

# Town of Braintree

## 2020 Fall Election Consolidation of Polling Locations

### District Voting Centers

**Braintree High School**  
Districts 1 and 2

**East Middle School**  
Districts 3 and 4

**South Middle School**  
Districts 5 and 6

James M. Casey  
Town Clerk  
July 8, 2020

# Town of Braintree

## 2020 Fall Election – Consolidation of Polling Locations

*The novel Corona virus COVID-19 is a rapidly evolving situation.  
The plan below reflects the information available on July 8, 2020, the date The Plan was written.*

### I. INTRODUCTION

#### A. PURPOSE

The primary purpose of the Town of Braintree Election Polling Consolidation Plan (The Plan) is to develop and build a framework for election operational policies in the time of a declared State of Emergency that align with recently passed legislation expanding voter access and addresses safety for Elections.

#### B. SCOPE

The Plan establishes:

- Identifying the current state of emergency due to COVID-19
- Incorporating directives of the *Court Order – Civil Action #2020-307 and Chapter 45 Act of 2020* signed by the Massachusetts Legislature and Governor
- Legislative changes impacting 2020 Fall Elections
- Identifying essential functions of an election
- Practices to limit the risk of exposure to election workers and voters
- Measures to curtail the further spread of the virus

## II. BACKGROUND

On March 10, 2020, Governor Charlie Baker declared a state of emergency in response to the COVID-19 outbreak, a highly contagious, sometimes fatal respiratory illness. To curtail the further spread of the virus Governor Baker subsequently issued a multitude of Orders and Advisories which restricts social gatherings and the operations of businesses deemed “Non-Essential”.

On March 23, 2020 an emergency act of the legislature known as *Chapter 45 of the Acts of 2020* was signed into law granting municipalities authority to postpone 2020 municipal elections in the Commonwealth, reduce hours of the Annual Town Election, reduce staff, and increase voting options in response to the Declaration of Emergency due to COVID-19. This Act defined the parameters under which municipalities can make changes to their normal operations of local elections while working within the guidelines of Massachusetts General Laws relating to elections. Many municipalities with elections scheduled in March and April had postponed their elections opting to hold these planned elections during May and June.

During the Month of May leadership in both the Massachusetts Senate and House established conference committees to review impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the 2020 Fall Elections and heard testimony from various agency and groups legislatively responsible for election administration; Secretary of State – Election Division, City and Town Clerk’s Associations and major political party.

In June, both the Senate and House passed their legislative versions to expand voter access, address safety issues for both voters and election workers and provided tools to assist city and town clerks in administering the 2020 Fall Elections. Early July, both the House and Senate voted approval of House Bill #4820 which makes substantial changes to election laws in response to the Covid-19 pandemic

On July 6, 2020, Governor Baker signed House Bill #4820 as Chapter 115 of the Acts of 2020.

## **OPERATIONS**

### **A. OBJECTIVES**

Voting is a fundamental right in Massachusetts. The objective of The Plan is to summarize the legislative changes impacting the 2020 Fall Elections and the administrative impacts for election officials charged with their implementation. Additionally, The Plan presents two alternative proposals, to the current structure, for the consolidation of polling locations that provide options for a fair, open and safer Election Day.

### **B. PLAN EXECUTION**

This Plan will take effect by a majority vote of acceptance of the proposed District Voting Center plan or acceptance to continue with the current structure, with or without modifications adopted by the Braintree Town Council. The Chief Election Officer/Town Clerk of the Town of Braintree will be responsible for its execution.

## **III. RECOMMENDATIONS**

On July 29, 2020 the Committee of Ways and Means, on a vote four to one, approved a favorable recommendation to the Town Council to consolidate the current 12 voting precincts/11 voting sites in favor of three District Voting Centers (DVC) having two voting districts (4 polling locations) in three separate school buildings; Braintree High School (Districts 1 and 2), East Middle School (Districts 3 and 4) and South Middle School (Districts 5 and 6). Chapter 115 of the Acts of 2020 provides the council authority to change polling locations for public convenience and if public health would be better served. Given the uncertainties of future restrictions associated with the current COVID-19 health emergency coupled with a continuation of concerns among voters and election staff regarding social distancing and personal protection equipment (PPE) during the voting process and to minimize the need to disinfect multiple polling locations it is my recommendation that the Braintree Town Council adopt, for the 2020 Fall Elections, the District Voting Centers Plan over the current voting structure.

