

Q&A: Municipal Elections During COVID-19

Q: Voting by mail is highly encouraged due to COVID-19. How does this work?

A: There are 2 methods of voting by mail during the COVID-19 situation; Absentee or Early Voting by Mail.

Absentee Voting: In order to be eligible to vote by absentee ballot in Massachusetts, normally a voter must be prevented from voting at their polling place on Election Day, due to:

- Absence from the voter's city or town on Election Day; or
- Physical disability; or
- Religious belief.

However, due to COVID-19, amended Chapter 45 of the Acts of 2020 permits any person taking precautions related to COVID-19 in response to a declared State of Emergency shall also be eligible to request an absentee ballot.

Absentee ballot applications can be downloaded [here](#)

Early Voting by Mail: Typically, early voting is not permitted for local elections. However, Chapter 45 of the Acts of 2020 as amended states: Notwithstanding section 25B of chapter 54 of the General Laws or any other general or special law to the contrary, any eligible voter may vote early by mail for any annual or special municipal or state election held on or before June 30, 2021.

(b) Any qualified voter wanting to early vote by mail may file with their local election official an application for an early voting ballot. Local election officials shall send early voting by mail.

(c) Local election officials may substitute absentee ballots for early voting ballots for those voters requesting to vote early by mail in municipal elections. **Early voting by mail applications can be downloaded [here](#)**

There will be no physical early in-person voting at town hall for the Annual Election.

If you cannot download either application, a hand-written or typed note with your signature can be sent to the Town Clerk. You can mail it to 1 Avenue A, Turners Falls to the attention of Deb Bourbeau, or scan and email to townclerk@montague-ma.gov

Note: A photo of the request taken with your phone and emailed is also acceptable.

Various forms of communicating your request is accepted for either the absentee or early voting ballot however, the request must be in writing and must be signed by the applicant. (No calls, voicemails, etc.)

Q: What is the different between Absentee Voting and Early Voting by Mail?

A: If one votes by absentee, and later changes their mind once the ballot has been returned, the voter may appear in person on Election Day to vote, as long as the absentee ballot has not yet been cast by the Election Staff. Early voting by Mail does not allow this option. Once the early voting by mail ballot has been returned, there are no other chances for the voter to change their mind.

Accurate records are kept by the Town Clerks office on who requests absentee ballots and early voting ballots.

Q: Is there a recommended time to allow ballots to be mailed back and forth?

A: The “official” deadline to request a ballot by mail is Wednesday, June 16th by 5:00 PM. Completed ballots must be received by the town clerk’s office no later than 7 PM on Tuesday, June 22nd, (the close of polls on Election Day). However, it can take up to two weeks to request a ballot by mail and receive it under normal circumstances even if all transactions occur within Montague. With COVID-19 restrictions, this process is even slower. Therefore – it is important to request your ballot as soon as possible if you plan to vote by mail.

Q: Does the town have a ballot drop off box?

A: Yes. It is located in front of Town Hall, 1 Avenue A, Turners Falls. Voters are highly encouraged to use the drop off box in order to process all ballots in a timely fashion & to avoid any delay using the postal service.

Q: When are Absentee Ballots and Vote by Mail Ballots counted?

A: All absentee and vote by mail ballots are cast and counted by the poll workers on Election Day and are included into the final tallies.

Q: What is the last day to register to vote for the new election date of June 22nd?

A: Saturday, June 12th. This is for anyone new to town, or if you have never registered to vote before.

Since town hall is closed on Saturdays, there will be voter registration forms along with a depository box in the Lobby of the Montague Police Station located at 180 Turnpike Rd in the village of Turners Falls.

Q: Does MA have online voter registration?

A: Yes, one can register on line at www.registertovotema.com, as long as you have a signature on file with the Registry of Motor Vehicles, which could be a MA driver's license or a State ID card.

Q: Can 16 and 17 year olds register to vote?

A: Yes, but it's only a pre-registration. By law, you cannot vote until age 18. If one is turning 18 after the last day of voter registration but before the election, is it highly recommended you pre-register. This will allow you to vote on Election Day. This can be done on line at www.registertovotema.com, or download a voter registration form [here](#) and mail to the Town Clerk's Office, 1 Avenue A, Turners Falls, MA 01376 or scan and email to townclerk@montague-ma.gov

Additional questions regarding the upcoming Annual Election scheduled for Tuesday, June 22nd should be sent to the Town Clerk, Deb Bourbeau at 413-863-3200, ext. 203 or townclerk@montague-ma.gov