Centre County Board of Elections
Ballot Return and Collection Plan
2021 Municipal Election

Date: October 7, 2021
Version 1.0

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1 Establishing a Ballot Return and Collection Plan
1.1 BALLOT RETURN SITES HISTORY

For the 2020 Municipal Election, the CCBOE established a secure ballot return site (SBRS) at the Willowbank Office Building – the main administrative office building for Centre County Government – as an option for voters to return their own voted absentee ballot or mail-in ballot. The secure ballot return receptacle (SBRR) was in front of the Willowbank (SEE IMAGES A & B).

For the 2020 General Election, the CCBOE approved a Ballot Return and Collection Plan, with eight secure ballot return sites, to achieve four main objectives:

- Afford voters greater access to returning their own voted absentee ballots and mail-in ballots.
- Decrease the wait time for in-person voting on Tuesday, November 3, 2020.
- Provide voters another safe option for voting during COVID-19.
- Allay concerns regarding potential delays with the United States Postal Service.

The Centre County Elections Office (CCEO) is located at the Willowbank Building at 420 Holmes Street in Bellefonte, PA 16823. The CCEO allowed voters to return their own voted absentee ballots and mail-in ballots in-person to Elections staff for the 2020 General Election. The CCBOE designed the front entrance of the Willowbank Building with safety measures in place for COVID-19, efficiency considerations, and ease of access to voters. The CCBOE also worked with the Pennsylvania Department of State to establish a satellite elections office (SEO) at the Ticket Center of the Bryce Jordan Center (BJC) at 127 Bryce Jordan Center, University Park, PA 16802.

The Centre County Board of Commissioners finalized a contract for a lease of the Ticket Center at the BJC for use as a SEO. The CCBEO designated the location for voters to request and cast an absentee or mail-in ballot over the counter. The CCBOE successfully worked with the Pennsylvania Department of State to establish and approve a secure connection at the SEO capable of connecting to the Statewide Uniform Registry of Electors (SURE) system. The Centre County Elections staff assisted in the training of temporary election workers that processed the absentee and mail-in ballot applications. The SEO had copies of every ballot style available to be voted in each of Centre County’s precincts. Lastly, the SEO had a secure ballot collection receptacle to store voted absentee or mail-in ballots submitted at the location.

For the 2020 General Election, a total of 20,269 ballots were returned via secure ballot drop boxes and 2,202 votes used the SEO at the BJC to cast their ballot.

1.2 BALLOT RETURN SITES FOR CURRENT ELECTION

For the 2021 General Primary, the Centre County Board of Elections (CCBOE) will again establish a plan and adopt procedures for how Centre County voters may return their own voted
absentee ballots and mail-in ballots. The plan will follow the previously adopted plan for the 2020 General Election. With the following notable modifications:

- There will not be a Satellite Elections Office for the 2021 Municipal Election. However, voters will have the option of applying, receiving, and casting a vote-by-mail ballot at the Centre County Elections Office at the Willowbank Building. The CCBOE will establish an online appointment scheduling webpage that will allow for voters to sign up for a time to drop off their application, receive their ballot, vote the ballot, and return it. The online scheduling tool will be like the one used during the 2020 General Election for the Satellite Elections Office at the Bryan Jordan Center.
- The secure ballot drop box located at the Magisterial District Justice Office in Centre Hall will be moved from inside the building to outside. This will enable the secure ballot drop box to be accessed 24/7. The drop box will continue to be monitored 24/7 by a video security surveillance system.

1.3 LOCATION OF BALLOT RETURN SITES

1.3.1 Location

The CCBOE has identified the following locations for SBRSs. At each location a SBRR will be mounted to the ground, floor, or wall. The receptacles will be located outside the buildings.

1. Willowbank Office Building, 420 Holmes Street, Bellefonte, PA 16823
2. Patton Township Municipal Building, 100 Patton Plaza, State College, PA 16803
3. Ferguson Township Municipal Building, 3147 Research Drive, State College, PA 16801
4. State College Borough Municipal Building, 243 South Allen Street, State College, PA, 16801
5. Spring Township Municipal Building, 1309 Blanchard Street, Bellefonte, PA 16823
6. Magisterial District Office 49-3-03 (Philipsburg MDJ Office), 118 Enterprise Drive, Philipsburg, PA 16866
7. Magisterial District Office 49-3-04 (Centre Hall MDJ Office), 2795 Earlystown Road, Centre Hall, PA 16828
8. HUB-Robeson Center, 100 Pollock Rd, University Park, PA 16802
The SBRRs at all locations will be installed no later than Monday, October 11, 2021. The SBRRs will become operational dependent on when ballots are ready for mailing by the Centre County Elections Office.

1.3.2 Hours of Operation

The hours of operation for all SBRSs will be 24/7. The CCBOE will also work with elections staff to set up hours of operation at the Centre County Elections Office for evenings and weekends to enable maximum flexibility and convenience to voters.

1.3.3 Advertising and Promoting

The CCBOE will post on the County Elections’ website, social media, press releases, and legal advertisements pertinent information regarding all SBRRs, including, but not limited to, hours of operation, addresses, maps, specific placement, parking, photographs, signage, rules and regulations, and closest bus route(s).