## IV. PLAN OVERVIEW

*Impacts of pending* election legislation over the current structure are summarized below:

### A. LEGISLATIVE CHANGES

- ***Implements an early vote-by-mail system:*** An application to receive an early voting ballot will be mailed to all registered voters by the Secretary of State for the September 1, 2020 State Primary Election by July 15, 2020. The Secretary of State will then mail another application for the general election in the voter booklet sent out in advance of the November 3, 2020 State General Election. Both applications and ballots will be postage paid. Returned applications will be returned to the voters Town Clerk's Office via U. S. Mail, secured drop box or in-person.
- ***Creates early voting for the primary and expands early voting periods:*** For the first time in Massachusetts early voting will be available for the state primary, to take place beginning Saturday August 22, 2020 through Friday August 28, 2020. Early voting for the general election would take place beginning Tuesday, October 17, 2020 to Friday October 30, 2020. Early voting hours would vary according to the size of the municipality in order to give voters ample opportunity to participate while not overburdening small towns' election departments. Voters may return their early voting ballot in the mail, in a secure drop box, or in person.
- ***Tasks the Secretary of State with creating an online portal:*** Requires Secretary Galvin's office to create an online portal by October 1, 2020 to make it as easy as possible for people to apply for general election early voting electronically.
- ***Expands absentee voting:*** Provides for absentee voting by any person taking precautions related to COVID-19. Voters may also return absentee ballots via a secure drop box.
- ***Provides tools to assist clerks:*** Acknowledges the increased burden these options may place on municipalities and clerks; legislation provides for several accommodations to make the logistics of processing voters easier. The legislation allows for tabulating ballots prior to Election Day, and it offers pre-addressed envelopes to voters, so their applications go directly to their clerk's office.
- ***Makes in-person voting more efficient:*** Allows municipalities to consolidate polling places and eliminate the check-out table at these locations, allowing for a more efficient process and fewer poll workers. It also expands who is eligible to serve as a poll worker, knowing that many current poll workers are seniors who may feel less comfortable working in public during COVID-19.

## B. ELECTION ADMINISTRATIVE IMPACTS

*Each of the noted legislative changes have various degree of impact upon election officials charged with the administration of these changes.*

- ***Implements an early vote-by-mail system:*** In three previous elections, November 2016 – State General Election, November 2018 – State General Election and, March 2020 – State Presidential Primary Election, early vote-by-mail was an available option for voters mandated by legislation;. Vote-by-mail is basically “absentee voting” without the qualifications required with voting by absentee ballot. A significant difference between the two is for the voter...absentee voters have the option of changing their votes cast on their ballot by simply arriving at their Election Day polling location before the precinct warden has process their absentee ballot. While, an early vote-by-mail voters ballot is consider “cast” once it is turned over to election officials. New to the early vote-by-mail system is the legislative mandate for usage during a primary election and the general mailings for each fall election. ***Administratively, it adds additional processes to pre and post-Election Day responsibilities and the number of ballot requests will increase significantly.***
- ***Creates early voting for the primary and expands early voting periods:*** Cahill Auditorium will be converted into the town’s early voting site beginning Friday, August 21<sup>st</sup> through Wednesday, September 2<sup>nd</sup> and will become unavailable for other governmental use, the farmers market (August 22<sup>nd</sup>) or any other public use. The FY2021 budget did not include funding for early voting for the September 1<sup>st</sup> Election; though some Sate reimbursement for staffing will become available. The requirement making available a secure drop box to deposit ballots will need to be absorbed within the FY20201 budget. ***Administratively, staff is familiar with the overall execution of early voting procedures and will be in a position to execute all policies. However, staff will be restricted from taking earned vacation time beginning August 10<sup>th</sup> through November 15<sup>th</sup> due to expanded pre and post-election procedures as well as the September 26<sup>th</sup> Local Special Election.***
- ***Tasks the Secretary of State with creating an online portal:*** The online portal is a benefit for voters while increasing the administrative burden on local election officials due to an expected significant increase in voting-by-mail ballot requests. ***Administratively, it adds additional processes to pre and post-Election Day responsibilities.***

