

My response to Stephen Crane.

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From: **Judy Zaunbrecher** <jrzaunbrecher@gmail.com>

Date: Fri, Aug 21, 2020 at 10:48 PM

Subject: Re: Letter to Select Board on Town House Renovation Project and Temporary Relocation of Town Clerk's Office

To: Stephen Crane <scrane@concordma.gov>

Cc: Michael Lawson <mlawson@concordma.gov>, Jane Hotchkiss <jhotchkiss@concordma.gov>, Linda Escobedo <lescobedo@concordma.gov>, Terri Ackerman <tackerman@concordma.gov>, Susan Bates <sbates@concordma.gov>, Kate Hodges <khodges@concordma.gov>, Kerry Lafleur <klafleur@concordma.gov>

Stephen,

Thank you for quickly addressing my concerns about Concord's ability to conduct free and fair elections during the pandemic and at the same time moving the Town Clerk's office to temporary quarters.

Your response did not alleviate my concerns about the upcoming election and the Town's ability to conduct a free and fair election in which Concord voters will have confidence.

I appreciate that the Town House renovation project has been a long time in the planning and execution. And, because the Town had so much time to plan this project, it should have taken the general election into account and planned around it. Certainly taking advantage of the non-existent foot traffic at the Town House due to the pandemic is a project manager's dream. But, convenience for a project manager is not an excuse to put an election, any election, at risk.

Your note indicates that these timing decisions were made after the pandemic shutdown. It was clear at this point changes to how elections would be conducted were already being discussed at Beacon Hill, including greatly expanded mail in voting. The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, of which I am Co-President, had been actively and closely involved in the legislative work that ultimately led to the bill passing and being signed into law on July 6. The changes you cite as being passed into law were completely foreseeable in the spring as the pandemic unfolded. A good project manager would have taken that into account in any plan being considered.

The assertion the Town Clerk has sufficient resources to manage the election is not consistent with the extraordinary requests for volunteers to help out with the sorting of mail in ballots and data entry for the primary election. I personally have volunteered to work at least 5 hours in the coming week to help sort the mail in ballots for the primary election. This indicates to me the Town Clerk and her staff, who are extremely capable, have not been provided adequate resources to conduct the primary election, let alone the general election when history tells us voting participation will be much higher. Shifting these valuable and knowledgeable resources to focus on moving during the general election cycle runs the very real risk of stressing the system and people to a breaking point, leading to the increased risk of errors, missed deadlines, and possibly people not being able to vote or their votes not being counted.

The other elements that should be considered include:

- Where will the secure drop box for voter registrations, mail in ballot applications, and mail in ballot returns be located for the general election? It is currently at the Town House and the Town Clerk has done a good job of providing this information to the public. Is it going to move? If it is, then the Town Clerk will need to take the time to re-educate the public as to its location. If it remains at the Town House, resources will be required to transport these ballots, applications, and registration forms to the Town Clerk's temporary location. Yet another drain on resources and opportunity for these important voting documents to be misplaced, lost, or delivered after the deadline.

- The law states mail in ballots can be returned in person to the Town Clerk's office by 8 pm on election day. I assume that means voters, if they choose to do this, would need to return these ballots to the Town Clerk's Office temporary location at Harvey Wheeler. Will the public know where this temporary location is? By the way, the law does not allow mail in ballots to be returned to polling places.
- Where will early voting be conducted? Concord voters are accustomed to early voting at the Town House. If this location is changed for the general election, the Town Clerk will need to educate the public on this location change leading to yet one extra task and more public confusion.
- What are the IT arrangements for this move? The Election Division of the Secretary of the Commonwealth requires a dedicated line for voter roll transmission and other voting data sharing be set up. Who will be setting this up and is it another extra task for the Town Clerk's office?
- Is the space in the Harvey Wheeler appropriate for all of the work required in the election season and on election day?
- Will all of the Town Clerk files and voting information needed to conduct the election be at Harvey Wheeler and readily available to the staff? Is storage space secure?

Voters rely on the Town Clerk's office to help them register to vote and answer voting and election questions. Concord has a fabulous Town Clerk and staff--they are knowledgeable, service oriented, and friendly. Most importantly, they are dedicated to making sure our elections are free, fair, and flawless in Concord. This builds the public's trust in voting which is so important in any election, but especially important in 2020.

The plan for the Town House renovation that requires the Town Clerk's office to move in the midst of this important and challenging season appears to be expedient for the Town House renovation project, but is not prudent for the Town and its voters. It runs the real risk of leading to mishaps during the general election and to eroding voter confidence. I do not find this an acceptable trade-off as a citizen and a voter.

I ask the Town to reconsider its plan to relocate the Town Clerk's Office before the November 3 general election. This move should occur after the completion of the general election.

Sincerely,
Judy Zaunbrecher

