

Office of Town Clerk

Laura L. Schwall, CMC/CMMC
Town Clerk
148 Peck Street
Rehoboth, MA 02769



December 6, 2021

Massachusetts State Elections Town Clerk's Report on Polling Location Change

The Town Clerk of the Town of Rehoboth respectfully requests that the location of the Town's polling place, for all future Elections, be approved for the Town-Owned Francis Farm Community Center ~ Museum Building and facility located at 27 Francis Farm Road, Rehoboth, Massachusetts 02769. Due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, State of Emergency and Social Distancing Protocols, in addition to Precinct Two – Council on Aging Senior Center's catastrophic fire on September 12, 2020, the "typical" polling locations for the Town of Rehoboth (Precinct 1 – Rehoboth Town Hall – 148 Peck Street; Precinct 2 – Rehoboth Council on Aging/COA – Senior Center – 55 Bay State Road; Precinct 3 – Rehoboth South Fire Station – 102 Pleasant Street) are not suitable to conduct a safe and secure election during a Pandemic and loss of Precinct 2. In addition to the previously mentioned conditions, on October 27, 2021 the Town of Rehoboth received approval of their 2020 Census Reapportioning lines, inclusive of an additional Precinct (Precinct 4) with the Local Election Districts Review Commission (LEDRC). Since many voter precincts will change due to Rehoboth's growth over the past ten years and anticipated future growth in town for the next ten years, it was decided a centralized polling location be designated by the Board of Selectmen in consultation with the Town Clerk for the convenience of voters. Due to the events detailed below; the use of a centralized polling location at our local school facilities will no longer be possible. Therefore, our request, after a unanimous vote of the Board of Selectmen on November 1, 2021 is to designate the newly town acquired Francis Farm Community Center Museum and facility as Rehoboth's new centralized polling location inclusive of Precincts 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Timeline of Town of Rehoboth Polling Location Changes over the past seventeen months.

- For as long as I can remember Rehoboth has had three precincts and three separate polling locations around town – north – central and south Rehoboth (Town Hall – Precinct 1; COA/Senior Center – Precinct 2 [*previously Palmer River Elementary School until the COA was built in 2002*]; South Fire Station – Precinct 3) until September 12, 2020 when Precinct 2 (Council on Aging – Senior Center) burned to the ground:

https://www.thesunchronicle.com/news/local_news/fire-destroys-rehoboth-senior-center/article_706d6447-5b80-561b-8fe0-a6318b5caba2.html

When the COVID pandemic hit in March of 2020, and prior to the COA fire, Rehoboth combined and changed their polling location to the COA/Senior Center – 55 Bay State Road (our newest town building) to allow for the sharing of election workers during the pandemic and the ability to socially distant the voters for the postponed Annual Town Election (April – June 2020).

- After the April/June postponed election, it was determined a larger parking area was needed for the upcoming September Primary and November Presidential Election. Therefore, due to the Town's concern of increased voter participation at the upcoming elections, COVID-19 social distancing protocols and the devastating COA fire, Rehoboth designated a new centralized polling location, our local Elementary School. This time the Palmer River Elementary School Gymnasium was voted by the Board of Selectmen and approved by the State as our centralized polling location for all three precincts. We successfully held the September 2020 Primary and November 3, 2020 Presidential/State Election at Palmer River Elementary School.

(Continued)

- As the COVID pandemic continued into 2021, we requested use of the Palmer River Elementary School Gymnasium for the Tuesday, April 6, 2021 Annual Town Election. Unfortunately, the Principal and School Administration/School Committee refused our request due to students being required to return to in-person learning, from remote learning, by DESE. While students and staff were in-session, the election would not be able to be conducted at the elementary school due to traffic, parking, health and safety concerns.
- We contacted the D.L. Middle School Principal and received approval from the school Principal and School Committee to hold our April 2021 Annual Town Election at the Middle School, due to (at the time) DESE allowing middle school students to continue working remotely. Since then, all students are back to in-person learning and the School Committee has requested that we no longer hold our elections in the school buildings while school is in-session.
- In July of 2021, the Town of Rehoboth purchased the attached facility (see property record card) – a popular function venue “Francis Farm” Community Center from bankruptcy for our relocated Senior Center, which we lost due to the 9-12-20 fire. The facility offers 47-plus acres off of County Street and Francis Farm Road featuring several buildings encompassing over 18,000 square feet for activities and events. The “Museum” building, constructed in 2008, (Rehoboth’s newly designated centralized polling location by the Board of Selectmen) offers a 110 x 70-foot open floorplan where the elections will take place. Within the 110 x 70 area (see attached page 12 & 14) there is one single-locked-office – 12’ x 8’8” room, which I would like, if possible, to have access to the State VRIS program from that secure room; a request which was submitted through Elections Help Desk.
- On December 4, 2021 the Town Clerk-Laura Schwall, and IT Director-Derek Rousseau, surveyed the proposed site for the combined polling location of Precincts 1, 2, 3 and now 4 using the Secretary of the Commonwealth’s regulations for polling place accessibility (950 CMR 51:00) and determined that the Francis Farm Community Center Museum and surrounding buildings/pavilions located at 27 Francis Farm Road in Rehoboth, MA meets the criteria for a polling location.

FINDINGS: The Francis Farm Museum is centrally located in town and easily accessible by one of the town’s major roadways, Route 118 to County Street. It meets the requirements for site access, voting equipment, secure Wi-Fi access, parking, entrance, ramps, and building interior. The Francis Farm Community Center Museum is a public building, which the Town of Rehoboth owns, is ADA compliant and will not have a disparate adverse impact on access to the polls on the basis of race, national origin, disability, income or age. Francis Farm provides adequate space for voters to be able to maintain social distance from each other and Election Officials upon entering, waiting in line, voting and exiting the polling location.

Further, the Francis Farm Museum provides adequate space for Election Officials to perform their duties while maintaining social distance from each other to the greatest extent possible. The Rehoboth Board of Selectmen met on Monday, November 1, 2021 and have approved the polling location change for all future elections; please see attached. An added bonus is the Francis Farm Community Center Museum is next to the newly acquired Rehoboth Senior Citizens building, resulting in easy accessibility for our senior population as well. Based on the information provided with this letter, the Town of Rehoboth respectfully requests the State confirm the proposed change in polling locations is in accordance with the Commonwealth’s regulations for polling place accessibility (950 CMR 51:00) and will have no adverse impact on the voters of Precincts 1, 2, 3 and 4. Thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns. Finally, please stay healthy and safe.

Respectfully submitted,



Laura L. Schwall, CMC/CMMC
Rehoboth Town Clerk