- ***Expands absentee voting:*** Prior to this legislative change, to be eligible to vote by absentee ballot a voter must be prevented from voting at their polling locations on Election Day due to 1) Absence from the voter's city or town on Election Day; 2) Physical disability; or 3) Religious belief. During the March 3, 2020 election, the proposed legislative change allowing a voter taking precautions related to COVID-19 to obtain absentee ballots was informally in place. ***Administratively, the procedures for processing absentee ballots have not changed other than a need to purchase a secure drop box as a depository for returning early voting and absentee ballots. It is expected that the number of ballot requests will increase significantly adding additional demand on office staff.***
- ***Provides tools to assist clerks:*** The City and Town Clerk's Association has been advocating for changing the procedures of processing early voting ballots soon after the November 2016 General Election. ***Administratively, this one change could eliminate the need of a Central Voting Tabulating Facility and associated costs.***
- ***Makes in-person voting more efficient:*** With the introduction of early vote-by-mail, expansion of allowable acceptable use of absentee ballot voting, and increased days and hours of early voting, "in-person" voting is expected to play a lesser role on Election Day. ***Administratively, the consolidation of polling locations and elimination of the check-out table assists municipalities to be more efficient with less workers while, at the same time, effectively manage the mandates of social distancing across individual voting precincts due to the decrease in the number of physical buildings.***

# Individual Polling Locations

## PROCESS

### BACKGROUND

Up until October 9, 2019 voters cast their ballots at a polling location that was within or directly adjacent to their voting districts. At that time a total of twelve (12) polling locations were activated each election.

<u>DISTRICT</u>	<u>LOCATION</u>
1A*	Marge Crispin Center, 74 Pond Street (rear)
1B	Mary E. Flaherty School, 99 Lakeside Drive
2A	Eugene Hollis School, 482 Washington Street (rear)
2B**	St. Thomas More Church Paris Hall, 7 Hawthorn Road
3A	Donald E. Ross School, 20 Hayward Street
3B	Braintree Yacht Club, 9 Gordon Road
4A	Department of Elder Affairs, 71 Cleveland Avenue
4B	Archie T. Morrison School, 268 Liberty Street
5A	Braintree Town Hall, 1 JFK Memorial Drive
5B	Liberty Elementary School, 49 Proctor Road
6A	South Middle School, 232 Peach Street
6B	Highlands Elementary School, 144 Wildwood Avenue

\*Council Order # 19 040 authorized the permanent relocation of District 1A polling location to Braintree Town Hall, one JFK Memorial Drive.

\*\*Council Order # 20 017 authorized the temporary relocation of District 2B polling location to the Hollis School 482 Washington Street. Discussion and a vote to make this change permanent or to return to the St. Thomas More Church will be required if either Proposal # 2 or Proposal #3 is not adopted by the Council.

With the introduction of new election technology, increased legislative mandates, a diminished interest in becoming an election worker and, most recently, concerns among many seniors feeling less comfortable working as a poll worker and given a COVID-19 designation of being in a high risk group, municipalities are having difficulty filling Election Day positions. Individual polling locations hampers an administrator's ability to shift workers from one precinct to another on the day of the election and adds to voter frustration on Election Day.

Prior to the adoption of recent election legislative changes precipitated by the COVID-19 pandemic, a typical election consisted of 109 staff positions working over 16 hours (6:00am

– 10:00pm). There are 98 direct staff positions which include District/Precinct Wardens (14), Precinct Clerks (12), Check-In/Out Inspectors (48), Tally Clerks (24) and indirect staff positions of 11 police officers over two work shifts. Staffing levels are exclusive of Town Clerk Office Staff (5) and members of the Board of Registrars (3).

Although the recent election legislative provides the municipality the option of eliminating the Check-Out position (24), between 6 and 12 of these positions will be retained to help in sanitizing voting booths and pens throughout Election Day.

# DISTRICT VOTING CENTER

## PROCESS

District Voting Center's would be established by combining the twelve current polling locations into three district voting groups. These groups will be established as follows: Group #1: Districts 1A, 1B, 2A and 2B; located at Braintree High School, Group #2: Districts 3A, 3B, 4A and 4B; located at East Middle School and Group #3: Districts 5A, 5B, 6A and 6B; located at South Middle School. These three sites were selected due to their ability to accommodate multiple voting precincts as well as having sufficient parking with a primary parking area, with handicap accessibility spaces, at the main entrance of the building and a secondary parking area nearby.

## VOTER PROCESS

### General Parking



The main school parking lot provides adequate parking for all voters. Three separate handicap parking (HP) areas totaling 18 defined HP parking spaces are located near the main entrance of the school. Additional HP parking spaces will be added along the oval driveway nearest the school building.



