

Election Committee Meeting Minutes, February 26, 2024

The 2024 VMA Election Committee held its 10th meeting on 26 February 2024 by Zoom.

In attendance: Council Chair Arthur Alexander and Council liaison Katie Howard. Committee members Marty Langelan, Jen Bergeron, John Sharrow and Paul Weller. Committee Member Naomi Naierman was absent. Village Manager Michael Silliman and Election Committee Contractor Julian Lamphear also attended, as did VMA resident Lynn Welle.

Committee chair Marty Langelan called the meeting to order at 7:46 pm. Marty summarized the Committee's work thus far, noting that we had held 9 meetings to discuss and approve the election procedures. She reported that the Council had approved the VMA Voter Form at the February Council meeting and thanked the VMA Council for taking up the Committee's recommendations. The Committee's other proposed changes would wait until the next Council, according to Arthur, as the Council would like them to be viewed with "fresh eyes." The Committee had posted the official Nomination Notice on February 22, and noted that we had now received one candidate nomination for the 2024 election cycle.

The Committee voted 4-0 (1 absent) to adopt the minutes from the February 1 meeting. The Committee then scheduled a meeting on April 1 at 7:45 pm to approve the 2024 voter list, and a following meeting on April 29 after the 2024 Election Candidate Forum.

Marty asked Committee members to verify that they can access the Committee's VMA email inbox, noting that some members had difficulty in doing so. Marty asked members to refer to the primer drafted by Bill LeoGrande, if having difficulty. Marty then proposed a standard Election Committee protocol to have Marty or Paul, as the chair and vice-chair, with Jen, Committee secretary, as back up, answer any emails received in the Committee's inbox within one business day. All other Committee members will be cc'd on any substantive replies. The Committee approved the email protocol.

The Committee also thanked Katie Howard for her commitment to assist in ensuring that the VMA Voter Form will be added to the VMA Committee webpage.

Turning to the Action Items on the Committee's Agenda, Marty opened by thanking Julian Lamphear for his steadfast work in systematically verifying VMA voters.

Julian reported that he had spoken with Boris Brajkovic, the Director of the Montgomery County Board of Elections, who thought that VMA was on the right track and exemplary in its efforts to ensure an accurate voter roll. Julian reported that he had finished a first run-through of the entire 2023 VMA list and confirmed approximately 500 VMA voters. Circa 200 names were as yet unconfirmed. Prior to the meeting, he submitted several spreadsheet lists to the Committee, to show confirmed voters, unconfirmed voters, and a separate list of likely invalid names. He also included a link to the County Board of Elections voter roll maintenance procedures that Boris provided.

Per the election procedures the Council adopted, it is up to the Committee to reach out to the invalid as well as unconfirmed names. Marty explained that at the April 1 meeting, the Committee would be required to vote on individual names and their "qualified voter" status, before sending the voter roll to ELECTEC. The individuals who have moved or have become ineligible for other reasons will receive written notifications of a proposed change in status and a request to contact the Committee if the information is inaccurate. The official means of producing and sending these letters is via the VMA Manager and staff. The Committee took as a goal to get the initial notification letters out in the coming week, to meet the timing specified in the 2024 Election Regulations.

Discussion turned to whether Street Captains would be able to confirm voters. While the Election committee has legal authority, the Street Captains do not. The Committee voted 4-0 to accept resident verification information from the Street Captains, based largely on improved efficiency. The Committee agreed to send a note to each of the Captains asking if they would be willing to help check the list of unconfirmed residents “if they have time,” as resident confirmation is not a requirement of the role. John Sharrow suggested that the Committee let residents know that we will be asking the Street Captains to help, in the next Committee article in the VMA weekly wrap-up. The Committee agreed to do that.

The Committee also discussed the need to verify the qualified voters who are family members within households here but not on the VMA Office List of current residents, due to likely shifts following the COVID pandemic.

Julian explained some of the idiosyncrasies of his work in Maryland, noting for example that the County Vital Statistics office does not publish deaths until someone has been dead for ten years. The Committee said that it looks forward to Julian’s next report in two weeks, and thanked Julian for his professional, thorough, objective work in methodically evaluating the voter roll in VMA.

The Committee next discussed the use of postal tracking. The VMA regulations have required postal tracking for the past several years. In response to the Committee’s inquiry about tracking, ELECTEC informed VMA that it no longer has the subcontractor who did that, and estimated the need to add \$4000 to its contract to track the ballot envelopes. The Committee considered that excessive. Marty reported on her research on tracking, crediting Larry Wasson and other residents who identified a company called “Letter-track” that can add USPS tracking to envelopes for as little as 18 or 20 cents per envelope (tracking 750 envelopes would cost about \$250). Michael Silliman committed to follow up with ELECTEC and Letter-track on this, in light of the importance of tracking on the ballot-return envelopes.

In other election matters, Marty reported that ELECTEC has committed to bring the drop-box on Election Day (May 7) by 3 pm, with the intent of then picking up the box and the sealed ballot envelopes at 8 pm the same evening, for ELECTEC to hold the unopened envelopes securely until the vote-count on May 21. The Committee discussed the possibility of adding a second day for the election drop-box, but consensus emerged to keep the drop-box for the ballot envelopes to May 7 for workload and security reasons. Marty further reported that ELECTEC will provide its draft ballot packet for the Committee’s approval in March, following the March 23 deadline for candidate registration.

Marty committed to draft the next VMA newsletter article on the 2024 Election, for the Committee to edit and approve as an administrative matter.

The Committee then discussed the possibility of having candidate photos in the VMA election info packet with the candidate statements. While candidate photos are optional, consensus emerged around the desirability of photos if possible and the need to ensure that there is a uniform standard for those opting to pursue the inclusion of a photo. Michael committed to check the technical photo specifications and get back to the Committee. The Committee expressed its intent to have the VMA election information packet with the candidate statements ready for printing by March 25 or 26, following the filing deadline (the regulations require VMA to mail that information packet to the voters by April 6 this year).

The Committee adjourned at 7:58 pm, by 4-0 vote.