



# TOWN OF STRATHAM

INCORPORATED 1716

10 BUNKER HILL AVENUE • STRATHAM NH 03885

VOICE (603) 772-7391 • FAX (603) 775-0517

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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Michael Houghton, Select Board Chair  
Joseph Lovejoy, Select Board Vice-Chair  
Allison Knab, Select Board

FROM: Deb Bakie, Town Clerk – Tax Collector  
David Moore, Town Administrator

DATE: November 12, 2021

RE: Report Back on Polling Locations for the Town of Stratham

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Please allow this memorandum to serve as a report back to the Select Board concerning polling locations in Stratham for 2022 and beyond.

As you know, elections in Stratham are a team effort involving the hands of many staff, volunteers, and elected officials. As a result, this memorandum was developed following conversations with the Select Board and the two of us as well consultation with the local school district and regional school district administration as well as consultation with the Supervisors of the Checklist and Town Moderator and Deputy Moderator.

Prior to finalizing a recommendation, we considered and discussed the input received to date. We encourage the Select Board to access the complete feedback in this memo's attachment. Also, we recommend the Board spend time at its meeting on November 15<sup>th</sup> discussion what if any additional steps that Board would like to take prior to moving forward.

The memorandum includes the following sections:

1. Identification of Issues and Concerns
2. Summary of Feedback Received
3. How the SAU and Local School District View Election Location Decisions
4. Recommendation to Select Board
5. Explanation of Draft Recommendation
6. Recommended Next Steps for the Select Board

## **1. Identification of Issues and Concerns**

Below are observations about the polling locations historically used in Stratham.

1. In general, in order to encourage participation and provide consistency, we believe it is generally preferable for the Select Board to set a consistent expectation for polling locations from year to year and election to election.
2. For Presidential Primary and State elections, the Municipal Center has proven to be very tight and lack parking and convenient traffic circulation to accommodate large numbers of residents participating. The pandemic added particular pressures as more space is needed to accommodate recommended distancing practices.
3. Given the historical turnout of Town elections, the Municipal Center location has served as an adequate location.
4. The Town relies on Town employees to supplement volunteers especially during larger elections. For smaller elections, Town staff can assist as needed but often also continue to work and/or provide counter service throughout the day. Elections held off site will definitely preclude offering counter service in the Town Clerk/Tax Collector's office and will similarly require some town offices to close and limit productivity.
5. Layout of elections are established in law and regulations from the Secretary of State; in the past we have been able to meet accessibility and other layout requirements in the Municipal Center but not easily; this task gets harder with large turnout and pandemic related precautions.
6. In November of 2020, the General Election was held at the Stratham Memorial School. There was no school on that day and the election was widely viewed as a success in terms of access, comfort, accessibility.
7. The safety and security of the municipal parking lot during elections requires significant staff effort and concern. Additional lighting, traffic management by police and DPW details, and signage are required. To a certain degree, these are needed for any election location in Town, however the space for parking and circulation at the MC is particularly limited and challenging to manage during election with large turnout. Weather conditions can exacerbate these issues.
8. Holding elections in buildings other than the Town Office pose logistical challenges, in particular for the Town Clerk/Tax Collector and the Supervisors of the Checklist. Office equipment, voting equipment need to be moved, set-up and eventually broken down.
9. The Town of Stratham relies on several tens of volunteers for each election. Ensuring volunteer comfort and safety needs to be considered in any siting location.
10. Many Towns in our SAU hold elections in schools (see below). As a result, school calendars reflect schools day closures on elections. SAU 16 prepares the next schools year's calendar beginning in January of each year.
11. Integrity of voting materials, processes, and equipment is a major consideration. While moving elections off site pose additional steps to ensuring election integrity, we have seen that this is possible (in November 2020) and certainly, Stratham would not be

alone in the movement of materials from their storage site to an off-site polling location.

## **2. How the SAU and Local School District View Election Location Decisions**

In preparation for advising the Select Board, we conferred with both the Stratham Memorial School principal Kate Lucas and Associate Superintendent of the SAU, Esther Asbell.