1.3.4 Additional Transportation Option

The Centre County Office of Transportation (CCOT) will provide rides free of charge to individuals 60 and older who would like to return their own voted ballots to a SBRR. Rides can be scheduled by calling the CCOT at (814) 355-6807.

1.4 PROVIDING NOTICE OF LOCATION OF COUNTY ELECTION OFFICES AND BALLOT RETURN SITES

The CCBOE will make a list of the secure ballot return sites and the location of the CCEO at the Willowbank Building public as early as possible, including the dates and hours of operation. Seven to ten days after submitting the initial Ballot Return and Collection Plan to BEST, the CCBOE will post a notice of the plan on the home page of the County website (centrecountypa.gov) and the main webpage of the Elections & Voter Registration Office (centrecountyvotes.com). The notice posted on the websites will be in a format that is accessible for voters with disabilities. If there are changes to the site location operations, the CCEO will post updated information on the website with 24 hours. A notice of the plan will also be posted at the entrance to the Willowbank Building and the Centre County Courthouse.

The public notice, at a minimum, will include:

- The ballot return deadline.
- List of county election offices and ballot return sites, including building names and street address.
- Days and hours of operation, including Election Day hours.
1.5 CONFIRMATION OF PLAN READINESS

Upon approval of the 2021 Municipal Election, Ballot Return and Collection Plan, the CCBOE will submit it to the Pennsylvania Department of State, Bureau of Election Security and Technology (BEST). If BEST requests modifications to the plan, the CCBOE will submit a modified plan within 7 days of the request. If the CCBOE determines that it is in the best interest of Centre County voters to further alter the plan or increase/decrease the number of SBRRs, the CCBOE will submit another supplemental plan to BEST no later than Friday, October 15, 2021, and provide notice to the public no later than Wednesday, October 20, 2021.

2. Ballot Return Site Design and Requirements

2.1 TYPES OF BALLOT RETURN SITES

For the 2021 Municipal Election, the CCBOE will establish sites where voters may return their own voted absentee ballots and mail-in ballots. All sites will have a secure ballot return receptacle. As mentioned in section 1.2.2, voters will be able to return their own voted ballots 24/7 to all ballot return receptacles. Return sites will have the same features, and be of substantially similar design, color scheme, and signage to easily facilitate identification by voters.

2.2 SECURE RECEPTACLES

Each secure ballot return site will have a secure ballot return receptacle (SBRR) that permits voters to return their own voted ballot. A postage stamp is not needed on the return envelope when a voter deposits their ballot into a SBRR.

Each SBRR will have a metal flap that opens with ease – requiring no more than 5 pounds of pressure to operate – to provide the voter enough space to insert their own voted ballot (SEE IMAGE E). The ballot deposit slot will open to no more than one inch as to not allow tampering or removal of ballots. The opening of the ballot deposit slot will also minimize the ability for liquid to be poured into the SBRR or rainwater to seep in. The ballot deposit slot will be within reach-range of no less than 15 inches and no more than 48 inches from the floor or ground.

Each SBRR will have one slot for voters to return their own voted ballot. The location of the slot will be identified with a sign stating “INSERT BALLOT HERE”.
2.3 SIGNAGE

The Centre County Elections’ ballot return sites are official and secure. The CCBOE has marked each SBRR with official signage reading “OFFICIAL CENTRE COUNTY BALLOT RETURN” (IMAGES B.2, F, G, H, I, J, K). The CCBEO did not display “VOTE HERE” signage at the SBRSs.

Additional signage will include statements that:

- The secure ballot return site is being monitored by a video security surveillance system or internal camera.
- Counterfeiting, forging, tampering with, or destroying ballots is a second-degree misdemeanor pursuant to sections 1816 and 1817 of the Pennsylvania Election Code (25 P.S. §§ 3516 and 3517).
  - Each SBRS will have unique contact information for the local police department that has jurisdiction where the SBRR is located and the Centre County District Attorney’s Office.
- Third-party return of ballots is prohibited unless the person returning the ballot is rendering assistance to a disabled voter or an emergency absentee voter. Moreover, such assistance requires a declaration signed by the voter and the person rendering assistance.
- Requesting that the designated CCEO should be notified immediately in the event the receptacle is full, not functioning, or is damaged in any fashion, and will provide a phone number and email address for such purpose. The non-emergency number (1-800-479-0050) for the Centre County Emergency Communications Office will serve as the phone number and will be listed on the SBRR signage.

2.4 ACCESSIBILITY OF BALLOT RETURN SITES

The CCBOE will ensure that all ballot return sites are accessible to voters with disabilities and that the design and placement of each site will meet accessibility requirements.

