



Election Officials Manual

Chapter 15: Establishing Voting Precincts, Polling Places, and Early Voting Sites

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I. Introduction	1
II. Geographic precincts.....	1
Constructing geographic precincts	1
Precinct size limits	1
Approval of precinct boundary alterations	2
Voter notice requirements for permanent precinct or district change	2
III. Temporary precinct consolidations for local elections	2
IV. Use of school district-based precincts	3
Permanent school district precincts	3
Required combination of special school district election and concurrent city or township election.....	4
Temporary consolidation of precincts for special school district elections.....	5
V. Establishing polling places and early voting sites.....	5
Multiple precincts at a single polling place.....	7
Reporting polling places and early voting sites in the Qualified Voter File	7
Voter notice requirements for polling place or early voting site changes	8
VI. Minimum number of voting stations required.....	9
VII. Arranging polling places.....	9
Voting area	10
Public area.....	10
Sample polling place layout	11



I. Introduction

This chapter explains how voters should be assigned to geographic precincts based on geography and how polling places and early voting sites for each precinct should be selected. Questions about the content of this chapter should be directed to Elections@Michigan.gov.

II. Geographic precincts

Constructing geographic precincts

Geographic precincts are the smallest geographic voting unit in Michigan. Geographic precincts should be as compact and contiguous as is practical. They should be defined using clearly observable boundaries. Clearly observable boundaries are:

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

Precinct size limits

A geographic precinct may contain no more than 4,999 active registered voters. Inactive voters registered within a precinct are not considered when determining the number of active registered voters within a precinct. For more information on the difference between active and inactive voters, refer to *Chapter 2: Voter Registration*.



Approval of precinct boundary alterations

In townships and charter townships, the approval of all geographic precinct boundary alterations must be granted by the local election commission. In a city, the approval of all geographic 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.

In most even-numbered years, geographic precinct boundary changes must be approved no later than 210 days prior to the August Primary. In the second year following the federal census, however, geographic precinct boundary changes may be approved 120 days prior to the August Primary.

Voter notice requirements for permanent precinct or district change

When geographic precinct boundary lines change, a new voter identification card must be generated in the QVF and mailed to every voter affected by the change. If precincts are renumbered, a new voter identification card must also be generated in the QVF and mailed to every voter affected by the change. Additionally, a new voter identification card must be generated in the QVF and mailed to every voter if the voter's congressional, state senate, state house, or county commission district changes.

III. Temporary precinct consolidations for local elections

Cities, townships, local school districts, intermediate school districts, or community college districts which are divided into two or more precincts may combine into a single precinct to conduct local elections. Local elections are elections where no state or federal candidate appears on the ballot.

Consolidated precincts can be formed only by combining entire precincts; a precinct cannot be split among multiple consolidated precincts. If a precinct consolidation changes a voter's polling place, the voter must be notified of that change. Additionally, on the day of the election, the election commission must post a notice at each polling place location eliminated for the election. The notice must include directions to the updated polling place location assigned to the voters who were previously assigned to the eliminated polling place.



The election commission of the county, city, or township overseeing the election must adopt a resolution to allow the consolidation of precincts at least 60 calendar days prior to the election at which the consolidated precinct is to be used. Consolidation is only permitted if the consolidated precinct will not contain more than 5,000 active registered voters. This is different than the 4,999 limit that applies to precincts because of a different statutory requirement. When deciding whether a consolidated precinct is appropriate for use in the election, the election commission should consider the complexity of the ballot for the election and the anticipated voter turnout. The more complex the ballot or the higher the expected turnout, the less likely a consolidated precinct will be appropriate for the election.

IV. Use of school district-based precincts

When conducting special school district elections, school election coordinating committees may choose to establish permanent school district-based precincts. School district-based precincts may not contain more than 5,000 active voters.

More information on special school district elections is provided in *Chapter 16: Election Dates and School Election Coordination*.

Permanent school district precincts

If the county clerk serves as the school district's election coordinator, the county election commission is responsible for establishing school district-based precincts and polling places for special school elections. When a city or township clerk serves as the school district's election coordinator, the city or township's election commission is responsible for establishing school district-based precincts and the city or township's legislative body is responsible for establishing the school district's polling place locations. Unless the geography of the school district requires the establishment of new school district-based precincts, the relevant jurisdiction may choose to use existing geographic precincts and polling places for special school district elections.



