter Empowerment Act.) An improved interface made it easier for us to administer the site, and also made it easier for these voters to download a .pdf ballot from the internet. The voters then fill it out and mail it to us. The voters can also check to see if we received their ballot. MOVE voters are now more and more choosing this method to receive their ballots, instead of a mailed ballot from us.

PERSONNEL CHANGES

One of the reasons our office was able to cope so well with the very demanding year is that most of our Staff have been with us for awhile. There are so many pieces to the election puzzle that it takes a few years to get a good understanding of the many processes. And the last few years, especially, have brought many changes to the way elections are run in New York State, requiring an even greater effort.

We had only one personnel change in 2012, and (fortunately) that happened at the end of the year. After the General Election was wrapped up we sadly bid adieu to Democratic Senior Machine Technician Catherine McGrath, who has done a stellar job for us over the last few years. We warmly welcome her replacement, Jim Gustafson.

LOOKING AHEAD

In 2013 Tompkins County voters will shift their focus from State and Federal to local elections. Over 75 offices will be contested in 2013, which means our focus shifts to providing a lot of assistance to candidates. We help them with customized voter lists, political calendars, and information about petitions, caucuses, and campaign finance laws.

Village elections for Cayuga Heights, Dryden, Groton will be March 19 (No seats are up in Trumansburg). Lansing Village is April 23. We will help run the Ithaca City School Board Election on May 21. The Unofficial date for the Primary is September 10, and the General Election will be November 5. And toss in our help with poll books and lists and such for many of the other school and fire districts throughout the year.

As mentioned previously, we will finish redistricting, which means many, many hours devoted to database changes.

We are also undertaking a mandated update of our Election Management System, (EMS), which requires a complete reinstall of its dedicated server. We'll also have to update the software on our voting machines to meet new State regulations.

The County will roll out a new, integrated website in 2013, so we will be working on converting our department's site to the new format. (For anyone interested, we're moving from a Dreamweaver based site to one that is powered by Drupal, open source software very popular for government websites.) We've always been pleased that our web site is considered an excellent example and leader in BOE sites, and are anxious to improve it any way we can.

We look forward to 2013 being another highly successful year serving the needs of Tompkins County's voters, candidates, and elected officials.

2012 BY THE NUMBERS

Voter Database:

Active Voters	51,737
Inactive Voters	6,217
New Registrations Processed	6,087
In County Address Changes	4,289
Enrollment Changes	788
Name Changes	1,026
Registrations Cancelled	6,270

Inspectors:

Inspectors Appointed & Trained	374
Classes Held	17

Mailcheck:

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

Mailed out	44,498
Returned	3,211

Absentee Ballots Out:

Presidential Primary	371
Federal Primary	834
State Primary	198
General Election	3765

Petitions Received:

Designating	12
Independent	9