

Late Backup

Item No. 37

10/1/2015

Initiated by Law Department

RESOLUTION NO.

WHEREAS, the United States Elections Project reports that voter turnout in the November 2014 national election was 36.6 percent of eligible voters, but the reported turnout for Texas was among the lowest of all fifty states at 28.3 percent; and

WHEREAS, the Texas Secretary of State and the Travis County Elections Division report that 40.4 percent of eligible voters voted in the most recent City of Austin municipal election in November 2014, and 15.6 percent voted in the subsequent December 2014 runoff election; and

WHEREAS, the United States ranks in the bottom 20 percent of nations in turnout in presidential elections, and even lower in congressional, state, and local elections, and studies have attributed these low turnout rates in part to unnecessary obstacles to voting including restrictions on when and where to vote; and

WHEREAS, the Council is vitally concerned with instituting voting policies that will engage City residents and increase civic participation in our local election process; and

WHEREAS, the Council is empowered to review all local practices that may affect voting in municipal elections, and may take action to promote voting and strengthen existing voting efforts related to increased voter participation; and

WHEREAS, the Council may enact laws and procedures for local elections that meet or surpass federal and state election standards and that encourage increased voter participation; and

WHEREAS, the Council believes that maximizing early voting hours and voting locations would facilitate increased access to the polls; and

WHEREAS, the City Clerk has had discussions with the Travis County Elections Division to identify locations and early voting hours that fulfill the objective of increasing voter participation via easier access to the polls, all to be secured within the confines of any election services contracts currently in effect and within current budget allocations; and

WHEREAS, the City Manager has approved a request by the City Clerk and the Travis County Elections Division to ensure that City-owned facilities slated for use as early voting branch locations can maintain expanded voting hours that are standardized with all locations citywide; and

WHEREAS, the City Clerk has had discussions with the Travis County Elections Division to facilitate negotiations with privately-owned properties in order to establish additional voting locations with expanded and standardized voting hours.

NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF AUSTIN:

The intent of the Council is to exceed the minimum requirements of the Texas Election Code for early voting locations and hours, specifically by: (1) authorizing early voting to be conducted during the same days and hours at all locations citywide, and (2) establishing early voting branch locations both at traditionally-used sites as well as at sites that have been identified as being in low voter turnout areas or in areas otherwise identified as needing additional branch locations.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The intent of the Council is that these initiatives to expand voting locations and hours be effected both at City-owned facilities and at voting locations situated on privately-owned properties.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

The Council wishes to commend the City Clerk for the large amount of proactive work already done in the areas of data accumulation and collaboration with the Travis County Elections Division to effect changes related to the Council's initiatives for expanding early voting opportunities.

ADOPTED: _____, 2015

ATTEST: _____

Jannette S. Goodall
City Clerk