

# Election Day 2012

Highlights from the Minneapolis Elections Division's Dec. 3 report to the City Council Elections Committee

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## Successes

### HIGH VOTER TURNOUT

- Minneapolis' voter turnout was the highest in nearly 40 years, since the voting age was lowered to 18 in 1971 and Election-Day registration began in 1974.
- Voter turnout on Election Day 2012 in Minneapolis was 81 percent, higher than the 76 percent turnout in Minnesota as a whole, which was one of the highest turnout states in the nation.
- Minneapolis voters cast 215,806 ballots, including more than 200,000 who voted at one of the city's 117 polling places on Election Day.
- A total of 50,668 voters registered to vote at the polls on Election Day. This number is greater than the entire population of the city of Minnetonka.
- Despite the high turnout and large number of people registering on Election Day, the City received no complaints about long lines or any other issues from 78 percent of the city's precincts (91 of 117 precincts).

### MORE EQUALIZED PRECINCTS AND MORE STAFFING

- Through the 2012 redistricting process, Minneapolis precinct sizes were equalized. The number of precincts with more than 3,000 pre-registered voters was decreased from nine to two, while the number of precincts with fewer than 1,000 pre-registered voters was decreased from 13 to nine. This was accomplished while reducing the total number of precincts from 131 to 117.
- More election judges were working in polling places and helping voters than in the past. Compared to the 2008 election, the City increased the number of election judges by 30 percent for 2012. In total, Minneapolis had more than 2,500 election judges working at the polls on Election Day.
- A greater focus was placed on assisting voters who have special needs, including accessibility and mobility issues, as well as language translation needs. In addition to the overall increase in election judges, an additional 50 judges were deployed to key polling places to enhance their ability to serve voters with special needs or language barriers.

## Challenges

### PRECINCT ISSUES

- The City received at least one Election Day complaint at 22 percent of polling places (26 of 117 precincts). The majority of the complaints were for long lines (14 percent of precincts.) Other complaints were related to signage (6.8 percent of precincts) and site

capacity (5 percent of precincts), along with a smaller number of complaints about other issues.

- Election Day registration is one of the reasons that Minnesota has a long tradition of high voter turnout. While it is an important component of our voting system, registering voters at the polls can be a time-consuming and resource-intensive process, sometimes leading to long wait times. In Minneapolis, 25 percent of voters in the 2012 election registered at the polling place.

### **TECHNICAL PROBLEMS**

- The most significant challenge experienced on Election Day was the failure of some tabulators to accept ballots. Every ballot cast on Election Day was counted and included in the City's totals; however, in some cases, problems with the City's aging voting equipment did cause delays in getting results. Although the voting equipment is tested in the days leading up to the election, equipment issues can and do still happen on Election Day, which is why there are specific processes outlined in the law and elections protocols to handle those situations while making sure every vote counts.
- Minneapolis also experienced some challenges related to the design and printing of a small number of ballots. The printing errors were small technical issues that did not affect ballot content or any races or issues on the ballot. However, they did prevent the tabulators from accepting some ballots. Because of these printing issues, ballots in three precincts in the city had to be hand counted in the days following the election to arrive at a final result.

## **Recommendations**

### **EARLY VOTING AND VOTE CENTERS**

- The Minneapolis Elections Division recommends that the City Council advocate for changes to state election law that would allow early voting. Early voting, while similar in some ways to absentee voting, has distinct advantages. Voters would be able to vote early for any reason, and that voting is conducted just like it is done on Election Day. Making it easier to vote early could increase voter participation and decrease the number of people headed to the polls on Election Day, which would decrease waiting times.
- The Elections Division also recommends that the City advocate for a change at the Legislature that would allow the creation of vote centers. Vote centers are sometimes referred to as "super precincts" where voters in a given county can vote on Election Day, regardless of the precinct in which they live. Vote centers would increase convenience for voters, because there would be no "wrong" place to vote.

### **POLLING PLACES, STAFFING, AND EQUIPMENT**

- The Elections Division will engage with stakeholders to evaluate the City's polling places and ensure that polling places that meet the needs of voter turnout, including accessibility, parking, and capacity.
- The City will develop a plan to diversify its current corps of election workers to reflect differences in age, race, ethnicity, language, physical capability, etc., found in

Minneapolis. Elections will also designate a dedicated team of election judges to focus exclusively on processing and counting absentee ballots.

- The City is partnering with Hennepin County to select and purchase new voting equipment. The equipment currently used in Minneapolis is 13 years old, and is generally designed to be used for about 10 years.
- The Elections Division encourages the City to look at using electronic poll books, which function like the paper poll books that are currently used, but which have distinct advantages over paper books, including the ability to quickly access data for multiple precincts, which is essential if voting centers are created in Minneapolis.