Required combination of special school district election and concurrent city or township election

If the special school district election is held on the same day as one or more elections in any other jurisdiction that overlaps with the school district, the school district election must be combined with the other election or elections. These combined elections may be administered in one of two ways:

- The election may be administered by the clerk of the city or township where the second election is occurring in the same manner as any other election, using the geographic precincts and polling places established in that city or township for state and federal elections. If the use of the polling places established for state or federal elections would change the location at which a voter would appear to vote if the special school district election was held independently of the city or township election, the city or township clerk must notify the voter that they should appear at their polling place for state and federal elections, not their polling place for special school district elections.
- The election may be administered by the clerk of the city or township where the second election is occurring, but must be administered using the geographic precincts and polling places established by the school district's election coordinating committee for the conduct of special school district elections. If the use of the polling places established for special school district elections would change the location at which a voter would appear to vote if the city or township election was held independently of the special school district election, the city or township clerk must notify the voter that they should appear at their polling place for special school district elections, not their polling place for state and federal elections. If the county clerk is the school's election coordinator, the county clerk must consent to the use of the special school district geographic precincts and polling places. Special school district geographic precincts and polling places cannot be used if a voter would be required to travel outside their city or township to participate in their city or township's election.



Temporary consolidation of precincts for special school district elections

The school election coordinating committee may request that the appropriate election commission temporarily consolidate voting precincts subject to the general limitations on consolidated precincts. A school district election coordinating committee must seek the consent of county election commission (if the school district spans multiple cities or townships) or the city or township election commission (if the school district is entirely contained within a city or township) to temporarily consolidate special school district precincts.

Additionally, if a city or township has committed to making their polling places available for all special school district elections and no voters from a neighboring city or township must travel into the original city or township to vote in a special school district election, the authority to consolidate precincts within the original city or township's borders lies with the election committee of that city or township. If a city or township has committed to making their polling places available for all special school district elections but voters from a neighboring city or township must travel to the original city or township to vote in a special school district election, the authority to consolidate precincts within the original city or township's borders lies with the county's election commission. If a city or township has not committed to making their polling places available for all special school district elections, the authority to consolidate precincts also lies with the county clerk.

The county election commission with the authority to consolidate precincts is the election commission of the county in which the consolidated precinct lies or, if the consolidated precinct crosses county lines, with the county election commission of the county coordinating the special school district election.

V. Establishing polling places and early voting sites

Polling places are the physical locations where voters should appear to vote in person on Election Day. Additionally, following the passage of Proposal 2 of 2022, the Michigan Constitution now guarantees Michigan voters the right to at least nine days of early voting before statewide and federal elections. The polling place for a geographic precinct need not be within the physical



boundaries of that precinct. The legislative body of the city or township is responsible for establishing each jurisdiction's polling places and early voting sites at least 60 days prior to each election. For counties conducting early voting, early voting sites must be established by the county election commission. For more information on administering early voting, refer to *Chapter 11: Early Voting*.

Polling places and early voting sites must adhere to the following requirements:

- The polling place or early voting site must be located in a publicly owned or publicly controlled facility, such as a school building, a fire station, or a police station, unless it is not possible or convenient.
- If a polling place or early voting site cannot be located in a publicly owned or publicly controlled facility, the building in which the polling place is located must not be owned or leased by an elected official, a candidate, or an entity regulated by the Michigan Campaign Finance Act. A polling place or early voting site additionally cannot be located in a building if a portion of the building leased by an elected official, candidate, or regulated entity is within 100 feet of the entrance to the polling place or early voting site.
 - Entities regulated by the Michigan Campaign Finance Act include an individual, business, firm, organization, or other group that has established, controls, sponsors, or financially supports a political committee or independent committee as defined by the Michigan Campaign Finance Act, or the subsidiary of a corporation or a labor organization that has established, controls, sponsors, or financially supports such a committee.
- All polling places and early voting sites must be fully accessible to the elderly and to persons with disabilities. Temporary ramps or parking places for persons with disabilities should be installed at the facility if necessary to make the facility fully accessible. An accessibility checklist can be found in the eLearning center; this checklist can be used to determine if a potential polling place or early voting site is fully accessible.¹

¹ Available at <https://mielections.csod.com/ui/lms-learning-details/app/material/b33cc7d8-f63b-4efd-9a0e-fabdcc8b9eb3>.



If a polling place or early voting site is established in a building that is not owned or controlled by a public entity, the city or township should enter into a use agreement with the entity that owns or controls the building.

A polling place or early voting site cannot be established, moved, or abolished within 60 days before an election unless the building in which the polling place was to be located is damaged, destroyed, rendered inaccessible, or rendered unusable.

