

Chairperson
Aaron Richman

Vice-chairperson
Jacqueline Yang

Clerk
Elizabeth O'Callahan



Members:
Lilian Chukwurah
Edward G. Robinson
Tracey Weeden

**City of Worcester
Human Rights Commission**

**Monthly Meeting Summary – Monday, May 6th, 2019, 6pm
Worcester City Hall, Esther Howland Chamber, 3rd Floor, 455 Main St., Worcester, MA**

Members present: Aaron Richman, Elizabeth O'Callahan, Edward Robinson, Jacqueline Yang, Lilian Chukwurah, Tracey Weeden

Staff: Jayna Turcek, Jamilex Rivas

1. Call to order and introductions

A quorum was established and Chairperson Richman officially called the meeting to order at 6:09 pm. Commissioners introduced themselves. The Chairperson welcomed the Commissioners and those present.

2. Approval of April 1st, 2019 meeting minutes

Commissioner Yang Motioned to approve as written. Commissioner Chukwurah seconded. Motion passed with all in favor

3. Old Business:

In the absence of the City Solicitor to speak on item 3A Chairperson Richman proposed switching the order of agenda items and proceed with item 3B

B. Review and discussion of annual city census

Niko Vangjeli from the City Clerk's Office/Election Commission provided an overview of the annual city census and its relation to voter rolls, as well as the process by which residents become and remain active voters.

Assistant city clerk

The city is required by state law to send out mailing on an annual basis

- 75,000 pieces sent out with a 55-60% average response rate.
- A second piece of mail sent out to residents who fail to respond to first mailing
- Total cost ~\$30,000
- If mailing is not returned by June 1st, the resident will become inactive
- Becoming an inactive voter means that at the next election, poll workers will ask individuals to complete a form re-enrolling them on the active voter list and to provide proof of residency, including the name and address (e.g. a utility bill, driver's license, excise tax)

Demographics



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- 60-65% active voters
- 75-80% presidential years
- Not dropped until after 2 state elections
- Many of the 40% of those who don't respond to mailings are college students

Process for Incarcerated Individuals

- Individuals incarcerated for felony charges are removed from active voter lists
- Following completion of term, individuals then become re-eligible to vote
- Individuals incarcerated for misdemeanors are able to vote using absentee ballots

Discrepancy in Language regarding becoming inactive

- Law states voters become inactive following a failure to respond for two consecutive years
- Mailing continues to indicate voters will become inactive after one year
- In 2014, the language around inactivation changed because the legislature changed law but did not follow through with changing language for inactive confirmation.
- The Election Commission asked the Massachusetts Secretary of State for clarification in 2016, who advised that the new language cannot be implemented because the second part of the law has not been changed by the legislature

Mailing

- Questions required by Commonwealth
 - Veteran, nationality if not citizen, occupation, date of birth, registered voter
- Provides the opportunity to request an absentee ballot form
- Electronic voting for those overseas
- Next year, the mailing will also include flyer to state that this is only for the city of Worcester so it isn't confused with the federal census

Election Commission Database of Households

- Households are listed and organized by address
- New addresses end up in database
- Database is updated daily with new information from sources such as the RMV
- Voters with no permanent address: The Election Commission works with the Health and Human Services Department and the Worcester Homeless Services Coordinator for individuals who don't have an address, using either the closest building to the Worcester Common, shelters or churches;

Public Comment:

- Randy Feldman, Worcester resident, for clarification on what constitutes a state election in determining when a voter is removed, e.g. does state election mean a primary and general state election, or two general elections?
- Mr. Feldman also explained that voting in Mississippi causes voters to remain active for 2 years and expressed a desire to see Worcester & Massachusetts for individuals stay active for long as possible. He asked Worcester have any choice in this?
- The Assistant Election Commissioner responded that because it's state law, there is thus no room for municipal discretion, but recommend that the Commission asks state representatives to support 2 year inactivation period

Motion: Clerk O'Callahan motioned to initiate a formal request to all state representatives of the City of Worcester that they utilize resources at their disposal support the 2 year inactivation period, and move forward with changing the relevant language in the second parts of the law, as discussed this evening by the Worcester City Clerk's Office.

Seconded by Vice Chairperson Yang seconded. Motion passed with all in favor

- Poll workers come from the parties and usually have to be US citizen to participate on election day; Additional clarification to be provided
- Election Commission members include 1 unenrolled member nominated through CAC
 - Must be unenrolled when applying as laid out in city charter

- Can residents vote in local elections?
 - City of Cambridge and other municipalities exploring this issue;
 - Currently a bill being considered to lower voting age to 16
 - It's possible the state legislature could bring another bill forward for cities and towns to opt in or out to allow non-citizens to vote in municipal elections

Accessibility

- Ballots currently available in English and Spanish
- All booths must be ADA Compliant
- Individuals may be accompanied by caretakers, family members, etc., for support with voting

Voting Initiatives

- Each election cycle, the Election Commission works with nursing homes, rehab facilities, etc.
- Pre-registration drives at high schools with Sen. Harriet Chandler to conduct civics lesson
- High schools coming in weekly to do mock city council meetings
- Civics Camp annual camp run in partnership with WPS and WSU over april vacation, students from all junior high and high schools, selected by principals.
 - Guests include Worcester Chief of Police, city councilors, city manager, and professors from Worcester State University
 - Same students from Civics camp help pre-register rest of their peers in October
 - In November, assigned to work in polls
 - Possible because of bill sponsored by city manager Augustus when he was a state senator

For Follow Up:

- Are there limitations or protections to the purpose of requests or uses of census information? Could the police department, for example, request census of people who are not citizens?

A. Response from law department on the eligibility criteria for volunteers on boards and commissions

Chairperson Richman provided a summary of the discussion from the April 30th Worcester Citizens Advisory Council Meeting.

- The Chairperson encouraged Commissioners to review the video from the April 30th CAC Meeting, where the item began at 0:18:40 and continued to 1:36:00.
- The city solicitor was scheduled to attend the CAC meeting but was unable to attend
- While discussing the item, a longtime CAC member remarked on the delay in resolution to these questions and asked "Do have the power to change this or not?"
- Members of the CAC ultimately passed motion to request that they have answers by June meeting

City Solicitor was scheduled to attend Human Rights Meeting but was unable to attend

- Had not yet prepared written remarks to provide and asked to respond first to the CAC
- Asked timeline for when he would be prepared to submit remarks

Motion:

Clerk O'Callahan motioned to request in writing that the law department provide a response in writing, by the Human Rights Commission Meeting, as to whether the CAC can change the registered voter requirement request by our July meeting. Commissioner Weeden motioned to amend that if the CAC cannot change it, that they provide an answer as to who can.

Commissioner Chukwurah seconded the motion. Motion passed with all in favor.

4. New Business

A. Planning conversation for annual meeting with Worcester Police Department (June 3rd, 2019)

The Human Rights Commission scheduled a second May meeting for 5/9 at 6:30 PM to further plan and discuss the joint June meeting with the Worcester Police Department. Meeting Location TBD

B. Book and film discussion events (Sponsored by Human Rights Commission, Advisory Committee on the Status of Women and Commission on Disability)

Chairperson Richman continued conversation for next meeting

5. Next meeting: Thursday, May 9th, 2019 at 6:30 PM, location TBD

6. Adjournment at 8:01 pm