

CITY OF CHARLOTTESVILLE, VIRGINIA
CITY COUNCIL AGENDA



Agenda Date:	February 6, 2023
Action Required:	Public hearing to inform ordinance enactment
Presenter:	Taylor Yowell, Voter Registrar, Electoral Board
Staff Contacts:	Taylor Yowell, Voter Registrar Katrina Callsen
Title:	Re-precincting the City of Charlottesville (1st reading January 17; 2nd reading March 6)

Background

Pursuant to Va. Code § 24.2-307, Council must be notified and undertake a precinct boundary revision process, “whenever the number of voters who voted in a precinct in an election for President of the United States exceeds 4,000.” Any newly established or redrawn precinct shall have no more than 5,000 registered voters. During the 2020 presidential election, one precinct (Johnson) had over 4,500 voters. The General Registrar is required to bring a plan to Council to address the large number of voters at that precinct. Five other Charlottesville precincts currently have over 4000 registered voters and are approaching the same statutory consideration. In addition to the legal requirement to consider reprecincting, large increases in voter registration since 2010 have created consistent logistical issues with two current polling places (Tonsler and Alumni Hall). The growing number of registered voters, distribution of voters exceeding the statutory guidelines, and building capacity issues and concerns at Tonsler and Alumni Hall required the City of Charlottesville Electoral Board and the City of Charlottesville Registrar’s Office to review the current precinct map and propose changes.

Va. Code Ann. § 24.2-307 permits the City Council to establish by ordinance as many precincts as it deems necessary. The City is also authorized by statute to increase or decrease the number of precincts and alter precinct boundaries subject to the terms of Va. Code Ann. §§ 24.2-305- 24.2-310.1.

In 2021 a Reprecincting Committee (the “Committee”) consisting of several community members, the Electoral Board Chair and the City Registrar, met to discuss the current polling places, number of voters at those places, where the population growth has occurred since 2010, where development is either underway or in the proposal state, and possible new polling places. The Committee reconvened in late summer 2022 after the State Elections Office removed its bar on reprecincting activity after mandatory federal redistricting was completed.

The Committee arrived at the attached proposed Map which eliminates Tonsler and Alumni Hall as polling places, proposes Jackson Via Elementary School and Charlottesville High School as new

polling places, redraws precinct boundaries to distribute voters among the precincts, and amends ward descriptions to encapsulate those changes.

Discussion

In August 2022, the Committee agreed that, while the registered active voters in the City of Charlottesville increased significantly, because approximately 20-40% vote early and no longer come to the polling places on election day, the total number of precincts (9) should remain the same. Due to the cramped space, consistent parking issues and severe traffic back-up at certain times of every voting day, the Committee agreed to propose the retirement of Tonsler Park Recreation facility as a polling place. Further, due to the fact that Alumni Hall is a private facility where scheduling issues arise and due to its lack of proximity to a large percentage of the voters who use the polling place, the Committee also proposed the retirement of Alumni Hall as a polling place.

Based on a physical tour of the City Schools and the City of Charlottesville Public Schools' willingness to use the schools as on-going and reliable polling places, the Committee proposes the use of Jackson Via Elementary School and Charlottesville High School as new polling places. Both schools have a large percentage of voters who can walk to the polling place, have ample parking, and accessible transportation routes.

Once the nine proposed polling places were established, the Committee, with the guidance of the staff of the Registrar's Office, realigned the Charlottesville voters around these nine polling places. The existing polling places being Herman Key Recreation Center, Carver Recreation Center, Venable Elementary School, Walker Middle School, Clark Elementary School, Buford Middle School and Johnson Elementary School, and the two proposed new polling places being Charlottesville High School and Jackson Via Elementary School. Committee members have also attended neighborhood meetings to discuss the proposed changes, including the retirement of Tonsler and Alumni Hall and the addition of Jackson Via Elementary School and Charlottesville High School as new polling places.

In realigning the voters to the proposed nine precincts, 55% of voters will not see a change in their polling place; they will remain in the same voting place. Each of the nine precincts, as proposed, currently have fewer than 4000 voters assigned to it, allowing for the possible expansion of those numbers due to proposed development in different parts of the City of Charlottesville.

Every voter assigned to a different polling place will receive numerous notifications of the new polling place, as required by Virginia law. In addition, the Registrar's Office will send out press releases and public service announcements regarding the changes if approved by City Council. The Registrar's Office will assist any voter with where they need to be if they decide to vote at the new precinct on Election Day.

Both Charlottesville High School and Jackson Via Elementary School are public education facilities. Permanently retiring Tonsler Park Recreation Center and Alumni Hall as Election Day polling places and permanently adding Charlottesville High School and Jackson Via Elementary School would have no expected negative operational or financial impact. To the contrary, retiring Alumni Hall, a private facility, will save the Registrar's Office \$1,375 each Election Day. Both Charlottesville High School and Jackson Via Elementary Schools will more easily accommodate large numbers of voters on election day. Both have considerably larger and more accessible parking capacities than Tonsler Park and Alumni Hall and both are directly on CAT transit lines. In addition,

the larger spaces at both Charlottesville High School and Jackson Via Elementary School will more easily accommodate the equipment needed to process the ballots and provide election officials and election workers with better ventilation and more space in which to work and take breaks.

To proceed with the changes, Council must amend City Code Chapter 9 to reflect changes in both ward and precinct boundaries. The Council must also comply with the requirements of the Voting Rights Act of Virginia (Va. Code Ann. § 24.2-125- Va. Code Ann. § 24.2-131). The next steps are providing the public with notice of the proposed changes and an opportunity for further input, initiating a public comment period, conducting a public hearing, completing a second reading of the proposed ordinance and voting on the changes at a March Council Meeting. The proposed ordinance amendments, if approved without changes, would go into effect in early April. The General Registrar would like to present Council with the proposed precinct changes and provide information on the process, compliance with the Voting Rights Act, and answer questions at this time.

Alignment with City Council's Vision and Strategic Plan

A Well-Managed and Responsive Organization.

Community Engagement

The Reprecincting Committee engaged stakeholders and community members in a variety of ways when drawing the proposed precinct maps. There are also several upcoming opportunities for public input. There will be an extended public comment period, a public hearing, an additional reading of the ordinance, a waiting period during which affected voters may challenge changes, and ultimately all affected voters will receive notice via direct mail and additional outreach methods. Public notice will also be provided on the city website and via publication as dictated by statutory requirements.

Budgetary Impact

N/A

Recommendation

Receive information. Staff recommends that Council approve the ordinance after the public comment period.

Suggested Motion: "I move that the Council approve the Ordinance amending and re-ordaining City Code Chapter 9 on Elections."

Alternatives

Council may reject or amend the ordinances. The Council may suggest alternatives to the proposed maps.

Attachments

1. Precinct Ordinance Changes_2023
2. Precinct_Map_Roads_Proposed Finalpdf