



Legislation Text

File #: HCC-9-FY21, **Version:** 1

Submitted by: Laura Reams
Submitting Department: City Clerk
Agenda Section: Discussion

Item Title:

Election 2021 - Proposed Changes to City Charter & Code for an all Vote-by-Mail Election

Suggested Action:

For Discussion

Summary Background:

In November 2018, Mayor Hollingsworth and Councilmembers Ward, Suiter, and Lawrence submitted a motion proposing the City make revisions to the Election Code necessary to enable the Board of Elections Supervisors to distribute, proactively, a Vote-by-Mail ballot to all registered voters in the City of Hyattsville (on State and city-only registries) and appropriate funds necessary to support this effort in the 2021 municipal election. Council discussed the motion on November 19, 2018. Council indicated support for bringing the proposal back for further discussion after evaluation by the Board of Supervisors of Elections. The Board made a commitment to Council to research the feasibility and logistics of moving to a Vote-by-Mail system post-Election 2019.

Since that time, and with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic there has been a renewed national push for Vote-by-Mail elections. Locally, several elections have been held by mail including the State primary and the Cities of Rockville and New Carrollton. Benefits of an all Vote-by-Mail election include increased voter turnout and civic engagement.

The Board and Clerk's office have worked with the City Attorney to review and make recommended changes to the City Charter and Code for an all Vote-by-Mail election in 2021. Attached is the draft legislation and draft election calendar.

A high-level summary of the proposed changes is below. These changes will be discussed in detail on July 20.

Charter Amendment

- Proposes moving Election Day to 2nd Tuesday in May
- Proposes changes to the process by which the Council President & Vice President are Elected
- Reduce timeline for Board to certify election from 10 days to 5 days

Election Code

- Enabling Legislation - Council determines method of voting for future elections via resolution, allows future Council's flexibility
- Provides for all VBM election, includes provision for issuance of new ballot if one is lost or damaged via completion of an affidavit by the voter
- Allows for continued early voting
- Provides for Election Day polling location with Same Day Voter Registration
- Requires a minimum of 4 communications to voters

Next Steps:

Council discussion and feedback. The legislation is tentatively scheduled to return to Council for further discussion in September with adoption scheduled for October.

Fiscal Impact:

TBD - There is currently \$55,000 budgeted for the 2021 Election. An all Vote-by-Mail election will likely require a budget amendment, related to infrastructure and increased communication costs. Staff will issue a Request for Proposal in July 2020, with responses due in September. It is anticipated that Council will discuss the cost proposal at its September meeting.

City Administrator Comments:

For Discussion- The revised legislation includes and/or considers many lessons learned and new legislative, staff and Election Board initiatives discussed over the past few years.

Community Engagement:

There will be a communications strategy planned for Vote-by-Mail.

Strategic Goals:

Goal 1 - Ensure Transparent and Accessible Governance

Legal Review Required?

Complete