For East Middle School, the primary parking area is directly in front of the old gymnasium area. This newly renovated area has sufficient handicap parking spaces with ADA compliant access walkway and an adequate number of general parking spaces voters. Additionally, the lower parking area is a short distance away and can accommodate overflow parking requirements.



For South Middle School, the primary parking area is directly in front of the main entrance to the school inside the circular driveway. The inner circle of the driveway has 14 parking spaces with three designated as handicap spaces. The outer circle of the driveway can accommodate approximately 20 parking spaces. Those spaces closest to the main entrance will be reserved as handicap accessible with signage showing this designation.

## Voter Entrance

### *Braintree High School*

The main entry point to the high school will be made via the right side double doors of the gymnasium entrance across from the main parking lot. The left side doors will serve as the exit, ensuring separation of voters as they enter/exit the building.



### *East Middle School*

The main entry point to the East Middle School will be the newly renovated entrance of the old gymnasium. After voting, voters will exit at the door located on the left side wall of the gymnasium, turn left and follow the path to the parking lot.



### *South Middle School*

The main entry point to the South Middle School will be the door to the right of the main entrance. Voters will enter the foyer and then turn right down the hallway to the rear gymnasium door identified as door 113 – Boys Gym. Voters will exit at the gym door identified as door 112 which is closest to the foyer area. Voters will then turn right and exit the door on the right.



## Health Assessment

As a voter enters the foyer area of each DVC and election staff member or town health agent will be stationed at the entrance of the gymnasium to observe if a face mask is being worn. Voters with a mask will continue into the gymnasium and follow the “social distant” markers on the floor to the voting area.

Voters not wearing a face mask will be offered one and asked to place it on before continuing into the building. Those refusing to place a face mask on will be asked to step-aside and the District Election Coordinator will be notified. Under current Election Laws a voter cannot be denied their right to cast a ballot. The District Election Coordinator will follow approved procedures as they unfold in the weeks ahead.

## Voting Area

The voting area in each individual district polling location is defined as the area beginning at the check-in table and ending at the designated voter exit door. The voting area consists of three specific areas; 1) **Check-In Station**; 2) **Voting Area** and, 3) **Check-Out Station**.

- **Check-In Station:** will have up to two check-in clerks to confirm voter status and record ballot style issued following the check-in procedures for the specific election being held.
- **Voting Area:** the area where the voting marks their ballot



Each DVC ballot station will have a total of twelve (12) 4-station voting booths, 48 voting stations with eight being ADA compliant, and two (2) AutoMark Terminals. Each individual voting precinct will be set-up with three voting booths, 12 voting station with two being ADA compliant. Voting booths will be placed far enough apart to provide for a safe social distancing area and will be separated by barriers to keep voters in their proper district polling location lanes.



The AutoMark Voter Assist Terminal is available to all voters. It assists the voter in marking (filling-in the oval of the voters’ choices) on the ballot. Voter assisted terminals will be located in a location providing voter privacy within the guiderail and placed on top of a ADA compliant.

- **Check-Out Station:** will have up a precinct record clerk and a warden. This area will also house the “voting tabulator”; the machine the voter deposits their ballot. Staffing assigned to this station will follow all procedures outlined for each of the respective positions.

## Staffing Requirements

<b>POSITION</b>	<b>CURRENT VOTING</b>	<b>DISTRICT VOTING CENTER</b>
Precinct Coordinator	2	3
Warden	12	12
Precinct Clerk	12	12
Check-In Clerk	12	12
Sanitizing Clerk	12	6
Tally Clerk	24	24
Board of Registrars	3	3
Town Clerk's Staff*	5	5
Police Officers	13 (2 shifts)	3 (2 shifts)

\*Includes Clerk of the Council

**Precinct Coordinator:** Assists the Precinct Warden in troubleshooting issues as they arise throughout Election Day. Position requires a person with confidence and ability to identify and solve up to mid-level technical issues as well as an innate skill at problem solving on administrative and election issues. Individual assists town clerk staff providing technical and administrative support beginning at 5:30am to closing of polling locations, typically at 10:00pm.

