

# May vs. November Local Elections

The Manassas Park Experience

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# Background

- In May 2006, picked up and championed cause initiated by former well-respected council member in response to low voter turnout at May elections
- May elections in the City of Manassas Park historically and routinely drew a relatively low percentage of registered voters to the polls as compared to November elections
  - 2000-2006
    - 8 – 12% of registered voters turned out for May elections
    - 30 – 62% of registered voters turned out for November elections
- Results seem to be consistent regardless of the extent and vigor of advertisement (to get out the vote) and campaigning (by candidates)
- Given that local elections arguably have the most direct impact on citizens, goal was to align City elections with State and National elections to take advantage of the greater turnout at the polls.
- Feedback from other Registrars who have made this conversion was positive.

# Argued Pros

- Achieves higher turnout of voters.
- Reduces costs by reducing the number of election/voting events (est. cost of May election: \$4,425).
- Reduces contention with other City departments/organizations for facilities:
  - Schools: Less conflict with schedules - Schools try to schedule teachers' workday in November to correspond with election day.
  - Parks & Rec: One less day impact to operations at Rec Center
- Reduces period(s) of time when campaign signs are prevalent throughout the city in common areas and roadbeds.
- Reduces number of days required for Officers of Elections. Registered voters who fill these positions will have fewer requirements to take time off of work and away from family and other personal commitments.
- It “worked” in other jurisdictions.

# Argued Cons

- Requires staff effort (primarily Registrar and City Attorney) to initiate and execute the change.
  - Submittal to Department of Justice for approval
  - Charter change
  - Public hearings
  - Notifying the State Board of Elections
- Affects duration of next term for Mayor and City Council.
- Increases concentration of election activities in November:
  - Increased concentration of political signage along roadways.
  - Increased concentration of workload for Registrar's office (more votes to count at one time).
- More filings for local candidates in the area of contribution and expenditure reports (May has 3 filing dates; November has 7 filing dates)
- Potential to reduce local election intensity:
  - Fear of under votes for local candidates
  - Potential to “lose” local candidates amongst Federal and State candidates.

# Results

- Voter turnout increased
- Logistical objectives achieved:
  - Saved money
  - Made it more convenient to vote
  - Reduced number of days for election workers to take off work
  - Smaller window for sign clutter
- But two major factors...
  - Undervote is real
  - Concern about “informed vote” for local candidates is real
    - Does the increase in overall votes mean we had many more “informed votes”
  - Is the undervote good or bad?
    - Means someone didn’t vote, but perhaps it’s because they didn’t feel informed enough to vote.
- My experiences
  - Ran as an independent in 2008
  - Enjoyed the “extra attention” – News Channel 8, press coverage, etc.
  - Felt overtaken by the Presidential election of 2008 – didn’t feel as bad in 2010
  - Talked with some people who were surprised to hear there was a local election
  - Talked with some people who were clearly voting a party line – didn’t care who was on local ticket (Note: Had an alleged non-resident ride the Democratic ticket to landslide victory)
  - Had several engaging dialogues with people who were clearly informed and wanted to learn more before casting their vote
- I championed the move from May to November for a multitude of reasons. In hindsight, there were some consequences that I didn’t predict. If I had it to do over again, I would have stayed with May elections.

# Backup

Year	May	Registered Voters	Num Votes Cast	% Voters who Voted	Nov	Registered Voters	Num Votes Cast	% Voters who Voted
2010						6218	1813	29%
2008						6218	4156	67%
2006		5333	587	11%				
2004		5119	570	11%		5391	3331	62%
2002		4962	375	8%		5022	1337	27%
2000		4073	488	12%		4489	2622	58%