Multiple precincts at a single polling place

Up to six precincts may operate at a single polling place, so long as the polling place is large enough to accommodate all six precincts. Election inspectors must be individually appointed to a particular precinct, however, and each precinct at a polling place must be operated by a specific set of election inspectors appointed to that precinct.

Early voting sites may serve electors from more than six precincts and/or may serve voters from more than one municipality in the same county if the municipal clerk of that jurisdiction has entered into an agreement with other municipal clerks or the county clerk. Refer to *Chapter 11: Early Voting* for more information about municipal and county agreements.

Reporting polling places and early voting sites in the Qualified Voter File

As soon as a polling place or early voting site is established by the city or township legislative body, the clerk should enter into QVF the location and the precincts which will operate at that location. Additionally, the clerk must enter into the *EV Sites Module* in QVF the days and hours each early voting site will operate. Refer to the *Early Voting QVF Setup Manual*² in the eLearning center for specific guidance on this process. The locations of polling places and early voting sites is made available to voters at Michigan.gov/Vote.

² Available at <https://mielections.csod.com/ui/lms-learning-details/app/material/40360b7c-a1fe-48cf-9c82-16ad420583ae>.



Voter notice requirements for polling place or early voting site changes

If a voter's polling place or early voting site is established or changed by the 60th day before an election, the clerk must give notice of the location to the voter by the 45th day before an election. This notice requirement applies to permanent and temporary changes to polling places and early voting sites but does *not* apply if at least one site previously available to the voter will remain available. For temporary changes, the clerk must give notice at least 21 days before Election Day for changes to polling places, and at least 21 days before the first day of early voting for changes to early voting sites.

If the clerk has email addresses for the affected voters, the clerk should also email the voters to notify them of the temporary change and the address of the voter's new polling place.

Finally, the clerk must post signs at the old polling place or early voting site instructing any voter who appears at the old location to appear at their new location to vote. These signs must include the address of the new polling place or early voting site.

After a polling place is approved, the city or township clerk must provide notice to all registered voters by sending an updated voter identification card, or sending a separate notice by mail or other methods to reach registered voters.

After an early voting site is approved, the appropriate clerk must send a separate notice by mail or other methods to registered voters, sharing both the location and hours of operation for each day that early voting is offered. The appropriate clerk to provide notice is as follows:

- For early voting offered by a single municipality, the corresponding municipal clerk
- For early voting offered under a municipal agreement, the clerk of each participating municipality to their respective voters
- For early voting offered by the county, either the county clerk to all voters or by the clerk of each participating municipality to their respective voters



VI. Minimum number of voting stations required

The number of pieces of equipment which must be provided at the polling place or early voting site varies depending on the number of voters who will be using the equipment. At least one voting station—the booth in which a voter casts their ballot—must be provided for every 300 voters who reside in the geographic precinct served by the polling place or early voting site. To avoid delays during peak voting times, the Bureau of Elections recommends that a voting station be provided for every 80-100 voters who reside in the geographic precinct. Additionally, for elections with longer or more complex ballots which will require each voter to spend more time in the voting station, the Bureau of Elections recommends increasing the number of voting stations.

Every precinct must have one voter assist terminal (VAT). If a polling place contains multiple precincts, one VAT may be provided for every two precincts present. If an early voting site is utilizing a VAT as a ballot-on-demand printer, then an additional VAT must be present solely for use by voters as a ballot marking device. The same VAT can be used at both an early voting site and an Election Day polling place. The VAT must be set up and turned on when the polling place opens, precinct chairs should ensure that there are a sufficient number of election inspectors capable of assisting with and troubleshooting VAT issues at all times.

VII. Arranging polling places

A polling place is composed of a voting area and a public area. When arranging a polling place and determining how much space to allocate to the voting area and the public area, the clerk and election inspectors should consider the need for an orderly flow of traffic, the space required for election inspectors to perform their duties, and the right of voters to cast their ballots in secrecy. The clerk determines the size of the voting area relative to the public area, but some public area must be available in all polling places. A physical line of demarcation, often painters' tape, should be used to distinguish the voting area from the public area.



