



**OFFICE OF THE MUNICIPAL CLERK/
ELECTION OFFICIAL**

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Date: May 15, 2020
To: Mayor and Assemblymembers
From: Beth McEwen, Municipal Clerk/Election Official
Subject: CBJ Elections in 2020 in light of COVID-19

In 2019, major changes to elections were planned due to the anticipated replacement of the State of Alaska Division of Elections (D.O.E.) election equipment that CBJ has borrowed since 1998. The D.O.E. purchased its new equipment and said they would allow us to borrow it beginning with the 2021 municipal election with the exception of the Accessible Voting equipment. We included the purchase of accessible voting and ballot counting equipment in our FY21 Budget request.

When D.O.E. purchased its new equipment, they gave CBJ the Accu-vote Optical Scan units with which we have been conducting elections over the past 22 years. We initially planned on using those machines to conduct the October 6, 2020 Regular Municipal Election, however, the situation relating to the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the need to look at other methods by which we can conduct an election while ensuring the health and safety of the voters as well as our election workers. Ninety percent of our election workers are 60 years or older placing them at higher risk for COVID-19 so conducting a Status Quo option is not really an option during this pandemic.

As of May 13th, the State of Alaska has not yet made a final decision as to the type of elections it will be conducting for the 2020 August Primary and November General Elections. Regardless of the decision the state makes, CBJ needs to make some important decisions immediately as to what type of election to conduct for the Regular Municipal Election.

We recently watched Wisconsin hold elections on April 7 after which 67 individuals were diagnosed with COVID-19 after visiting the polls on Election Day. Recent reports from the Wisconsin Department of Health said that due to the nature of contact tracing, they could not confirm if those individuals contracted the disease from the polling place or other locations. Closer to home, the Municipality of Anchorage has conducted its Regular Municipal Election on April 7 using a Vote-By-Mail process. They were set up to have 18 accessible vote centers open and due to workers not wanting to be exposed, they closed all but one of their vote centers under an ordinance allowing the Clerk to have emergency powers during the election process. While Anchorage did experience COVID-19 cases

during April, they were still under a “hunker down” executive order and I do not believe that any of the Anchorage COVID-19 cases were related to the conduct of their municipal election.

In light of all the above factors as well as the continued danger posed by COVID-19 in our community, I strongly recommend the Assembly consider conducting this year’s CBJ Regular Municipal Election as a Vote-By-Mail election. In doing extensive research into this matter I explored a variety of options that would not really work for CBJ’s October 6, 2020 Municipal Election.

I also discussed this matter at length with the Anchorage Municipal Clerk Barbara Jones about their Vote By Mail elections. In a gracious act of solidarity with a fellow Alaskan community, Ms. Jones sent the attached letter offering to partner with us and allow us to use the Municipality of Anchorage’s Election Center and staffing resources for our October election since they do not have an election taking place during that same time. This very generous offer far exceeds our ability to purchase the necessary equipment, set up an Election Center of our own, hire and train staff, and be ready to launch our Municipal Election all within the next 4 months.

I strongly recommend that the Assembly consider conducting this year’s CBJ Regular Municipal Election as a Vote By Mail election in partnership with the Municipality of Anchorage. If the Assembly agrees, the following motion would be in order at the Assembly meeting:

“I move that the Assembly call for the October 6, 2020 Regular Municipal Election to be conducted as an Election By Mail and to partner with the Municipality of Anchorage for the use of their Election Center and staffing resources.”

Following such a motion, Clerk staff would work with the Law Department to draft the necessary code changes as well as with the Finance Department to identify funding sources for an appropriation ordinance and bring both ordinances back to the Assembly for introduction at the June 8 Assembly meeting and set for public hearing and Assembly action at the June 29 Assembly meeting.

Attachments:

- Comparison Table for Election Voting Method Options 2020
- May 8, 2020 Letter from Municipality of Anchorage
- Elections Powerpoint Presentation to HRC