



**2023-2024 MCC Governing Board
Elections & Nominations Committee
December 11, 2023 – 5:30 p.m.**

MINUTES

Committee Members Present: *in-person:* Kristina Groennings, Chair; Katie Gorka; Eleanor Ague
Committee Members Absent: Ari Ghasemian
Other Board Members Present: Rasheq Rahman
MCC Staff Present: Betsy May-Salazar, Executive Director; Holly Novak, Executive Assistant; Matt Hockensmith, Comptroller; Mike Fisher, Programs Director
Guests: None.

CONVENE MEETING

ENC Chair Kristina Groennings convened a meeting of the Elections & Nominations Committee of MCC Governing Board on December 11, 2023, at 5:43 p.m. No changes were requested to the agenda; it was adopted by acclamation. An announcement was made about the meeting being audio-recorded.

REVIEW PROPOSED CHANGES TO ENC POLICIES & PROCEDURES

Proposed changes to the Policies and Procedures were considered at ENC meeting on October 11. The following three minor changes are recommended because they reflect current practices:

I. Absentee Voting

3. Absentee ballots may be requested in person, by email, ~~or by~~ telephone ~~or~~ online. A voter who requests an absentee ballot may also request absentee ballots for other family members in the immediate household.
4. Absentee voting will take place at the MCC's Ingleside facility ~~and at the Old Firehouse Center,~~ or any other location designated by the Governing Board.
5. ~~Absentee voters shall complete and sign an Application for Absentee Ballot, which will include an affidavit to the effect that they are qualified to vote.~~

Discussion:

1. There was a question about adequate documentation for when people pick-up ballots. Process explanation: when a person comes in to pick up a ballot, they must sign-in with their name, address and the number of ballots being requested. Requests are filed alphabetically; every time someone comes in, it is checked against that list. If someone asked again for ballots at the same address, we would be alert to it and decline because they already received them. In good faith, we 'cast a wide net' to encourage broad public participation in the Governing Board election by not imposing barriers. The validation of residency in the tax district happens on the back end once the ballot is returned as an actual vote.

2. A question was raised about whether Absentee Voting started during COVID-19 as an accommodation at the time. It was explained that Absentee Voting in the annual MCC Governing Board election has been offered for many years as a standard practice.

With all questions addressed thoroughly, the following MOTION was put forward:

MOTION: To approve proposed changes to ENC Policies & Procedures, for consideration by MCC Governing Board on January 24, 2024.

Approved by a vote of three: Kristina Groennings, Katie Gorka, Eleanor Ague – all voting “AYE.”

Ari Ghasemian was absent.

NEXT STEP: Following a vote by the full board on January 24, 2024, the revised ENC Policies & Procedures will be implemented for the 2024 Governing Board election.

REVIEW PROPOSED KEY DATES – 2024 ELECTION **remarks by Executive Director May-Salazar*

The proposed timeline for 2024 Governing Board election was explained. This serves to align sequential information that gets published in our marketing communications from January through May 2024.

- **Candidate Petition packets** will be available starting on Wednesday, Feb 7. The deadline for interested persons to submit their completed candidate petition with signatures is Monday, March 11. That gives MCC staff one week to fully vet the information submitted and make sure everything is in compliance.
- **Candidate Orientation** (for adults and youth together) will be Saturday, March 16; in-person at MCC.
- **March 27 - Absentee Voting begins.** We expanded the time span for preparation of materials because we must make sure every candidate’s statements are the right length and finalized. We must have publicity photos to layout the candidate posters. We will ensure that every outgoing Absentee Voting ballot packet contains consistent, final presentation materials about the candidates.
- **Candidate Meet-and-Greet:** various options of an ideal event to provide for the candidates to be present.
Last year: SpringFest was targeted to little kids and parents; they weren’t really able to stop and meet the candidates. It was also a fairly small event.
Better idea: Aiming for spring timeframe, the Parking Lot Sale seems a better opportunity for candidates to meet the public. It attracts a lot of people, it is more casual, and people are naturally walking around and talking to one another. Rather than having individual candidate ‘booths,’ there would be a section with candidates present - perhaps near the coffee stand. People can take a break, get their coffee and meet with the candidates. There is a rain date scheduled, so we could move the entire event if necessary.
- **Regarding youth-specific candidate meet-and-greet:** Last year, we offered “Open Game Night” at OFC– it had weak attendance. We are not sure whether it’s worth doing in that format again. Perhaps it should be a competition or tournament - something to attract more youth to be present.

