



## A NOTE FROM THE CHAIR OF THE ELECTION COMMITTEE

Dear Neighbors,

Some of you might like more details about why the 2019 election took longer than usual. It was an amazing election, and transparency is important, so we'd like to tell you more about it. It was the closest election here in many years. At the end of the counting, all three candidates were within four votes of each other (out of 261 voters and 522 votes). The Election Committee has a careful system for vote-counting, and we double-checked the entire count again that night to make sure we had it right.

As noted in our election report, there were also some ballots that the Committee had to disqualify. The instructions on the ballot said, "Vote for up to two people, including any write-in candidates. Voting for more than two people invalidates the ballot." 255 voters (98%) followed these instructions. However, there were six ballots where a voter appeared to have voted for three people. Each of those ballots showed two candidates and one write-in, or one candidate and two write-ins.

When someone enters three votes for only two open seats, there's no way for the election officials to determine the voter's intent. By law, the Election Committee is not allowed to decide which two of your three votes we will count. The whole ballot becomes invalidated. Legally, none of those votes can be counted; the ballot is automatically disqualified.

There was one further complication. On many ballots, and all six of the ballots in question, voters entered write-in names but did not put a check-mark in the box next to the words "write-in." Is checking the write-in box necessary, or does the write-in name by itself count as a vote? We needed the answer to that legal question before we could certify the final vote tally. If a ballot had one checked box for a candidate and two write-in names with no checked boxes, did that count as only one actual vote (ballot is valid) or three votes (ballot is disqualified)?

At 11 pm on Thursday night, after an extensive discussion, we decided that we had to consult the Village attorney to be sure. On Friday morning, we verified the election law. The Maryland State Board of Elections rules say: "Failure to fill in the oval for a write-in will not invalidate the vote for that candidate." The Village attorney, who specializes in local government law, confirmed that writing a name on the write-in line is a vote for that person, whether or not the box is checked. That meant that all six ballots did indeed show three votes and we had no choice but to disqualify them.

We all have day jobs, but at lunchtime Friday, the Committee was able to reconvene by email to certify the election and announce the voting results. When we got home from work Friday evening, we finished the detailed election report, coordinated it with all the Committee members, and sent it to the candidates, the Council, and the VMA staff to post, which they did on Saturday morning.

We wish that we could have issued the 2019 election results faster. But sometimes it just takes a little longer to be sure to do things right.

The 2019 election results are final. None of the votes on the disqualified ballots make any difference, since none of them can legally be counted. We hope all VMA residents will please keep this experience in mind for future elections. When a ballot says vote for only two people, please don't vote for three. We'll redesign the ballots next year to make this even clearer. We extend our warmest congratulations to Richard and Katya, and to Peter as well. We wish all three candidates every success in the years ahead.

Thank you all for voting. Martin's Additions takes pride in having honest and accurate elections, and it's an honor to serve on your Election Committee.

With best regards,

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Chair, 2019 VMA Election Committee  
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