**Warden:** Serves as the Chief Election Official for the assigned voting precinct. Position requires a strong familiarity of Election Day procedures and ability to manage all election workers assigned to their voting precinct. It is highly favorable that individual has had experience in each of the positions within a polling location and has strong administrative and communications skills in handling sensitive issues with voters. Required to be flexible and fill-in at every positions within the polling location as needed. Required to arrive at their assigned polling location no later than 6:00am and work a full-day; typically ending at 10:00pm.

**Precinct Clerk:** Serves as the keeper of records of all facts relating to election activities. Position requires an attentive individual with ability to be concise in the documentation of unusual events within the polling location. Serves as the backup to the warden and is required to fill-in at all positions within the polling location as needed. Required to arrive at their assigned polling location no later than 6:00am and work a full-day; typically ending at 10:00pm.

**Check-In Clerk:** Generally, the initial contact person with voter at the polling location. Position requires minimal skills but be attentive to detail in the recording proper voter and issuing correct ballot to voter. Clerk assists in the opening and closing procedures and ability to follow election policies. Priority is given to candidates able to work a full-day; arriving at their assigned polling location no later than 6:00am to the end of a typically Election Day at 10:00pm. Half-days positions may become available each election with the morning shift starting at 6:00am to 2:00pm and the evening shift starting at 2:00pm to closing; typically 10:00pm.

**Check-Out Clerk:** Pending legislation will eliminate this Election Day process. However, due the COVID-19 requirements, all voting booths and marking instruments must be sanitized throughout Election Day. This position will assume these functions. Additionally, this position requires individual to assist in the opening and closing procedures and the ability to follow election policies. Priority is given to candidates able to work a full-day; arriving at their assigned polling location no later than 6:00am to the end of a typically Election Day at 10:00pm. Half-days positions may become available each election with morning shift starting at 6:00am to 2:00pm and the evening shift starting at 2:00pm to closing; typically 10:00pm.

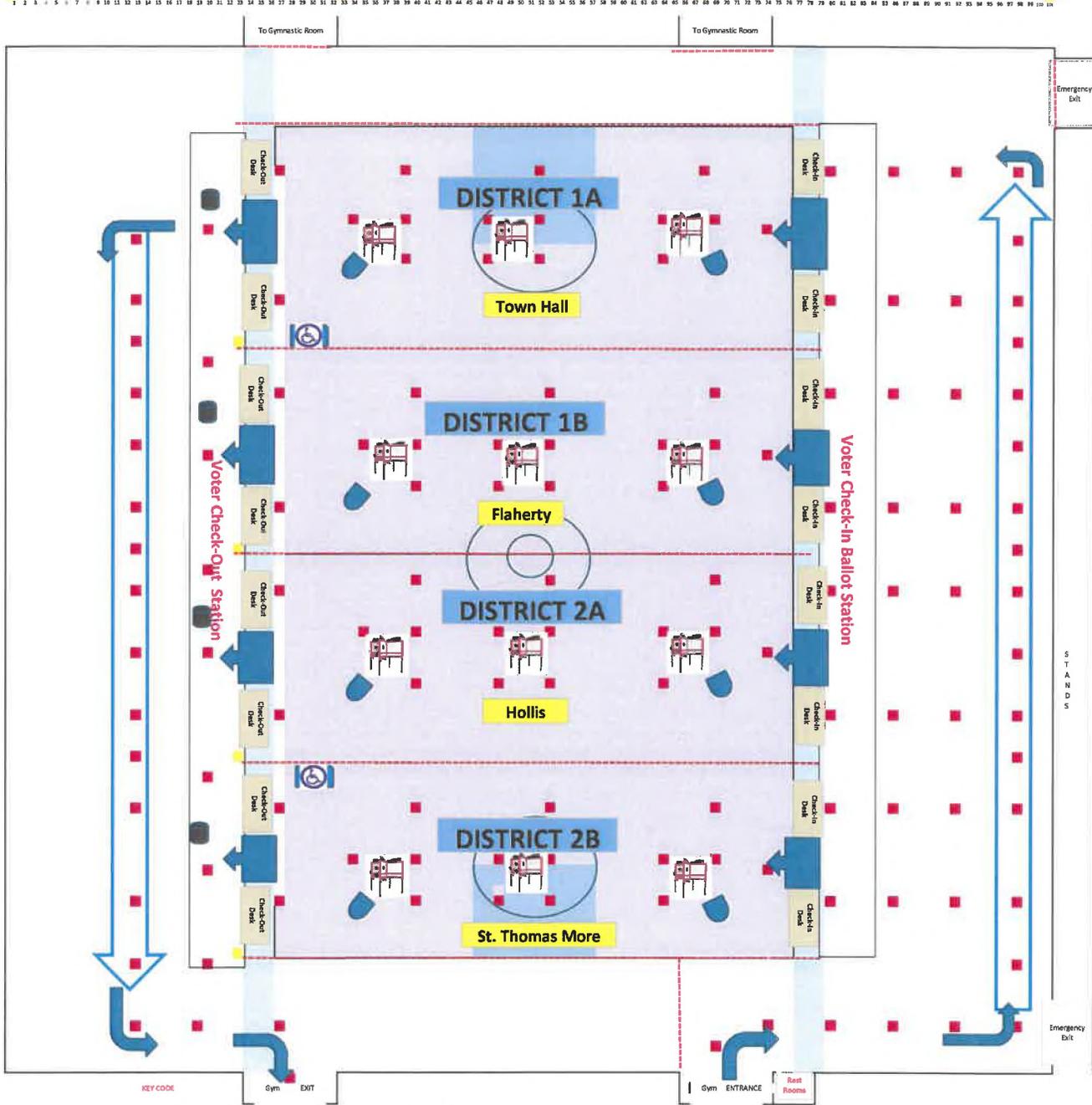
**Tally Clerk:** At the direction of the Warden, makes preliminary judgements regarding the intent of a voter on “hand count ballots” and “write-in ballots” for the purpose of completing the count. Individual requires and understanding of election procedures concerning the determination of “voter intent” as well as be attentive to detail. Candidate is required to arrive at their assigned polling location at 7:30pm and work through the closing of the polls; typically 10:00pm.