The following basic information will provide context for election impacts on our schools:

- A. The SAU joint board adopts a school calendar for the entire district; local school districts tailor their school calendar with professional development days, etc. A district-wide professional development day (no school for students) is held on the second Tuesday of March.
- B. The SAU joint board adopts a calendar for the next school year in February. Esther Asbell, recommends that the local school district board receive scheduled requests (for elections, etc.) in December.
- C. The decision by the SAU/local school district to hold school or not during an election day is not hard and fast according to Esther. For larger elections, they tend to not hold school. For all other elections, the decision to hold school/professional development during an election scheduled at a school is dependent on the ability to manage safety and security of the students/staff through separation. She notes that SMS lends itself to separation. Based on discussions with Kate Lucas and Esther Asbell both feel confident in the minimal disruption and ability to provide adequate separation on voting days for “smaller” elections.
- D. We were encouraged that – if the Select Board asked to hold elections at the SMS – it would be supported by the administration.

## **3. Recommendation for Select Board**

In consideration of the foregoing issues and concerns, we make the following recommendation to the Select Board: Beginning in 2022, the Select Board should establish polling locations for the following elections:

- Town Meeting Elections – Municipal Center – 10 Bunker Hill Avenue
  - Second Tuesday in March of each year.
- State Election (Primary) – Stratham Memorial School – 39 Gifford Farm Road
  - Second Tuesday in September of every other year
- State Election (General) – Stratham Memorial School – 39 Gifford Farm Road
  - Second Tuesday in November of every other year
- Presidential Primary Elections – Stratham Memorial School – 39 Gifford Farm Road

- This election is scheduled by the Secretary of State and is done from year to year (not on a consistent schedule like our other elections). This fact may pose challenges for scheduling a school location and we advise that flexibility may be required. However, as a default, we believe this election should also be held at SMS.

Here is a schedule of elections held each year and their locations for a quadrennium in accordance with this recommendation.

		Location	2022	2023	2024	2025
Town Election	2nd Tuesday in March each year	MC	1	1	1	1
State Primary	2nd Tuesday in September every other year	SMS	1	0	1	0
General Election	2nd Tuesday in November every other year	SMS	1	0	1	0
State Primary	TBD each quadrennium	SMS	0	0	1	0
		<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>
		MC	1	1	1	1
		SMS	2	0	3	0
		<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>

#### 4. Explanation of Draft Recommendations

- Town Meeting Elections – Municipal Center – 10 Bunker Hill Avenue
  - Second Tuesday in March of each year.

The Municipal Center has been able to accommodate these elections in the past and we anticipate in the future as well. Holding this election at the MC, minimizes the disruption of relocating election materials and equipment to SMS. We feel the potential issue of confusion over locations is mitigated by residents connecting the Town election to the Municipal Center, the seat of the local government. In addition, this location for this election better allows staff in other departments to work during the times they are not assisting with the election. The Town Clerk/Tax Collector office can also remain open on this day providing service to residents.

- State Election (Primary) – Stratham Memorial School – 39 Gifford Farm Road
  - Second Tuesday in September of every other year

While State Primary elections can sometimes see lower turnout, there is potential for high profile races to drive turnout and energy around this election. In addition, holding this election at SMS (along with the general election), allows one simple “rule” for residents to use in navigating polling locations “State Elections are held at SMS” (we are recommending the Presidential Primary election - also a State election - be held at SMS).

- State Election (General) – Stratham Memorial School – 39 Gifford Farm Road
  - Second Tuesday in November of every other year

We believe the turnout and energy around general elections (in Presidential years or not) warrant the larger and more easily navigable SMS location.

- Presidential Primary Elections – Stratham Memorial School – 39 Gifford Farm Road
  - This election is scheduled by the Secretary of State

We believe this election, is likely also appropriate to hold at the SMS location for the same reasons provided for the State elections above (subject to availability as discussed in section 3).

## **5. Recommended Next Steps for the Select Board**

We have identified the next potential steps for the Select Board:

1. Review and discuss this memorandum at your meeting on November 15th.
2. Consider inviting further comment and revisit discussion at December 5<sup>th</sup> or December 19<sup>th</sup> meetings.
3. Consider submitting a request to hold elections for 2022 to the Stratham Local School District

cc: Town Moderator Dave Emanuel  
Deputy Town Moderator Beth Dupell  
Supervisor of the Checklist, Mel McGrail  
Supervisor of the Checklist, Connie Aubin Adams  
Supervisor of the Checklist, Cathy Warner

## **Attachment**

Comments from Elected Election Officials Consulted for this Memorandum

**From:** [beth@ecm-design.com](mailto:beth@ecm-design.com)  
**To:** [David Moore](#)  
**Subject:** Re: Polling Locations: Select Board Deliberations  
**Date:** Wednesday, November 10, 2021 7:42:57 AM

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David,

All looks good to me.