TWO PROPOSALS:

1. Having ALL candidates at the Parking Lot Sale (adult & youth) – all candidates together (it attracts a wide audience). This is a robust opportunity to mingle with all the candidates at once.
OR...
2. Separate youth “meet-and-greet” event (game night) – augmented and elevated by some form of competitive tournament to try to attract more youth to come interact with the youth candidates.

Discussion:

1. A question was raised about how best to actively collaborate with high schools – perhaps announcing the youth candidate opportunity in an assembly. The schools offer “Pep Rallies,” but those are typically at the end of the day when a large portion of the student body goes home. Broadcast announcements (morning news program) would be a big ask to have so many youth candidates mentioned in a 5-minute daily news program (would not serve to actually “meet” the candidates). McLean H.S. has an afternoon news show but teachers can choose whether or not to have students watch it at the end of the day because it takes up 10 minutes of class time. We are very limited in reaching out to the student body through a ‘news show.’ A newsletter does go out from McLean H.S. Career Center. We have announced MCC’s Youth Ambassador program by this method. We could potentially have an announcement to recruit people to run for MCC Governing Board. It’s unknown what percentage of the student body actually looks at it – but the newsletter does go out to every student at the school.

ACTION ITEM: Mike Fisher will pursue at the schools to see what is available for either the candidates to push out their message, or to actually have some kind of meet-and-greet.

2. As to how youth find out about MCC Governing Board: word-of-mouth + PIO marketing has greatest influence. Youth board member Eleanor Ague found out about the opportunity through previous youth member, Sarah Tran. And when the postcard arrived in the mail, she knew it was legitimate and decided to run. Regarding Youth Ambassador applications: after it was announced in the school newsletter, that's when the applicant numbers rose to a huge volume incoming from McLean H.S.
3. Meet-and-greet would not be ideal on-site at the schools because students are able to vote for *both* Langley H.S. and McLean H.S. candidates, as well as Basis Independent and other private schools also voting in the MCC Governing Board election. Therefore, should be something that is more inclusive of multiple schools.
4. Offering a different type of youth-oriented gathering: perhaps it could be a Langley vs. McLean Quiz Night or variety show. The concept of such a competition is up for consideration. Game night at OFC last year was the best option at the time (though it had little attendance; only friends of the candidates). A better approach would be trying to elevate this event to entice more people to come.

"AP's Out Party" is different timing than the election: the party happens at OFC in mid-May at the end of AP's. We're not sure what it's going to look like this year because we are not committing this year's Youth Ambassadors to having the same thing. If they take us in a different direction, we will see where they go.

5. Parking Lot Sale benefits MCC's overall election goals: We might find more success, more variety of people, and reach a wider audience by having the youth candidates at the Parking Lot Sale than having them at Game Night. Also, with adults there, they will be exposed to the fact that there are youth candidates and they may go home and push their kids to think about it. MCC's Parking Lot Sale is the biggest program event that draws a sufficiently large audience during Spring timeframe. It attracts adults and young kids, and many teenagers also attend with their parents. This would yield more exposure to fellow teens than they would have at Game Night. Advertising to the high schools about the MCC Parking Lot Sale will be necessary.

ACTION ITEMS: Have more robust advertisement to 'Meet-the-Candidates' at Parking Lot Sale. It has a dual-purpose to invite more people to the event, as well as greater exposure for the candidates. Explore announcing in school newsletters – to make sure the high schools know about this opportunity. The Youth Ambassadors can also help to advertise this.

Summary by Executive Director May-Salazar: So, are we saying we are going to take the separate youth event off-the-table and have all adult and youth candidates be present at the Parking Lot Sale?

YES- there was general agreement by the committee that this is the best way to go because we don't have a separate youth event concept fully-developed at this point.

- **May 13 – Absentee Voting will end.** This is two days ahead of last year's deadline in order to give time to prepare for in-person voting BOTH on Friday night as well as Saturday at McLean Day event.
- **Friday Night Rides – voting available for adult and youth candidates**
Background: At 10/11 ENC meeting, Youth Board member Eleanor Ague proposed that in-person voting for teens be offered at Friday night rides because that's when most teens are present. They tend not to come back on Saturday; we are missing a key opportunity to connect with youth.

