

Annual Activity Report of the Newport Canvassing Authority 2023

Pursuant to Chapter 2.56.040 of the Newport Code of Ordinances, I respectfully submit the Newport Canvassing Authority's annual report to the Newport City Council setting forth a summary of our annual activities for the calendar year 2023, including a record of attendance for the members of the authority for each regularly scheduled monthly meeting.

Mission:

The Mission of the Newport Canvassing Authority is to conduct all elections in the City of Newport in a fair and transparent manner, in accordance with the U.S. Constitution, R.I. Constitution, the General Laws of the State of Rhode Island, and Rules and Regulations promulgated by the R.I. Board of Elections and the R.I. Secretary of State.

Under direction of the State Board of Elections, in cooperation with the Secretary of State, and with the assistance of the Canvassing Department, the Canvassing Authority is responsible for maintaining an accurate list of registered voters and is responsible for administering elections fairly and efficiently in an open, transparent, and equitable manner.

It is the goal of the Canvassing Authority to ensure the will of the majority of the City's citizens are accurately voiced in each municipal, state, and federal election.

Staff:

The Canvassing Authority is authorized under Rhode Island General Law §17-8-1. The Newport City Council appoints a bipartisan canvassing authority of three (3) qualified electors of the City, not more than two (2) of whom shall belong to the same political party, along with two (2) alternates, one (1) from each party. The Mayor nominates the members of the canvassing authority from lists of party voters submitted by the respective chairpersons of the City's political committees.

At the start of 2023, the Canvassing Authority was comprised of: Chairwoman Sharon Connors (D), Donato Andre D'Andrea (R), and Maxine Shavers (D). After Maxine Shaver's resignation in June, J. Clement "Bud" Cicilline (D) was appointed to fill the remainder of Maxine Shavers term. Mary Moniz continued as the Democratic alternate. The Republican alternate seat remains vacant.

While the Canvassing Department was staffed by Canvassing Clerk Tracy Nelson and Caitlin Springer, Senior Clerk Typist at the start of the year, we experienced a significant staff turnover during the spring and summer of 2023. Julianne Gavan joined the staff in June as Senior Clerk Typist and Hugh Moren was appointed Election Administrator in August after 5 years working for the Providence Board of Canvassers. Rolland Everitt and Michael Kelley were hired as temporary personnel to assist with each of the twenty (20) day early voting periods leading up to the September 5, 2023 Special Primary for Congressional District 1 and the November 7, 2023 Special General Election for Congressional District 1.

Meetings:

The Canvassing Authority is scheduled to meet on the first Tuesday of each month at 11:30 A.M. All meetings are posted on the Secretary of State's website at least 48 hours in advance, pursuant to the

Open Meetings Act. Unless otherwise noted as a legally advertised Executive Session, all meetings are open to the public.

2023 Highlights:

In February, Representative David Cicilline (RI-1) announce his retirement from Congress effective June 1st to become president of the Rhode Island Foundation. Governor McKee signed a Writ of Election on June 1st ordering a Special Primary on September 5th and a Special General Election on November 7th.

The Canvassing Authority voted unanimously to combine polling places for the Special Election and submitted the list of polling locations to the Board of Elections for approval. Upon approval, Newport opened one polling location per City ward.

All polling locations (including early voting) were inspected by the Rhode Island Board of Elections and the Governor's Commission on Disabilities. After completion of the inspections, a report was generated by the Board of Elections outlining remediation, as well as temporary "Election Day fixes" needed to comply with the *Americans with Disabilities Act* and the U.S. Department of Justice requirements.

Democrat Gabe Amo was elected to fill David Cicilline's seat and turnout in Newport for the Special Election reached just over 20%.

2023 Overview:

The Canvassing Office processed almost 1100 new voters in Newport in 2023, while continuing to update party registrations, name changes, and moves within the City. Additionally, the office processed about 350 cancellations for voters that move out of Newport, passed away, or for other reasons required by law. With this net gain voters in 2023, as of mid-December, our population of total registered voters is just under 15,000.

Additionally, legislation took effect in 2023 requiring local boards of canvassers to update registration records four times a year using data from the United States Post Office's National Change of Address (NCOA) program. This new requirement keeps the voters rolls more accurate than in the past where the NCOA update was done only once every two years. Two NCOAs were completed in 2023, as the requirement is paused within 90 days of an election.

Preparations for the 2023 Special Elections began in the Spring, with a mailing sent to previous poll workers and anyone indicating on their voter registration that they were interested in being a poll worker.

The Canvassing Office processed approximately 650 mail ballot applications for the Special Primary and General Election.

Early voting was codified into law by the General Assembly in 2022 with passage of the *Let RI Vote Act*, allowing voters to cast ballots, in person, at city hall, in the twenty days preceding an election. Interest in early voting has increased with awareness, and has necessitated hiring more temporary staff. Rolland Everitt and Mike Kelley returned in this capacity for the CD 1 Special Election after helping in last year's midterm elections.

As the popularity for early voting has increased, so has the Canvassing Authority's concern for the space and staff needed in order to continue the effective administration of elections. ***These needs must be addressed in advance of the 2024 Presidential Election.***

Successful elections require a highly trained staff of poll workers to staff our polling locations. A number of efforts are underway to develop outreach efforts to expand our pool of poll workers. And, after reviewing the pays scales of Newport poll workers and comparing these rates to other communities, the Canvassing Authority recommended a poll worker pay increase to the city Council that was approved and adopted in the summer of 2023.

The Elections Administrator, Hugh Moren, has undertaken an expansive role in streamlining elections operations and community outreach. A much more developed communication and election day monitoring approach in collaboration with the Newport police department addresses both the safety of our polling locations and the transmission of election day results.

The members of the Canvassing Authority continue to take a more active role on Election Day so that the staff may remain at the office to focus on assisting voters and poll workers; to remotely monitor turnout and equipment function and deploy resources as needed; to oversee transmission of results; and to prepare for the return of supplies, equipment, and ballots on Election Night.

The Canvassing Department staff (Hugh & Julianne) are a dedicated team who work together cohesively. This is a benefit to the Canvassing Authority, candidates, voters, and the general public.

Respectfully submitted,

Sharon Connors, Chair
Newport Canvassing Authority