## DISTRICT VOTING CENTER – VS- INDIVIDUAL POLLING LOCATIONS

ISSUE	DISTRICT VOTING CENTER	INDIVIDUAL POLLING LOCATIONS
Posting of Warrant and Ballots (10-days before Election)	Police Officer post three buildings.	Police Officer post in up to 11 individual buildings
Location Setup (Day before Election)	DPW staff equipment delivery and setup in three buildings.	DPW staff equipment delivery and setup in 10/11 individual buildings.
Support of Police	6 police detail shifts required, all assigned inside polling location. The three morning officers to assist in the transportation of election day ballots, tabulator and election supplies on the morning of the election.	21 police detail shifts required, all assigned inside polling location. Three of the morning officers to transport election day ballots, tabulator and election supplies on the morning of the election to multiple polling locations.
Staffing	Three polling locations with staff interchangeable across individual precincts based on need.	Inability to interchange staff across individual precincts.
Absentee and Early Voting Ballots	Precinct wardens remain focused on voter activity at all times. Board of Registrars will be required to process ballots in three locations	Precinct wardens to process ballots losing ability to focus on other voter activity.
Social Distancing	Increased oversight over voters in adhering to social distancing guidelines	Loss of direct oversight that social distancing guidelines are adhered similarly across locations
Disinfecting Polling Locations	Less costly to disinfect three buildings.	Significantly higher costs associated with disinfecting all individual polling locations
COVID Signage	Requires 3 sets	More costly, requiring 11 sets
School buildings	Reduce school building use to three sites; no elementary school	Usage of 8 school buildings of which 6 are elementary schools
COST SAVINGS	Approximately \$50,000 savings for 2020 Fall Elections	More costly

