

Date Presented to Council: 6/8/2020  
 Verified By: [Signature]  
 Clerk's Note: see meeting minutes for action taken

**City of Wasilla  
 Informational Memorandum No. 20-08**

**Discussion And Direction On Holding By-Mail Elections For The 2020 Election Cycle In View Of The COVID-19 Pandemic.**

Originator: Jamie Newman, City Clerk  
 Date: 5/27/2020

Agenda of: 6/8/2020

Route to:	Department Head	Signature	Date
	Chief of Police		
	Public Works Director		
	Recreational Services Director		
X	Finance Director		5-27-2020
X	Deputy Administrator		5/27/2020
X	City Clerk		5/27/2020
X	Mayor		5/27/2020

**Attachments:** By-Mail Election Information (3 pages)

**Summary Statement:** To aid in the discussion, please see the attached information on by-mail elections.

## Introduction

Under WMC Title 4 Elections, traditional precinct-based elections are conducted in the City of Wasilla with voters provided the option to vote at their designated polling place on Election Day, Early Vote at a designated Early In-Person Voting site, or by-mail through the Absentee By-Mail Voting process under WMC 4.20.020.

As we continue to grapple with COVID-19, and the predictions of a resurgence of cases in the fall, there are legitimate concerns about the impacts of traditional precinct-based voting to election workers and voters.

While the Alaska State Legislature passed a bill allowing the 2020 primary or general elections be held by-mail under AS 15.20.800, the Lieutenant Governor announced on May 15 that the Alaska Division of Elections would conduct the August primary election in the “traditional manner” (precinct-based voting).

Currently, the City and Borough of Juneau and the Matanuska-Susitna Borough have legislation pending directing by-mail elections for the 2020 election cycle due to health and safety concerns posed by COVID-19.

## Modified Absentee By-Mail Voting Summary

WMC 4.20.020 outlines the process for Absentee By-Mail voting. If the decision is made to move from a precinct-based election to a by-mail election, I propose to follow the Absentee By-Mail Voting process outlined in code, except that the application would be waived, and ballot packets would be mailed earlier than currently scheduled. An official ballot packet would be mailed to every registered voter qualified to vote in the election and returned for counting without the voter having to complete an Absentee By-Mail ballot application. Currently, the State Division of Elections (REAA elections in certain areas of the state), Municipality of Anchorage, Kenai Peninsula Borough (selected precincts only), and the Lake and Peninsula Borough have been successfully conducting by-mail elections for years.

## How Modified Absentee By-Mail Voting Would Work

A ballot packet would be mailed to all qualified registered voters approximately 21 days before Election Day. Each ballot packet would contain an official ballot, secrecy sleeve, a ballot return envelope, and instructions.

Upon receipt of the ballot packet, the voter marks the ballot, places it in the secrecy sleeve, and then places the secrecy sleeve in the ballot return envelope. The voter certificate on the back of the ballot return envelope must be signed by the voter in the presence of a witness, and the voter must provide an identifier. The fully executed ballot return envelope would then be returned for processing. There are three ways to return the ballot envelope: 1) Place it in a Secure Drop Box by 8:00 p.m. on Election Day; 2) Return it to the City Hall Vote Center by 8:00 p.m. on Election Day;

or 3) Mail it back using first-class postage through the United States Postal Service, postmarked on or before Election Day.

Voters who don't receive their ballot packet for whatever reason, would have the opportunity to visit the City Hall Vote Center to obtain and vote a replacement ballot. The Vote Center functions like an Early In-Person voting site, and will offer Questioned and Special Needs Voting. Precincts would be closed on Election Day, but the Vote Center would be open.

## Estimated By-Mail Election Cost

Currently, there are approximately 7,000 registered voters in the City of Wasilla. The total cost for one ballot packet with postage is about \$2.40. After all expenses are in, I estimate moving to a by-mail election would more than double the cost of the election.

## Voter Authentication

Consistent with WMC 4.20.020, the identity of the voter would be verified through voter registration records. For the ballot to count, the voter must sign their name under witness, and provide an identifier (voter number, date of birth, or last four digits of social security no.), and the witness must sign the witnessing affidavit.

## Reported Impacts to Precinct Based Voting Amid COVID-19

Widely reported problems with traditional precinct-based voting amid COVID-19, have been election workers backing out of working the election at the last minute, and precinct locations having to be moved because the original locations didn't want voters coming in. Closing precincts leads to crowded lines and voter confusion, and elections cannot happen without workers. Wisconsin held elections in April 2020, whereby after visiting the polls on Election Day, 67 individuals were diagnosed with COVID-19. Due to the nature of contact tracing, the Wisconsin Department of Health could not confirm if the individuals contracted the virus from the polling place or other locations. At the April 7, Anchorage Municipal Election, 19 Vote Centers were scheduled to open; however, all but one had to be closed due to election workers canceling over concerns with possible exposure to COVID-19.

## Summary

If 2020 City elections are to be conducted under the by-mail model, the Council must take action authorizing the change. At the latest, action should be taken by July 1, to give the Clerk sufficient time to ensure:

- Adequate community education and outreach
- Securing ballot printing/mailing services
- Drafting regulations

If no action is taken by the Council, precinct-based voting under Wasilla Municipal Code Title 4 Elections, will be carried out for the 2020 election cycle. Community outreach to promote Absentee By-Mail Voting will be taken to inform voters of the option. Additionally, measures to protect election workers and voters from the possible transmission of COVID-19 will be taken to the best of our ability and resources available.

If there are at least two Council Members who support moving to by-mail elections for the 2020 election cycle, please make the following motion:

**I MOVE, that the 2020 elections be conducted by-mail, and that the Clerk work with the City attorneys to draft the necessary legislation and regulations.**