

August 21, 2020

To: Concord Select Board

From: Judy Zaunbrecher

Subject: Town House Renovation Project and Town Clerk Office Dislocation

I just heard the Town Clerk's office will need to temporarily move to the basement of the Harvey Wheeler Community Center right after the September 1 primary election. This requires the Town Clerk and her staff to divert their attention from wrapping any issues from the state primary election, preparing for the upcoming Town Meetings, and preparing for the November 3 general election at a critical time. In my view, this puts the integrity of the general election in Concord at risk.

I am appalled the Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager managing this renovation project has developed and are executing such a plan. I am extremely disappointed the Select Board, as the elected authority to oversee the Town Manager, is allowing this to happen.

Voting is the core of our democracy. People have fought and lost their lives to win the right to vote. The 19th amendment was ratified 100 years ago after an eighty year battle by suffragists to win the right to vote. Over the past 100 years, the battle has continued leading to Chinese-American, Asians, and American Indians winning the right to vote. The Voting Rights Act was passed 55 years ago to dismantle the voting barriers faced by Black Americans. District of Columbia residents won the right to vote in Presidential elections in 1961 through the passage of the 23rd Amendment to the Constitution. The battle to protect and extend voting rights to all US citizens is continuing today.

2020 is seeing an unprecedented attack on everyone's right to vote. Voter suppression is rampant in this country through the President and his allies falsely claiming large scale voter fraud and is already laying the table to delegitimize the upcoming election on November 3. The emergency election measures implemented by the state so everyone can vote safely this fall are only successful if local election officials can carry them out. On top of everything, our local election officials must be on the constant lookout for foreign interference in our election systems, a threat federal law enforcement and Congressional committees have continually been warning us about.

The Town personnel managing the Town House renovation project could have easily planned for this upcoming election season. The date of the November election has been known for decades as it is established by federal law. The approximate date of the state primary is also well known. The procedures for registering to vote, preparing for the election, securing the voter rolls and ballots, processing of mailed in ballots, setting up early voting, preparing for election day (recruiting poll

workers, training poll workers, establishing polling places) and any post-election duties are well known and should have been taken into account in the Town House renovation plan. It was apparent to election officials and election advocates in the spring that emergency procedures would be needed so voters could safely participate in the election this fall. The emergency voting legislation was passed on July 6 outlining how voters could safely vote this fall. This legislation made it crystal clear that mail in voting would significantly increase this fall—and it has. This bill also extended for the first time early voting for the September 1 state primary. Again, it is the Town Clerk who will need to make sure these procedures are put in place and the election runs smoothly in Concord.

As Co-President of the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts and a member of the LWV of Concord-Carlisle, I have been personally involved in advocating for and educating voters on how to vote safely this fall. Additionally, the League of Women Voters is actively pushing back on the changes at the US Postal Service to ensure all mail in ballots are delivered on time. I never thought I would need to write a letter to the Concord Select Board to advocate for free and fair elections in Concord and to ensure the resources are in place to carry out our elections.

Temporarily relocating the Town Clerk's office in the midst of election season is beyond the pale. It appears to me the Town management has placed meeting a project timeline above conducting free and fair elections in Concord.

I encourage the Select Board to call the Town Manager and Assistant Town Manager to account for this plan in the strongest possible terms and request the temporary relocation of the Town Clerk's Office be postponed until after all of the ballots have been counted and reports filed for the November 3 election. The citizens of Concord deserve to have confidence in how elections are held in Concord. The current plan to move the Town Clerk's office does not do that.

Sincerely,

Judy Zaunbrecher

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Cc: Stephen Crane

Kate Hodges