**Braintree High School - Gymnasium**  
101' X 110'

32 Feet



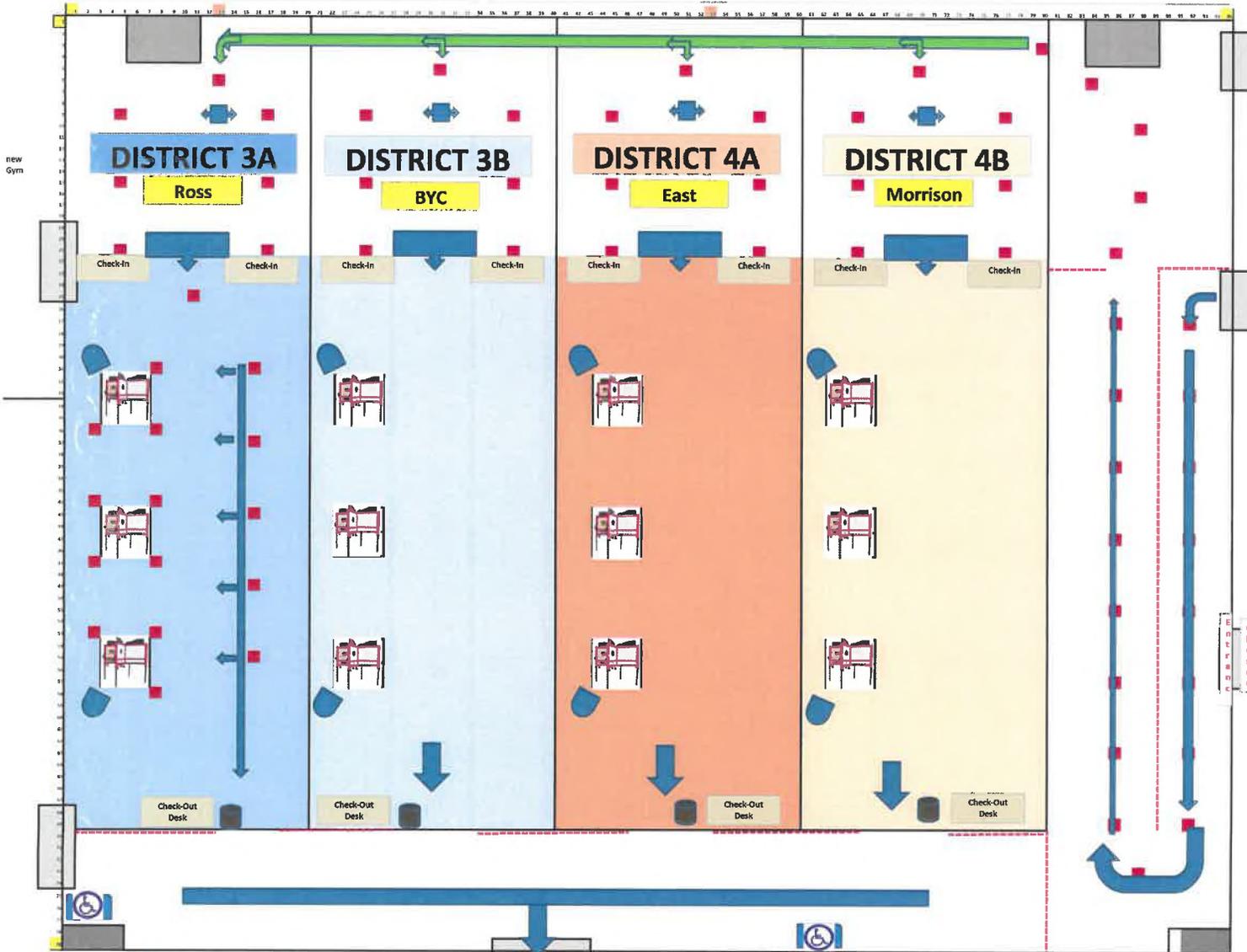
KEY CODE

- ADA Voting Booth (5)
- 4-Booth Voting Station (12)
- Direction
- Voters/Distance Markers (130)
- Barrier
- Voting Tabulator (4)
- ADA/AutoMark Machine

**Crews (125)**

- 1 - Precinct Coordinator
- 3 - 2 - Election workers
- 2 - 4 - Voting Clerks
- 8 - Tally Clerks (7:30pm to closing)
- 1 - Police Officer
- 1 - 4 - 2 - Maximum Voters in Gym

EAST MIDDLE SCHOOL - FRONT GYM  
79' x 95'



KEY CODE

-  ADA Voting Booth (4)
-  4-Booth Voting Station (12)
-  Direction
-  Voters/Distance Markers (130)
-  Barrier
-  Voting Table/ator (4)
-  ADA/AutoMark Machine

Capacity (165)