Beth

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On 2021-11-09 15:16, David Moore wrote:

|  
Dear Dave, Beth, Mel, Connie and Cathy,

I am sending this e-mail out to you on behalf of Deb Bakie and I jointly. As you can see, we have been working on behalf of the Board to help organize and prepare an upcoming discussion of the Board on polling locations. We are preparing to make recommendations, but are seeking your input on our initial thoughts and draft recommendations.

Can you please take a look and get back with your thoughts or any concerns you may have? All input we receive by Friday morning we will be able to incorporate on our report back memo to the Select Board.

We look forward to hearing from you and thank you.

David M.

David Moore  
Town Administrator

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10 Bunker Hill Avenue  
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[www.StrathamNH.gov](http://www.StrathamNH.gov)

**From:** [David Emanuel](#)  
**To:** [David Moore](#); [conniea@me.com](mailto:conniea@me.com); [carwarner@gmail.com](mailto:carwarner@gmail.com); [beth@ecm-design.com](mailto:beth@ecm-design.com); [mel.mcgrail](mailto:mel.mcgrail)  
**Cc:** [Deborah Bakie](#)  
**Subject:** RE: Polling Locations: Select Board Deliberations - Emanuel Feedback  
**Date:** Friday, November 12, 2021 11:09:04 AM  
**Attachments:** [image001.png](#)  
[Memo to Supervisors and Moderators on Polling Locations 11-9-2021.pdf](#)

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David,

The communication and intent of solidifying venues for polling locations per type of election makes sense to me.

I support the concept and proposal outlined in the memo dated November 9, 2021 and do not have any further comments at this time.

I have a Town Council meeting in Durham on Monday November 15, 2021 and can not attend the BOS meeting for the discussion.

Please contact me with any questions or further questions.

DE

Dave Emanuel, MPA, EFO, CFO  
Fire Chief - Durham Fire Department  
51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824  
[david.emanuel@unh.edu](mailto:david.emanuel@unh.edu)  
(603) 862-1426 (Office) - (603) 397-7447 (Mobile)  
"Our Family Protecting Your Family"



*Please note the email address change as the Durham Fire Department migrated from the Town of Durham to University of New Hampshire IT platform on May 27, 2020. The best email address for Dave Emanuel from this point forward is [david.emanuel@unh.edu](mailto:david.emanuel@unh.edu). Please update your address book.*

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**From:** David Moore <dmoore@StrathamNH.gov>  
**Sent:** Wednesday, November 10, 2021 10:03 AM  
**To:** David Emanuel <David.Emanuel@unh.edu>; [conniea@me.com](mailto:conniea@me.com); [carwarner@gmail.com](mailto:carwarner@gmail.com); [beth@ecm-design.com](mailto:beth@ecm-design.com); [mel.mcgrail@comcast.net](mailto:mel.mcgrail@comcast.net)>  
**Cc:** Deborah Bakie <DBakie@StrathamNH.gov>  
**Subject:** FW: Polling Locations: Select Board Deliberations

**CAUTION:** This email originated from outside of the University System. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Folks,

Yesterday, in my haste to get this is out at the end of the day, I neglected to copy Deb (co-author of



the memo) and I also did not complete the “to” section of the memo with your names. I apologize for the oversight. No other content in the memo has changed.

Deb and I look forward to hearing from you.

David M.

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**From:** David Moore

**Sent:** Tuesday, November 09, 2021 3:17 PM

**To:** David Emanuel <[David.Emanuel@unh.edu](mailto:David.Emanuel@unh.edu)>; Beth Dupell <[beth@ecm-design.com](mailto:beth@ecm-design.com)>; [mkmcgrail@comcast.net](mailto:mkmcgrail@comcast.net); [conniea@me.com](mailto:conniea@me.com); [carwarner@gmail.com](mailto:carwarner@gmail.com)

**Subject:** Polling Locations: Select Board Deliberations

Dear Dave, Beth, Mel, Connie and Cathy,

I am sending this e-mail out to you on behalf of Deb Bakie and I jointly. As you can see, we have been working on behalf of the Board to help organize and prepare an upcoming discussion of the Board on polling locations. We are preparing to make recommendations, but are seeking your input on our initial thoughts and draft recommendations.

