

City of Alexandria, Virginia
FY 2024 Proposed Operating Budget & CIP
Budget Questions & Answers

April 5, 2023

Question: Would the proposed funding increase for election mailers be mandated by state law to continue at that level? What is staff's recommendation to replace the election mailer request with a new position in the Office of Voter Registration and Elections?

Response:

City-Wide Mailer

Currently, the Office of Voter Registration and Elections sends an informational voter guide to all registered voters prior to presidential elections. This mailing provides non-partisan information regarding early voting information, identification requirements and sample ballots. The goal of the mailing is to provide up-to-date information directly to voters when the laws governing elections can change frequently. This has the potential to decrease misinformation. A secondary benefit is that it helps to keep the list of registered voters up to date.

The office has proposed increasing the frequency of the citywide mailing prior to all general elections (once per year). The office has confirmed with the Virginia Department of Elections that there is no legal requirement to send or continue sending these informational mailings, at any level.

The risks associated with not sending out city-wide mailers, prior to every general election include:

- Possible perception that the city “picks and chooses” which general elections to send the informational mailers.
- Fewer opportunities to contact voters directly.

From the perspective of our office, the risk of not staffing absentee duties with a full-time position outweighs the benefits of informational mailers. Therefore, the office respectfully gives the absentee coordinator position the highest priority.

Absentee Coordinator Position

Since 2020, there has been a significant increase in absentee voting above previous electoral cycles, with the most recent Presidential, Gubernatorial, and Congressional elections having respective increases of 418%, 259%, and 96% in the number of absentee ballots received. These increases come alongside significant legislative changes to how absentee voting is conducted, including the maintenance of a permanent absentee voter list, the reporting of absentee results by precinct, the curing of absentee ballots, and the implementation of drop boxes.

In place of the proposed budget's funding for additional city-wide mailers in advance of general elections, the Office of Voter Registration and Elections request funding for a full-time (1.00 FTE) Absentee Voter Coordinator position. The positions duties would include:

- Maintenance of permanent absentee voter list, as required by Virginia law
- Precinct-level absentee reporting
- Oversight of drop boxes
- Processing and sending of by-mail ballots

- Receiving and curing ballots

The position could be fully supported with the reallocation of funding already proposed for the mailer (\$50,800) and an offsetting reduction to temporary/contractual services (\$27,378) for duties absorbed by the new position. This would represent the first time the department saw an increase in full-time employees since July 2005.

If the requested position is not granted, it will require the office to continue rely on part-time/seasonal staff. A temporary staffer had been hired previously during the 2019-2020 election cycle but has since resigned from the position. The risks associated with relying on part-time/seasonal staff include:

- Increase demand for full-time staff to train and supervise AB duties. This also reduces staffing contingencies during elections for unexpected absences due to illness.
- Possible decrease in accuracy and efficiency in AB processing. This could lead to more negative implications such as a loss of citizen trust in election administration, and therefore legitimacy of government.