

Stow Annual Town Meeting – July 11, 2020

Article 41
Sponsor: Town Clerk
Vote required: Majority

Article 41. Amend General Bylaw-Town Election Date

To see if the town will vote to amend the Stow General Bylaws, Article 1, Section 2 to read in its entirety as written below or to take any action there to.

SECTION 2. The annual town meeting for the election of officers and such other matters as may be voted on the official ballot shall be held on the Saturday of May of each year, immediately following the start of the annual meeting, provided that in no event shall such election be held later than the third Saturday in May.

*Annotated version: Add - **Bold Underline** Delete – ~~strike through~~*

SECTION 2. *The annual town meeting for the election of officers and such other matters as may be voted on the official ballot shall be held on the ~~Tuesday~~ **Saturday** of May of each year, ~~which falls on the eighth day following the date of the~~ **immediately following** start of the annual meeting, provided that in no event shall such election be held later than the ~~last Tuesday~~ **third Saturday** in May.*

TOWN CLERK’S RATIONALE

1. Provide a safer environment for the students and school staff.

Holding elections when school is in session causes concerns to school staff, administration and parents when ‘strangers’ aka voters are at the school. Typically all the exterior school doors are locked while students are in the building. On Election Day the doors to the music / special education wing are open. Voters are parking in the school parking lot near the pre-school-kindergarten playground.

2. Provide more parking spaces and more convenient parking for voters

There are a limited number of spaces for voters when school is in session. We will be able to utilize both the front parking area and the parking area off of Hartley Rd.

3. Eliminate issues related to student drop off/pick up

In general (*PK has different drop-off procedures*) parents stay in their cars for drop-off/pick-up. They start lining up 10-15 minutes before dismissal and the process is usually completed 10-15 after dismissal. The cars are lined up along the sidewalk in front of the school and flow out onto Great Rd. This makes it difficult for voters to enter the parking lot.

Approximate Schedule*

8:20am-8:55	Morning drop-off PK-5	11:00-11:30	PK ½ day pick up
11:50-12:20	½ Kindergarten pick-up	2:00-2:30	PK full day pick-up
2:50-3:20	Afternoon pick-up	<i>* allows for 15 minutes before and after start/end of school</i>	

4. Provide a consistent polling location within the school

State elections and primaries are held in the gym/café and the local elections are held in the music rooms at the front of the school. Voters forget which door to go to for the different elections – no matter how many flags & signs we use to direct them to the proper entrance.

5. Using the Music / Special Services wing displaces all music classes and the special education classroom

Instruments, risers, rugs, and other classroom furniture must be dismantled / moved. Students with special needs are displaced from their classroom, their routines are changed and they don’t have access to the

specialized equipment (swing, mat, exercise items, etc). Teachers are gracious about making accommodations but we are sensitive to the extra planning/work required of them and the custodial staff.

6. Why can't the schools close for local elections?

The school district has been scheduling professional days or taking a day off for State Elections and Primaries for several years. Each day the school is closed extends the school year later into June. Since local election turn-out is usually very low it seems unreasonable to ask schools to close for the local elections. We can fit the local election setup in the music wing.

7. Can we hold large elections at the school & small elections at the Community Center?

It is not reasonable to change the location of the polling place for different elections. The MGLs requirements would make that option costly for the Town and confusing for voters. Every voter must be notified every time their polling location is changed. At the March 2020 Primary some confused voters went to Hale School – and we haven't voted there since 2012.

8. Can we split the precincts into 2 locations?

- a. We would still need to use a school as one of the locations so it would not solve that issue.
- b. It would confuse/anger many voters. (see note above about Hale School or please come witness how upset voters are when they get in the wrong precinct line & have to move over 3 feet to a new table to check in. We let them skip the other precinct line and they're still annoyed – imagine if they had to get in their car and go to a different location.
- c. There many benefits having both precincts at one location; related but not limited to, scheduling, set-up, break-down, costs, flexibility, etc. I would be happy to go into more detail if asked.

9. Why isn't the Pompo Community Center an adequate location for both precincts?

Before the Community Center was built I was asked if Elections could be held there. My answer has never changed and it is still no. We handle approx. 300 voters an hour during state elections. Pompo Community Center can not accommodate the traffic at state elections. It might be able to handle the traffic for one precinct during large elections but please refer to #8 why splitting the precincts between two locations is not ideal & refer to #7 why just the small elections can't be held there. As I have continually stated, Pompo does not have ample parking to accommodate a large election. There is no safe parking on Great Road in front of the Community Center in either direction. Remember what it was like when Pompo School housed grades K-5 and there was a school event... every parking space was filled, cars were parked all over the grass, behind the school, up on sidewalks, and all along Great Road. Now we have decreased the amount of parking spots AND added our first responders into the mix of a traffic nightmare. Center School has the most parking areas available: two lots at Center; along both sides of Great Rd.; along Hartley Rd., at Hale School when school is not in session, at the old Fire Station corner of Hartley Rd and Crescent St.; at Town Hall; at Town Building and even at the Library if needed.