Can you please take a look and get back with your thoughts or any concerns you may have? All input we receive by Friday morning we will be able to incorporate on our report back memo to the Select Board.

We look forward to hearing from you and thank you.

David M.

David Moore  
Town Administrator

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**From:** [Cathy Warner](#)  
**To:** [Deborah Bakie](#); [David Moore](#)  
**Cc:** [mel mcgrail](#); [C Aubin-Adams](#)  
**Subject:** Fwd: Polling  
**Date:** Thursday, November 11, 2021 1:38:23 PM

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Sent from my iPhone

Begin forwarded message:

**From:** Cathy Warner <carwarner@gmail.com>  
**Date:** November 11, 2021 at 1:30:51 PM EST  
**To:** carwarner@gmail.com  
**Subject:** **Polling Locations**

Date: November 11, 2021

Re: **Select Board Designated Polling Locations for the Future**

Deb and David,  
Although we feel that the decision to hold elections off site (from the Town of Stratham Municipal Center) is what may be recommend to the Select Board, we do appreciate the opportunity to have our thoughts and concerns heard and shared to them before a final decision is made.

That said, the Supervisors of the Checklist are unanimously opposed to holding the elections off site. Below are some of our thoughts and reasons for not moving the elections. We tried to address all your points and observations.

**Background Observation Points**

#1 Agree, no matter where elections are held, keep it consistent.

#2 Rather than moving the polling place, if at all possible work on the traffic flow, circulation and parking at the MC.

#3 Agree, historically the MC has been an adequate space and since the Verification of the Checklist has been completed, we now have a more accurate voter list reflecting our numbers.

#4 Agree, the Town shouldn't need to close or limit the MC hours to set up for elections.

#5 Layouts...if we are within the law for the space, but tight, then perhaps we can rethink layouts and patterns before deciding on a move.

#6 We disagree with SMS being more comfortable. At peak times voters were parking on Gifford Farm Road. Voters were still in long lines outside in the cold. The hallway between the gymnasium and cafeteria became very congested at peak times. The outside door in the cafeteria was open to allow people in to register and it was drafty and noisy. People were coming in and out through both that door and the hallway door throughout the day. At the end of the night, Supervisor materials must be returned and locked in our cabinets at the MC. It is important that the Supervisors are safe when doing so.

#7 There is always significant effort by police, staff, volunteers and DPW for any election. This is the case no matter where the elections are held. Kudos to all for their work ethic...it truly is a team effort. No matter where the elections are held, the safety of the voters and election officials is paramount. Perhaps a larger study of traffic flow, use of roads for parking, and parking lot options at the MC and Cushing property could be helpful. Can the Smyk property be used as well?

#8 Of major concern to the Supervisors, if the elections are moved off site, is not the amount of work, but the integrity of the voting materials. This includes the Ballot Machine, Absentee Ballots, Ballot Drop Box, as well as the election forms, files and records the Supervisors need to access throughout the day. Elections will be closely monitored in today's political climate. Can we adequately keep the integrity of all these materials when they are transported and offsite?

#9 Agree for any location...volunteers are critical to our success and their safety is important.

#10 This is true...but we need to do what is best for the Town of Stratham.

### **SAU and Local School District View**

#4 There was some confusion among us as to the statement, “The Town’s desire to hold elections at the school.” Were the Town’s voters surveyed?

### **Draft Recommendation**

To us it doesn’t make sense to have one election at the MC and all the rest at the school. Again, we are opposed to moving any of the elections from the MC, but if they are moved, for continuity, we think all of them should be off site.

### **Explanation of Draft Recommendation Details**

The statement made regarding keeping the Town Election at the MC holds true for all elections.

### **Recommended Next Steps for the Select Board**

It is our hope that the Select Board hears and considers all input regarding where Stratham’s voters will go to cast their ballots and votes. We do want it known to the board that the Supervisors are opposed to a move at this time.

Thank you,

Supervisors of the Checklist:

Melanie McGrail

Connie Aubin-Adams

Cathy Warner

Sent from my iPad