




OFFICE OF THE
TOWN CLERK
30 Providence Road
Grafton, MA 01519
(508) 839-5335
Town Clerk: *Kandy Lavalley* 
lavalleyk@grafton-ma.gov
www.grafton-ma.gov

July 1, 2020
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

On June 30th, our office discovered a box of 202 sealed ballots from Precinct 2 that had been returned to this Office prior to election day but were inadvertently not brought to the polls and counted. The box has been secured in the vault prior to, during, and since election day and the ballots remain sealed.

Upon discovery of the box, our office contacted the Secretary of State Elections Division to discuss how we can open and count the ballots and add them to our election results. The State advised us to obtain a court order to allow a first count of the ballots. This order will allow us to add those votes to the current figures for that precinct. Today, Town Counsel has filed the necessary papers with the Worcester Superior Court seeking an emergency court order to allow these votes to be tallied.

Once the Court issues its order, a small team will be assembled to open ballots and total the counts. The team will consist of the Town Clerk, Election Workers, Wardens, and the Board of Registrars. For maximum transparency, the opening and counting of these ballots will be televised on the local cable access government channels, Verizon channel 33 and Charter channel 193. This process will be similar to the tallying that occurs at the polls at the end of election day. The public is welcome to attend provided social distancing guidelines can be met. We will publish the date and time when we receive further guidance from the court.

Timeline of Facts:

- On Tuesday, June 30, 2020, Grafton Assistant Town Clerk, Paul Cook, was filing forms in the vault in the Town Clerk's Office and discovered a box of secured and sealed (unopened) early voting ballots ("Unopened Ballots") that the Town had received prior to election day for Precinct 2.
- The Assistant Town Clerk made the Town Clerk aware of the Unopened Ballots. The Town Clerk inspected the contents of the box and found that it contained 202 early voting ballots of Precinct 2.
- The Town Clerk spoke with all staff to ascertain how it was that the Unopened Ballots had not been counted and determined that the Unopened Ballots had been placed in the box on top of the other boxes while efforts were underway to organize equipment and ballots by precinct for election day.
- The Town Clerk contacted the Warden of Precinct 2 to notify her that ballots were not processed and that measures would be taken to correct the matter.

- For this election, the Clerk's Office had sent out a record 1,855 ballots to voters who requested to vote early or absentee. Returned ballots were stored in the same area of the vault where existing boxes of unused ballots were being held. This caused staff to inadvertently overlook the box of completed ballots.
- After the conversations described above, the Town Clerk contacted the Secretary of State Elections Division to alert it to the discovery of the Unopened Ballots and seek guidance regarding having them counted and added to the election results.
- The Secretary of State advised the Town Clerk to seek a court order and write a memo explaining the discovery and the steps taken to rectify the situation.

Going forward, the Clerk's Office will take the following steps to be sure this does not happen in the future:

- We will designate 5 sections of the vault for returned ballots from each precinct for both early voting and absentee voting.
- Each of the 5 sections will have color coded boxes denoting early voting and absentee votes to match the precinct they are for.
- On the morning of the election, boxes will be counted for each precinct prior to them leaving the vault to be transported to the precinct to be counted.
- The boxes will then be counted upon arrival by separate staff to ensure that the same number of boxes counted in the vault arrive at the precinct.
- We recognize that the integrity of the election is of the utmost importance. We will work with Town Counsel to find a suitable independent organization to investigate and provide a report of the facts of the case to the community. We will implement recommendations from the organization to improve this process in future elections.

The Clerk's Office will hold a press conference at 5pm on Thursday, July 2nd via Zoom to take questions. Questions will be answered through the Q&A Function in Zoom Webinars. Information to access the press conference is below.

You are invited to a Zoom webinar.

When: Jul 2, 2020 05:00 PM Eastern Time (US and Canada)

Topic: Town Clerk Press Conference on Uncounted Ballots

Please click the link below to join the webinar:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85492002339?pwd=a1RFRnRDDeXlobjYzdzJDSUhodFR0UT09>

Password: 000368

Or iPhone one-tap :

US: +13017158592,,85492002339#,,,,0#,,000368# or
+13126266799,,85492002339#,,,,0#,,000368#

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