



Josh Arneson &lt;jarneson@richmondvt.gov&gt;

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**FW: Elections Update - 2021 Annual Meeting procedures**

1 message

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**Linda Parent** <lparent@richmondvt.gov>  
To: Josh Arneson <jarneson@richmondvt.gov>

Wed, Dec 9, 2020 at 3:18 PM

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**From:** Senning, Will <[Will.Senning@vermont.gov](mailto:Will.Senning@vermont.gov)>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, December 9, 2020 2:07 PM  
**To:** Senning, Will <[Will.Senning@vermont.gov](mailto:Will.Senning@vermont.gov)>  
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**Subject:** Elections Update - 2021 Annual Meeting procedures  
**Importance:** High

Good Afternoon Clerks,

We are reaching out today with some initial information about your upcoming annual meetings. We have been receiving a lot of questions from many of you already.

First though, I still have not had a chance to say thank you, personally, for the job you all did administering the Primary and General Elections this year. You all stepped up, dug your heels in, and lead Vermonters through a successful election under extremely difficult circumstances and immense stress. Your support of each other and of our office resulted in a team effort that everyone relied on. I and the whole Elections Division team were proud to be a part of it, and you all should be as well. I hope you all get some much deserved rest and relaxation over the holidays.

With that said, I want to cover some basic information about annual meeting. With the recent resurgence of the virus, and the likelihood that it will still be prevalent throughout the first part of next year, there are many questions about what alternative procedures are available to conduct annual meeting as safely as possible. For those of you that conduct some, or all, of your business “from the floor” in a traditional open town meeting, there are obvious concerns about that type of gathering if the virus is still prevalent.

For the time being, please be aware of the following:

- At the end of this calendar year, the Directives issued by Secretary Condos in 2020 expire and are no longer in effect. This means that all of the alternative procedures permitted by those Directives are no longer available. This includes the option to mail a ballot to all active registered voters, the ability to postpone annual meetings, and to conduct a drive-thru polling place, among others. You can review the Directives that will expire [here](#), [here](#), and [here](#).
- However, in a bill passed this Fall, the legislature has already allowed for the following:
  - The legislative body of a municipality may vote to put all articles for this year’s meeting on a ballot. Whereas the law typically requires a vote of the voters to adopt the Australian ballot system for annual meeting, the legislative body may vote to do so this year as a one-time safety measure. Meetings will revert back to the current procedure after this year. For those of you who are not familiar with Australian ballot procedures, see below for some basic introductory information.

- No signatures are required to be collected by candidates for local office. Those candidates are only required to file a Consent of Candidate form no later than the sixth Monday before the election (Jan. 25 for annual meetings held on March 2).
  - Signatures are still required for petitions to place an article on the ballot, including social service appropriations. However, please remember that your legislative body may decide to place any article on the ballot without requiring a petition, if it so chooses.
  
- Also, the legislature has been meeting preliminarily already late this fall to discuss further action they may be able to take regarding annual meeting. They are aware that a bill would have to be passed very quickly and are putting the pieces in place to do so. The three items they have discussed and seem to be moving toward thus far, and please recognize there is no guarantee these will happen, are as follows:
  - Permitting a municipality to postpone the annual meeting until later in the year when it can be held under hopefully safer circumstances.
  - Permitting a municipality to mail ballots to all active registered voters.
  - Granting the Secretary of State the same authority that was granted last year to authorize alternative procedures for local elections in 2021. This would allow us to reauthorize procedures like drive-thru polling places.

Again, please remember these three provisions are not in place yet but are actively being discussed for inclusion in a bill that would pass as soon as possible in January. We will keep you informed as we know any more details or developments.

- Our federal funds for COVID-19 response expire at the end of this calendar year, and could only be spent on federal elections. For these reasons we are not able to pay for postage or other mailing costs for the annual meeting. We do, however, intend to provide absentee ballot envelopes for the annual meeting, as we have done in the past. We are putting a survey together that will include the ability to order certificate envelopes, as well as outgoing and return envelopes. The municipality will be responsible for any postage or mailing costs.

- For those of you who typically conduct all or part of your business “from the floor”, but your legislative body is considering moving those items onto a ballot this year, please review subchapter 3, of Chapter 55 of Title 17, for the law on Australian ballots. Some of the basics are as follows:
  - Candidates must submit their consent forms by the sixth Monday before the election in order to be included on the ballot.
  - The ballots will contain the articles to be voted on as they are listed in the Warning.
  - Ballots must be prepared no later than 20 days before the election. You may prepare the ballot in house if you choose.
  - Voters may request a ballot be sent to them, they may pick it up at your office, or they may vote their ballot in person at the office (only if possible in accordance with your current policies).
  - An informational meeting must be held by the legislative body within the 10 days prior to the meeting. This meeting may be conducted remotely under the emergency open meeting law provisions that have allowed public bodies to meet remotely.
  - There must be a polling place on the day of the election. The polling place may open anytime between 5 a.m. and 10 a.m., and must close at 7 p.m.

You can find additional information and sample Warnings on the [Town Meeting Reminders](#) page of our website.

We hope this helps answer some initial questions for now. We will continue to keep in touch with more information and any updates as we receive them. Please keep your eye out for the survey regarding absentee ballot envelopes.

We also genuinely hope you get some time off to recover, recoup, and relax. We all deserve it.

Thank you,

Will

Will Senning

12/14/2020

Town of Richmond VT Mail - FW: Elections Update - 2021 Annual Meeting procedures

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**PLEASE NOTE THAT MY EMAIL ADDRESS HAS CHANGED. My new address is [will.senning@vermont.gov](mailto:will.senning@vermont.gov)**