

XIV. Establishing Voting Precincts and Polling Places

Precinct Boundary Requirements

Michigan election law stipulates that all precincts “shall be composed as nearly as practicable of compact and contiguous territory and shall have clearly defined and clearly observable boundaries.” A “clearly observable boundary” is defined under the law as follows:

- A named road or street.
- A road or highway that is part of the federal, state primary, or state secondary road system.
- A river, stream, or drainage feature that is 40 feet or more in width.
- A natural or constructed permanent physical feature that is shown on an official county, city, or township map issued by the Department of Transportation or a United States geological survey topographical map.
- An apartment building, a dormitory or other permanent multiple-unit housing structure.

This office has been advised by the Department of Information Technology’s Center for Geographic Information (CGI) that a village or school district boundary line *can be used* to define a precinct boundary line.

Precinct Size Limits and Voting Station Minimums

Each precinct must not contain more than 2,999 registered voters. At least one voting station must be provided for every 300 registered voters.

The voting station minimum provided above *must be exceeded when and where appropriate*, after careful consideration has been given to the projected turnout, length of the ballot and the number of voters each voting station can handle per hour. If, after the election commission has considered these three factors, it appears that the number of voting stations needed in each precinct to ensure the orderly conduct of the election *exceeds* the minimum requirements, the minimum requirements *must be exceeded as appropriate*; the election commission does *not* have the option of following the minimum voting station requirements after it has been determined that the minimum is inadequate for the election at hand.

Approval of Precinct Boundary Alterations

In a township, the approval of all precinct boundary alterations must be granted by the local election commission. In a city, the approval of all precinct boundary alterations must be granted by the local election commission or other officials charged with the performance of the duty by the jurisdiction’s charter.

Notice to Voters – Permanent Precinct or District Change

An updated Voter Identification Card must be issued to every voter affected by a permanent

voting district change or a precinct reassignment.

- Electors placed in a new Congressional, State Senate, State House or County Commissioner District must be issued a corrected Voter Identification Card. (MCL 168.499(3))
- Electors assigned to a new precinct or polling place location must be issued a corrected Voter Identification Card. (MCL 168.499(3))

Temporary Precinct Consolidations

Temporary Precinct Consolidations: In an instance where a city, township, village, local school district, intermediate school district or community college district is divided into two or more precincts, the precincts may be combined to conduct any election scheduled in the city, township, village or school district other than an even-numbered year November general election, an even-numbered year August primary, a special statewide election or a special federal election. A “consolidated” precinct established under the allowance cannot contain more than 5,000 registered voters. (MCL 168.659 as amended under PA 296 of 2004)

- The consolidation of precincts must be effected through the adoption of a resolution by the appropriate election commission on the county, city, township or village level. The resolution must be adopted at least 60 days prior to the election involved. When determining whether to consolidate precincts for an upcoming election, the election commission must consider the complexity of the ballot and the anticipated turnout for the election. (MCL 168.659 as amended under PA 296 of 2004)
- If a decision is made to proceed with the consolidation of precincts for an upcoming election, *whole precincts* must be combined; the precincts involved in the consolidation cannot be divided. (MCL 168.659 as amended under PA 296 of 2004)
- In an instance where the consolidation of precincts will make it necessary for voters to attend a different polling place location to participate in the election, the election commission must notify the affected voters of the new polling place location established for the election by mail “or other method designed to provide actual notice to the registered electors.” On the day of the election, the election commission must post a notice of the polling place location change at each polling place location eliminated for the election. The notice must provide directions to the new polling place location established for the precinct. (MCL 168.659 as amended under PA 296 of 2004)

Obtaining School District Maps: The Department of Information Technology’s Center for Geographic Information (CGI) currently has two school district map series available online. The two school district maps series which are available at the present time can be accessed through the URL’s listed below:

School District (K-12) maps by county:

http://www.michigan.gov/cgi/0,1607,7-158-12540_13084-100538--,00.html

ISD maps showing all constituent K-12 school districts:

http://www.michigan.gov/cgi/0,1607,7-158-12540_13084-29765--,00.html

If you have Adobe Acrobat Reader you will be able to view and print sections of the maps with a standard printer. Better results can be obtained through the use of a large format plotter and color printer.

