



BOSTON CITY COUNCIL

Committee of the Whole
Ruthzee Louijeune, Chair

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REPORT OF COMMITTEE CHAIR

December 6, 2024

Dear Councilors,

The Committee of the Whole was referred the following dockets for consideration:

Docket #1507, Message and order requesting and recommending that the city hold in-person early voting for both the September 9, 2025, Preliminary Municipal Election (presuming this body acts favorably on my separate submission related to the date of the Preliminary) and the November 4, 2025, Municipal Election. I make this request in accordance with the provisions of G.L. c.54, § 25B (c)(1) upon the request of the registrars of the City of Boston. That statute provides a local option to allow for in-person early voting for any Preliminary or Municipal Election.

Docket #1508, Message and order at the recommendation of the Chair of the Board of Election Commissioners, I hereby transmit for the approval of your Honorable Body an Order fixing the date of the 2025 Preliminary Municipal Election as September 9, 2025.

These matters were sponsored by the Administration and referred to the Committee on October 9, 2024.

Summary of Legislation

Docket #1507 is an order that adopts the statutory local option to allow for in-person early voting for the 2025 preliminary and general municipal elections in the City of Boston. **Docket #1508** is an order that fixes the date of the 2025 preliminary municipal election in the City of Boston as September 9, 2025.

Information Received at Hearing

The Committee held a hearing on Friday, December 6, 2024 on Dockets #1507 and #1508, as well as Docket #1670, order for a hearing regarding voter accessibility and election preparedness. City of Boston Election Commissioner Eneida Tavares and Head Assistant Registrar of Voters Sabino Piemonte testified on behalf of the Administration.

Regarding **Docket #1507**, it was explained that M.G.L. c.54 § 25B (c)(1) provides a local option to allow for in-person early voting for any preliminary or municipal election. Docket #1507 requests the City Council to approve this local option, on the recommendation of the registrars of the City of Boston. It was highlighted that vote-by-mail and in-person early voting has been seen to increase turnout and reduce congestion on Election Day, helping to make participation in democracy more accessible and manageable for both poll workers and voters. It was explained that designated early voting locations are meant to be conveniently accessible and the Election Department attempts to offer options in every neighborhood, subject to location availability. The statute requires the publishing of notice of early voting locations, dates, and hours at least 48 weekday hours prior to the start of the early voting period. Councilors requested that the language be changed to at least seven days prior to the start of the early voting period. The Commissioner stated that the Election Department's practice is to publish notice as soon as the sites are approved - typically a couple weeks in advance - so they would have no objection to changing the requirement to a minimum of seven days. It was stated that the Administration aims to have the same



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number of in-person early voting locations as last year: 10 neighborhood sites each Saturday and Sunday, 3 neighborhood sites each Tuesday and Thursday, and City Hall every day.

Regarding **Docket #1508**, it was explained that pursuant to the City Charter the preliminary municipal election is set to occur on the sixth Tuesday preceding the municipal election, which, in 2025, would be September 23. Moving up the date of the preliminary municipal election allows the Election Department staff additional time between the preliminary and municipal elections to do administrative work, such as ballot processing, certification, ballot position drawings, and ballot and ballot kit preparation. The recommendation of the Election Commissioner is to move the date of the preliminary two weeks earlier - to the eighth Tuesday preceding the municipal election, which would be September 9, 2025. It was explained that a Charter amendment (home rule petition) would be required to permanently change the timing of the preliminary election from the sixth Tuesday to the eighth Tuesday prior to the municipal election. Concerns regarding the preliminary coinciding with Jewish High Holidays, as well as the Monday after Labor Day weekend were flagged. It was noted that the City only sets the dates for city-specific (municipal) elections.

The Committee discussed the importance of outreach and voter education. Some points of clarity included that in-person early voting sites are open to all voters, regardless of precinct; that while showing an ID during check-in for early voting may expedite the process, it is not required; ballot boxes may be closed on Halloween night; and if someone requests a mail-in ballot but does not use it, they may still vote in-person. If voters experience issues or are turned away, they are advised to call the Election Department. The Administration explained that the Election Department is cooperating with a state and an independent review into issues experienced in the 2024 election, as well as working with a consultant on implementing additional checks and safeguards to ensure that elections in 2025 (and beyond) are conducted without issue.

Summary of Amendments

Docket #1507 was amended to add language requiring a longer notification period than the statutory minimum of 48 weekday hours. The new draft specifies that the Election Department will publish notices of the early voting locations, dates, and hours at least seven days before the early voting period begins.

Committee Chair Recommended Action

As Chair of the Committee of the Whole I recommend moving the listed dockets from the Committee to the full Council for discussion and formal action. At this time, my recommendation to the full Council will be as follows:

- Docket #1507 **OUGHT TO PASS IN A NEW DRAFT**, and
- Docket #1508 **OUGHT TO PASS**.

Ruthzee Louijeune, Chair
Committee of the Whole