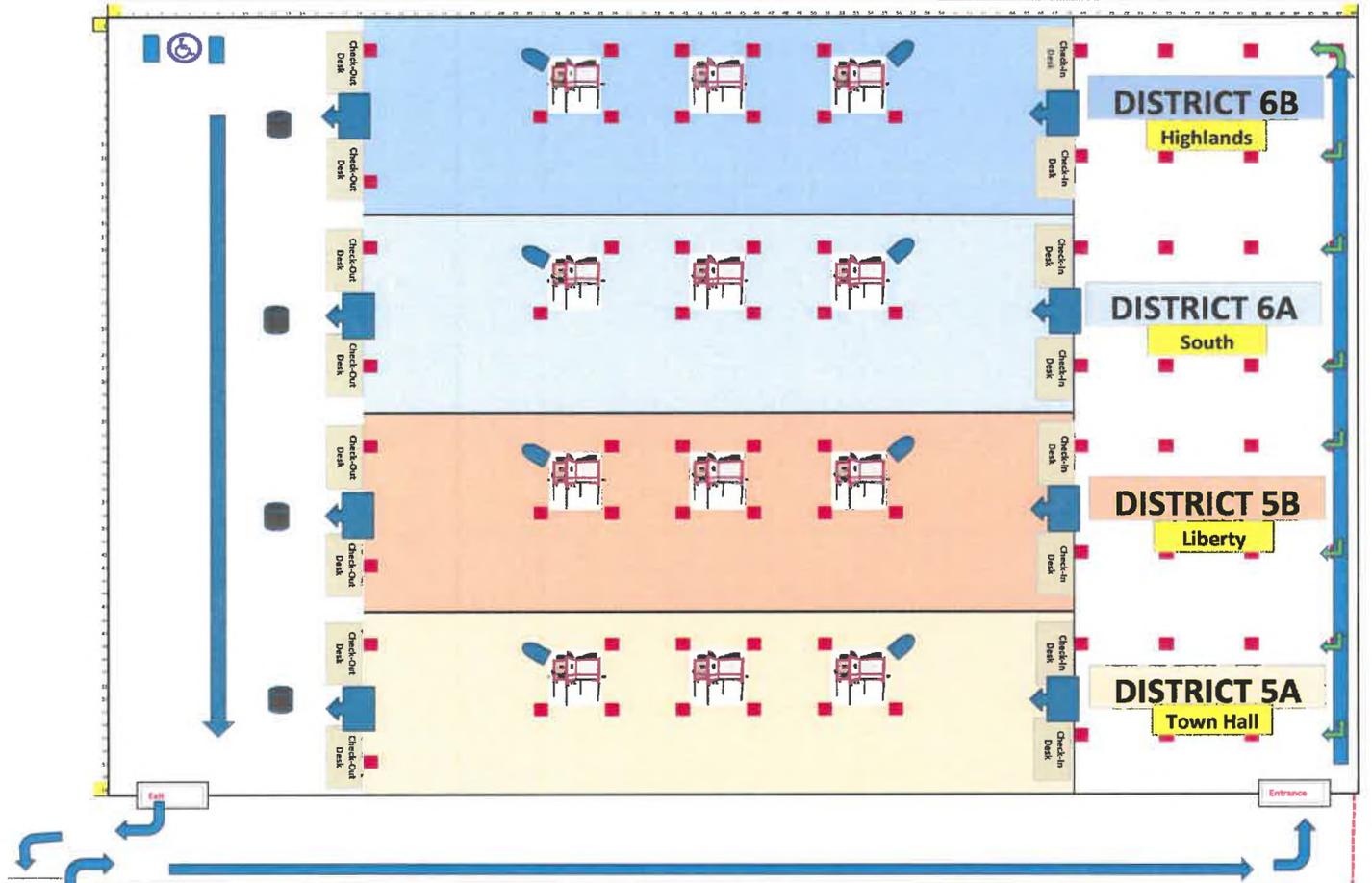
- 1 - Precinct Coordinator
- 3 2 - Election workers
- 2 4 - Voting Hours
- 8 - Tally Clerks (7:30pm to closing)
- 1 Police Officers (2 shifts)
- 1 3 0 - Maximum Voters in Gym

TO PARKING LOT

Guardrail Definition

The guardrail is defined as the footprint of a polling location where access is restricted to election workers or voters actively voting. It begins at the check-in desk and ends at the assigned exit door of the voting center.

**SOUTH MIDDLE SCHOOL - GYM**  
59' x 83'



- KEY CODE**
- ADA Voting Booth (8)
  - 4-Booth Voting Station (12)
  - Direction
  - Capacity (185)**
  - Voters/Distance Markers (130)
  - Barrier
  - Voting Translator (4)
  - ADA/AutoMark Machine
- 1 - Precinct Coordinator
  - 3 2 - Election workers
  - 2 4 - Voting Hours
  - 8 - Tally Clerks (7:30pm to closing)
  - 2 - Police Officers
  - 1 3 0 - Maximum Voters in Gym