If you wish to have CGI print any of the available county maps, an online order form is available. The fees involved are printed on the form. The form can be accessed through the following URL:

http://www.michigan.gov/cgi/0,1607,7-158-12540_13937-101045--,00.html

Use of School Based Precincts

School District Precincts: In an instance where a *county clerk* is responsible for serving as a school district’s “election coordinator,” the county election commission is responsible for establishing the school district’s precincts and polling place locations. (MCL 168.301(5) as amended under PA 71 of 2005) In an instance where a *city or township clerk* is responsible for serving as a school district’s “election coordinator,” the city or township’s election commission is responsible for establishing the school district’s precincts (if there is a need to establish separate precinct boundaries for the conduct of the school district’s elections) and the city or township’s legislative body is responsible for establishing the school district’s polling place locations (if there is a need to establish separate polling place locations for the conduct of the school district’s elections).

Precinct Size Limit: Precincts established for the conduct of local school district elections, intermediate school district elections and community college district elections cannot contain more than 2,999 registered voters.

Combined School District Election/Local Election: Regardless of the arrangements made by a “election coordinating committee” chaired by a county clerk, the clerk of a city or township that falls in the local school district, intermediate school district or community college district *must* conduct an upcoming regular or special school election *if the city or township is holding a regular or special election at the same time*. In such an instance, the law extends two options for the administration of the combined school district election/local election:

- 1) The clerk may administer the combined school election/local election with the same precincts and polling places established in the jurisdiction for the conduct of state and federal elections. (If the use of such precincts to administer the school election changes any polling place voters routinely attend to participate in the school district’s elections, the city or township clerk is responsible for notifying the affected voters of the polling change for the school election.)
- 2) The clerk may administer the combined school election/local election with the precincts and polling places established by the school district’s “election coordinating committee” for the conduct of school elections. (This option cannot be selected without the consent of

the county clerk who is functioning as the school district's "election coordinator." In addition, this option cannot be selected if it would result in voters having to travel outside of their city or township of residence in order to participate in the election.)

Establishing Polling Places

The city council, township board or village council, if applicable, is responsible for determining the location of polling places in the jurisdiction Michigan election law, MCL 168.662, provides the following with respect to the establishment of polling places:

- Whenever possible, a polling place must be located in a publicly owned or controlled facility such as a school building, fire station or police station.
- If it is necessary to establish a polling place in a building other than a publicly owned or controlled facility, the building must be owned or controlled by an organization that is "exempt from federal income tax pursuant to section 501(c) other than 501(c)(4), (5), or (6) of the internal revenue code of 1986...."
- As an exception to the above, a polling place may be established in a "profit or nonprofit residence or facility in which 150 persons or more aged 62 or older reside or at an apartment building or complex in which 150 persons or more reside."
- All polling places must be fully accessible to the elderly and handicapped. If necessary, the use of temporary ramps and signs designating handicap parking spaces may be employed on Election Day to ensure access.
- A polling place may *not* be established in a building that is owned by a business, individual, firm, organization, etc. that has established, directs, controls or financially supports the administration of a Political or Independent Committee registered under the Campaign Finance Act. This prohibition extends to a building owned by a subsidiary of a corporation or the local of a labor organization if the parent corporation or labor organization has established, directs, controls or financially supports the administration of a Political or Independent Committee.
- The same polling place may be used to accommodate up to six precincts if convenient and practicable (each precinct must have its own precinct board.)
- A polling place may not be established, moved or abolished less than 60 days before an election unless the polling place has been "damaged, destroyed, or rendered inaccessible or unusable as a polling place."

Arranging Polling Places

A polling place is composed of a processing/voting area and a public area. When arranging a polling place, consideration must be given to the space needed to establish these two areas, the need for an orderly flow of traffic and the right of voters to cast their ballots in secrecy.

- The processing/voting area of the polling place contains a table and chairs for the election

inspectors appointed to work in the precinct. Sufficient room must be available in front of the table for electors who are offering to vote to stand. The election inspectors should be positioned so that they have a clear view of the polling place. The processing/voting area of the polling place also contains the voting stations and ballot boxes needed to serve the precinct. Ballot boxes must be positioned in full view and close to the election inspectors so that they can be monitored at all times. The processing/voting area is reserved for the precinct inspectors engaged in processing voters, the voters applying to vote and in the process of voting, and any challengers qualified to serve in the precinct. No other persons have the authority to be present in the processing/voting area.

- The public area is reserved for voters entering and exiting the polling place and any persons on hand to observe the election who do not have official “challenger” status.
- Some type of barrier must be established so that the processing/voting area of the polling place can be distinguished from the public area of the polling place. In instances where a polling place is used to accommodate two or more precincts, care must be taken to clearly separate the precinct boards to avoid voter confusion.