MCC staff discussed this request in terms of resultant changes in the logistics of both Friday Night Rides and Saturday McLean Day event:

1. If in-person voting were offered on Friday night, it would be for both: youth voting for youth candidates *AND* adults voting for adult candidates.
2. The League of Women Voters must evaluate their capacity to:
 - a. adequately recruit volunteers to staff and manage these Friday evening hours at the

voting tent in addition to all hours throughout the day on Saturday

- b. coordinate a larger vote-tabulation team on Saturday evening to handle a greater amount of total ballots cast, which is likely.

League of Women Voters responded back to MCC that they are able to handle this increased workload by recruiting sufficient respective teams for Friday night and Saturday.

3. The voting tent must be well-lit on Friday night to facilitate visibility to look at the annotated computer printouts, and interaction with the public in handling ballots & affidavit paperwork. Special Events Manager Catherine Nesbitt confirmed that four 800-watt light fixtures will be placed in the voting tent on Friday night to provide excellent lighting.
 4. Overall arrangement of individual tables/tents along “Candidate Row” should be revised to have fewer placements on Friday night/Saturday. We propose teens being represented at Friday Night Rides with voting from 4:00 to 8:00 p.m. And on Saturday, have adult candidates present, with voting available from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Whenever voting is open, ALL people can vote (youth and adults). This plan will facilitate a better layout of fewer candidate tables which are more concentrated to the core audience who is likely to be there. We will encourage the candidates to be present just once, and for the entire time – which yields appropriate return. Last year, all day on Saturday was too long. An empty campaign table reflects poorly on MCC as well as on that individual.
 5. Voting hours: A question was raised about why the hours of voting would be less than the actual event time of Friday Night Rides (2:00 to 10:00 p.m.) The plan is for Friday night voting is to be 4 hours (4:00 to 8:00 p.m.) in order to give teen candidates adequate advance time to arrive to Lewinsville Park after school and get set-up. These are the core hours without it going too late (when people really aren’t paying attention to voting). Also, we are trying help the League of Women Voters team finish within a reasonable time in order to be able to come back on Saturday morning to resume efforts. Friday Night Voting will affect our logistics of staffing, including involving Governing Board members to be present that evening.
 6. Signage & information about voting: We will have signage about voting in the designated hours on both days. It will be widely promoted in all public communication about the opportunities for public participation in the MCC Governing Board election.
- **Candidate Orientation with Executive Director**: Orientation with the Executive Director for all newly-elected board members will take place immediately prior to May 22 Regular Meeting. The final 2023-2024 meeting (June 5) is when the 2024-2025 Board will be sworn-in at the Pledge ceremony.

Following this detailed discussion about the “Key Dates,” no further questions or concerns were raised.

DISCUSSION OF CONCEPT: VIABILITY /BENEFITS OF ONLINE VOTING (FY25 OR BEYOND)

At 10/11 ENC meeting, the topic was raised about possibly offering online voting – for potential to increase community participation in the Governing Board election. Youth Board member Eleanor Ague commented on the difficulty of getting teen voters to come into MCC or to attend McLean Day. Offering online voting would result in a big impact on increased participation by high school youth demographic.

It was recommended that MCC staff research the process other county entities use for online voting, with an idea of looking toward 2025-2026 election for considering a possible change in MCC’s method. FCPA, FCPL and Reston Community Center all have publicly elected boards. Reston CC is most similar to MCC, yet their election process is quite different in scope. **Chair Groennings stated that based on initial research it’s definitely off-the-table for the 2025 Governing Board election but that we should not preclude it entirely for future years.**

Remarks by Executive Director May-Salazar: It is something we can continue to consider in the future. Holly Novak did a lot of research on various possibilities. Reston CC is our closest model; but there are some key differences in what we do vs. what Reston does:

1. Biggest difference: Reston CC literally changed their ByLaws in order to get to the point of doing this. They changed it to allow only one vote per household vs. everybody voting [in one household]. The reason is to reduce complications for the IT vendor: you literally must have one specific I.D. number per household to be able to issue ballots correctly (otherwise it would require complexity of multiple I.D. numbers, assigned per-person).
2. Reston CC does not have teen board members. In contrast, MCC has two elections happening simultaneously: youth / adults. Multiple people are able to vote tied to a particular household (whether you own the property, or if you are a renter, or if you live there as a family member or occupant). This is an important aspect of MCC's public-focused election style. It is not clear if it would be to our benefit to create limits on household participation in order to accommodate online voting method.
3. Reston CC election is a "Preference Poll" – it is 'ranked-choice' voting.
4. Reston CC's board is seated by Fairfax Co. BOS, similar to MCC.
5. Reston CC does not have a voting "event" such as McLean Day. It is simply a period of time when the online preference poll remains open.

Discussion:

1. What is the big advantage of online voting? Is it for cost savings?

NO – it would not be a cost savings. Reston's costs for software is \$6K; everything else is ancillary. Our costs are not that far off in what we spend compared to Reston, once we've compiled all our numbers. The main factor is the desire for more participation and whether we would achieve greater public involvement if voting were online.

2. I really liked your argument that the voting process is something that actually brings people into the MCC building.

Yes – and that is Holly Novak's wonderful viewpoint: community engagement – our Governing Board election process is 'purposely cumbersome!' (*LAUGHTER!*) It's very much the fact that by voting, the community is becoming invested here - not just that it's 'quick-and-easy.' We want people to know exactly what they are voting for and why. We want them to realize it's a community center – not just a person who is running for some position. We offer a lot to accommodate in making the voting process accessible (there are many ways to get an absentee ballot – you don't have to come into the MCC building). You can request it and mail it back. But it is still somewhat 'old school' – you can choose to come in and cast your Absentee Ballot in-person into the ballot box.

3. If Reston has the limitation of only one vote per household, that cancels out the notion of greater participation.

Reston doesn't have more people voting than us; that's interesting. We had over 1,000 people voting in the last two years. In COVID-19 year, we had only 300 people voting. In 2023, we had almost 1,500 votes; in 2022, it was 2,500. But if it were to go down to ONE single vote allocated per household, results would clearly change.

4. It's not acceptable for MCC because we have teens on our Governing Board. Reston CC actually got rid of/discontinued their teen membership on their board in this process – therefore, it isn't appropriate for MCC.

5. We are already exploring new and different ways to inform people about our election (school newsletters) to effectively get the word out that MCC is here... you can run for a position on our board... and you can vote! We had many more youth candidates in 2022; in 2023, youth involvement as candidates continued strong.

Summary decision regarding online voting: While it's not something we are ever going to say: 'We never want to talk about this again.' knowing that it's a big, complex and involved process, we are making the decision to say "NO" for 2025. We will not do online voting in the 2025 election. We can possibly consider it for 2026... or perhaps make a decision about that this year, if people wish to keep doing more research on it.

OLD /NEW BUSINESS

Chair Groennings opened the floor for any additional topics to address this evening.

Ms. Novak asked the recently elected board members to express their views - whether they have any comments or recommendations for this upcoming election based on their experience in the 2023 election process.

Comment by adult board member:

I have nothing to mention about 2023; I thought everything was great! But thanks for asking.

Comments by youth board member:

1. The voting process is very different than normal student council elections (which is a Google form). Once I communicated that to people, it went really smoothly. It's just a process of getting them to fill out the MCC ballot request form (and then they think they are done!) but that's just the beginning. I agree that it demonstrates to youth about engaging with local government. I thought the process was interesting and I liked it.

Executive Director May-Salazar suggested we may need to do a little educating around the process as being similar to voting for local representatives. A suggestion was made that perhaps the youth can make brief videos about the election process. Both Eleanor Ague and Sophia Bruno did that last year.

2. Another complication is that McLean Day last year was on prom night for McLean and Langley – which was a schedule conflict for many students. However, they still managed to stay at the candidate tables for over ½ of the day. Friday Night Rides is better for the teen population. Eleanor has been attending on Friday nights since 6th grade! It will be good to offer voting at Friday Night Rides. We will see how it works and hopefully turnout will be higher.

Nothing else was mentioned as a further topic for discussion.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Chair Groennings thanked everyone for attending and adjourned the meeting at 6:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted, Holly Novak - Executive Assistant