Voting area

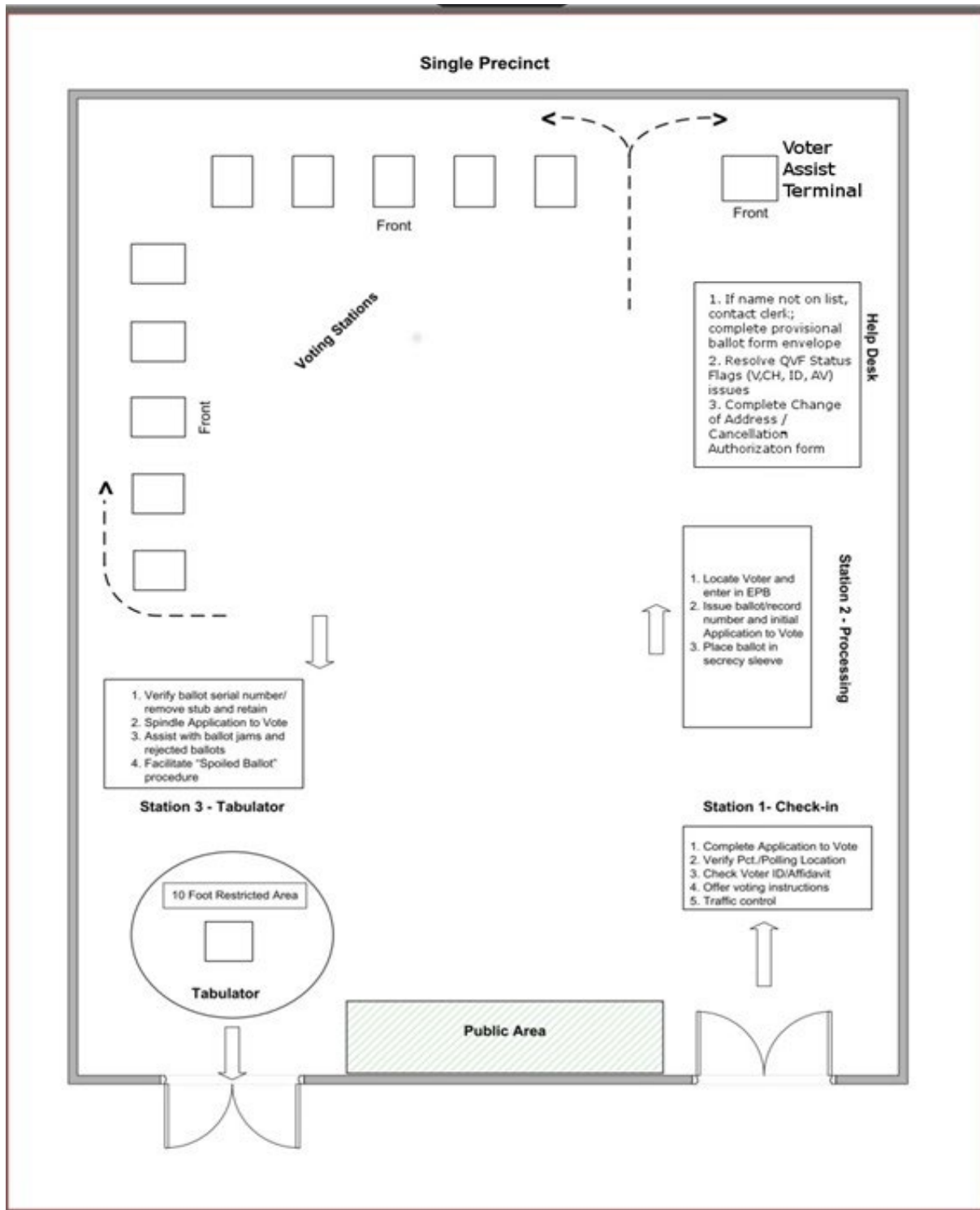
The voting area of the polling place is where voters complete applications to vote, are issued a ballot, complete the ballot, and feed the ballot into the tabulator. The voting area contains a table and chairs for the election inspectors appointed to serve in the polling place to process voters and issue ballots. The table must be arranged so that voters can access the front of the table while election inspectors sit behind the table. Additional room may be needed for properly credentialed election challengers to observe the voting process from behind the election inspectors if such challengers are present. The election inspectors should be positioned so that the election inspectors have a clear view of the entire polling place.

The voting area of the polling place also contains the voting stations and the tabulator. Tabulators must be monitored at all times and should be positioned in full view of, and physically close to, the election inspectors. The 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 properly appointed to serve in the polling place. No other persons have the authority to be present in the voting area.

Public area

The public area is where voters may line up while waiting to apply for and be issued their ballot. The public area is also where members of the public wishing to observe the election process, often referred to as poll watchers, may stand. In some polling places, the public area will be large; in others, the public area may be relatively small.





Sample polling place layout

