

Poll change takes aim at easing fall voter crunch

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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Village to separate polling areas by ward for elections in September, November

Village of Grafton voters should have an easier time casting their ballots this fall.

The Village Board on Monday passed a resolution dividing most of the 16 municipal wards into separate poll lists for the Sept. 14 and Nov. 2 elections at John Long Middle School, 700 Hickory St.

Traditionally, the village has combined wards at the polls to tally ballots from among its 8,648 registered voters.

Village Clerk Teri Dylak told the board the change is designed “to streamline the voting process” and shorten long lines in fall elections when turnouts are typically heavier. With the new system, voters should be able to move more quickly to a table handling their ward of residence.

Separate poll lists will be used for wards 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12 and 13. Wards 2 and 16 will be combined, as will wards 10, 11, 14 and 15.

The resolution will only apply to this fall’s elections but could be adopted by the board in subsequent years if the change is effective, Dylak said.

Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said local officials are generally pleased with another change enacted this year — moving the polls from Grafton High School to the John Long School gymnasium for this year’s April election. He said that some voters complained about the change but more residents said they supported the move.

“Voters generally found the new site acceptable,” Hofland said. “The village has received some concerns, including parking and signage, and those will be addressed.”

The village has traditionally used only one polling place, and for decades that was Grafton Elementary School. However, in response to school district concerns about security issues for classes with younger students, the village moved the polls to nearby Grafton High School in November 2008.

The village used different parts of the high school for polling places — including the gymnasium, cafeteria and auditorium — but received complaints about parking limitations. Hofland said that prompted the move to John Long School, where there is more open parking during the school day and voters can use front and rear entrances to the building.

Hofland said village officials have considered but rejected other options to streamline voting, including having multiple polling places. That approach is used by a number of area communities, including the cities of Mequon and Port Washington.

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“However, that would result in additional election costs, including having to add more staff,” Hofland said.

Use of John Long School as the polling site will be reviewed by the Village/School District Liaison Committee at its 6 p.m. meeting June 3, Hofland said.