

GREENE COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS

2020 Annual Report

The Greene County Board of Elections joined the rest of the world in dealing with the impact of the COVID 19 virus and the issues it presented in 2020. This unprecedented situation resulted in major challenges for the Board, as well as our voters and candidates during this most difficult period.

As has been our tradition and history, the Greene County Board of Elections diligently works to conduct fair and impartial elections in the most efficient and cost effective manner possible. The issues presented in 2020 made this an almost impossible task last year, and had it not been for the noble efforts of so many we may have very well failed. With that said, we wish to acknowledge:

***The staff of the Greene County Board of Elections.**

2020 increased the work load tremendously in the Board at the same time we were dealing with a reduced in-office staff presence. Our employees engaged rigorously in the work they were able to do remotely coordinating with our in-office staff. Then, when operating the most participated election in the history of our county in the midst of a pandemic, did so in the safest manner possible. Interacting with thousands of voters during a pandemic, putting their own health at risk in so doing, was truly a courageous response by our staff.

***Greene County Department Heads and the staff of other departments.**

Our fellow county employees in so many other departments rose to the occasion in their support of our Board. Public health with guidance and resources were invaluable even though they were overwhelmed themselves. Emergency Service, Law Enforcement and Building and Maintenance personnel were always there to support us with PPE and other supplies and the security we all needed. Various offices accommodated our needs for additional office space given the huge number of absentee ballots being processed and social distancing required as voters entered the building.

***County Administrator Shaun Groden and our Legislature.**

For the Board of Elections to achieve success in the face of all of the challenges presented would not have been possible without the support and resources provided by the leaders of our county. Every request we made, as we struggled to comply with the numerous changes in law and requirements coming down from the State government, were approved without issue understanding the obstacles we faced.

One casualty of 2020 was the absence of our 2019 Annual Report as we were so overwhelmed in dealing with the impact of the COVID crisis as 2020 unfolded. This is why you will see several reference to the 2019 included in this report.

The 2020 election year began in a routine fashion. The BOE was preparing for Village Elections in March and had already received the various caucus and petition filings from candidates for those village offices. The political parties in the county were engaged in circulating petitions for various candidates preparing to run in the November election cycle. (NOTE: State Law was changed in 2019 which moved Primary Day from September to June. As a result, petition circulation for the November election changed from a June/July time frame to February/March/April.)

Then, the harsh reality of the COVID virus hit America. By Executive Order, the Governor curtailed the petition circulation, reduced the number of signatures required and moved the filing date forward. Days prior to Village Elections, scheduled for March 18th in 2020, again by Executive Order, Village Elections were postponed until an unspecified date. Subsequently, the Presidential Primary scheduled for April was also postponed.

Ultimately, the Presidential Primary was combined into the June 23rd Primary for State and Local elections. In the intervening time period, by a combination of new laws and numerous Executive Orders, the absentee voting process was dramatically modified.

- *The justification for receiving an absentee ballot was broadened to include the fear of contracting COVID.

- *The BOE was required to send every eligible primary voter an absentee ballot application with a returned postage paid envelope to make it easier for absentee voting.

- *Requests for an absentee ballot that previously had to be submitted on a hard copy paper application facilitating signature verification was modified to allow applications by telephone and email requests.

Additionally, for the first time in NYS, Early Voting was required for the Primary Election as the result of State legislation passed in 2019. Then, in September, village elections were conducted pursuant to Executive Order.

As the year progressed, we continued to operate at reduced staff at times until the point was reached with the enormous absentee issues developing for November, we had to return to full staff. Enhanced absentee availability was continued for November and the heightened interest resulting from one of the most contested presidential elections in history lead to an unprecedented increase in the work load at BOE. This required us to hire two additional individuals to assist with the processing and with day-to-day operations in the Board of Elections from September through the end of November.

As we entered mid to late October, the volume of absentee ballots and the preparation and conducting of early voting lead to space needs that were difficult to accommodate. With the cooperation of the administration and our office neighbors on the fourth floor, we were provided with numerous rooms and space so that we could meet our mandate.

The early voting process during this period was overwhelming. We were forced to bring in numerous trained election inspectors to assist with the operation of the voting process along with coordinating social distancing requirements and continuous cleaning operations, as well as absentee ballot processing. We went days on end with lines virtually around the building and the County's Security Staff was stellar in their performance and assistance with crowd control.

Finally, election day 2020 arrived on November 3rd and we were able to operate all 25 of our local polling sites, fully staffed and trained for the enforcement of social distancing, cleaning procedures and operating new poll pads for checking in voters as the state is moving to require. This is a significant change from the hard copy poll books voters were used to signing as they now signed on a tablet. While difficult, this process facilitated the updating of election records of individual voters and will make the voting process more efficient and consumer friendly in the years ahead.

Post-election day saw the need for a court supervised recanvas process resulting from the closeness of the State Senate race in the 46th Senate District. This including the review and opening of a record 3,815 absentee ballots cast. While time consuming, the process was efficiently administered in compliance with all court ordered mandates. We were extremely pleased to have representatives from every campaign acknowledge that our process was the most efficient and orderly of any of the counties involved.

Other than routine reporting of data to the State Board and the certification of official election results, this concluded the most difficult year in the history of our Board.

In closing, we want to once again thank all of those who assisted us throughout 2020.

We look forward to the return of more routine and orderly election cycles in 2021.

Please see the attached for some statical comparisons of recent election year data noting the uniqueness of 2020.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Respectfully submitted.

Marie Metzler,
Democratic Commissioner

Brent Bogardus,
Republican Commissioner

GREENE COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS
STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

<u>CATEGORY</u>	<u>2016</u>	<u>2017</u>	<u>2018</u>	<u>2019</u>	<u>2020</u>
Registered Voters	29,549	29,337	29,968	30,417	32,829
Absentee Ballots Sent	2,198	1,160	2,053	1,080	4,692
Absentee Ballots Returned	1,978	798	1,792	826	3,815
Petitions Processed	35	94	60	133	30
New Registrations	2,926	1,297	635	449	2,412
Early Voters					
-Primary	0	0	0	0	71*
-General	0	0	0	630	4,308

*In addition to primary early voters, 3,742 absentee ballots were sent out, 819 returned