2.5 SECURITY

The CCBOE will ensure the following at each secure ballot return site:

- Only personnel authorized by the CCBOE will have access to the ballots inside of SBRR.
- Each SBRR will be mounted to the ground, floor, or wall in a manner to prevent their unauthorized removal.
• All SBRR should be secured by a lock and sealed with a tamper-evident seal. Only authorized election officials designated by the CCBOE will access the keys of the lock.
• The CCBOE will ensure adequate lighting is provided at all SBRSs when in use.
• All SBRRs will be monitored by a video security surveillance system. Video surveillance will be retained by the CCEO through January 28, 2021. Video surveillance will be retained from the first day absentee ballots and mail-in ballots are available for voters to obtain from the CCEO or mailed out to voters, whichever happens first.
• To prevent physical damage and unauthorized entry, the SBRRs are constructed of durable material able to withstand vandalism, removal, and inclement weather.

3 Ballot Collection and Chain of Custody Procedures

CCBOE will develop ballot collection and chain of custody procedures for ballots returned to the CCEO or a SBRS. These procedures will be consistent with Pennsylvania law and Pennsylvania Department of State directives.

3.1 BALLOT COLLECTION AT BALLOT RETURN SITES

• Ballots will be collected from ballot return sites only by personnel authorized by the CCBOE and at times determined by the CCBOE, at least every 24 hours, excluding Saturdays and Sundays.
• Authorized personnel will be accompanied by a member of the Centre County Sheriff’s Office to provide security. The member of the Sheriff’s Office will not assist with the retrieval of voted ballots but will be present during the retrieval process.
• The CCBOE will designate at least two election officials to collect voted ballots from a ballot return site. Each designated election official will carry identification or an official designation that identifies them as an election official authorized to collect voted ballots (See IMAGES L & M).
• Election officials designated to collect voted ballots by the CCBOE will sign a declaration declaring that he or she will timely and securely collect and return voted ballots, will not permit any person to tamper with a ballot return site or its contents, and that he or she will faithfully and securely perform his or her duties. These declarations will be stored at the CCEO for 22 months after the certifications of the official election results.
• Election officials designated to collect voted ballots will receive a training from the CCEO prior to retrieving ballots.
• Election officials will follow the directions outlined in the Ballot Return Site Collection Form (ATTACHMENT A) when retrieving the voted ballots from the ballot return receptacle and when returning the voted ballots to the CCEO.
3.2 TRANSPORT AND RECEIPT OF RETRIEVED BALLOTS TO THE BOARD OF ELECTIONS

- Ballots collected from any ballot return site will be immediately transported to the CCEO.
- Upon arrival at the CCEO, county elections official will note the time of arrival on the Ballot Return Site Collection Form.
- The elections officials retrieving ballots will inspect the secure ballot transfer container for evidence of tampering and should receive the retrieved ballots by signing the retrieval form and including the date and time of receipt. In the event tampering is evident, that fact must be noted on the retrieval form.
- The completed Ballot Return Site Collection Form will be maintained in a manner prescribed by the CCBOE to ensure that the form is traceable to its respective secure ballot container.
- The elections official at the CCEO should note the number of ballots delivered on the Ballot Return Site Collection Form.

3.3 ELECTION DAY AND POST-ELECTION PROCEDURES

- The CCBOE will arrange for election officials to retrieve ballots on election night and transport them to the CCEO at the Willowbank Building.
- Elections officials will be at the ballot return receptacles immediately prior to 8:00PM or at the time the polls should otherwise be closed.
- At 8:00:00PM on Tuesday, November 2, 2021, or later if the polling place hours have been extended, all ballot return sites and receptacles will be closed and locked.
- Elections officials will be accompanied by a member of the Centre County Sheriff’s Office to provide security. The member of the Sheriff’s Office will not assist with the retrieval of voted ballots but will be present during the retrieval process.
- Elections officials will ensure that no voted ballots are returned to the ballot return receptacles after the close of polls. Each receptacle’s ballot deposit slot will be sealed shut and locked with a “defeater” bar. At each site, a notice signed by the CCBOE will be posted by the elections officials that the polling is closed for the election.

4 Processing of Collected Ballots

All ballots collected from a return site will be processed in the same manner as absentee ballots and mail-in ballots personally delivered to the CCEO at the Willowbank Building by the voter and ballots received via the USPS or any other delivery service.
### Version History

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### Images
IMAGE A – Willowbank Secure Ballot Drop Box (2020 Municipal Election) - Far

IMAGE B.1 – Willowbank Secure Ballot Drop Box (2020 Municipal Election) - Near
IMAGE B.2 – Willowbank Secure Ballot Drop Box (2020 General Election) - Near

IMAGE C – Locations of Secure Ballot Drop Boxes

IMAGE: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/fc/Map_of_Centre_County%2C_Pennsylvania_No_Text.png

IMAGE: https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/f/fc/Map_of_Centre_County%2C_Pennsylvania_No_Text.png
IMAGE E – Close up of Ballot Deposit Slot (2020 Municipal Election)
IMAGES F, G, H, I, J, K – Signage for SBRRs
We, the Centre County Board of Elections, do hereby designate ______________________ to collect voted ballots from ballot return sites for the 2021 Municipal Election.

- Steven G. Dershem, Chair
  Michael Pipe, Vice-Chair
  Mark Higgins

Ballot Return Site Election Official

- Centre County Elections Office – 814-355-6703
- Willowbank Site (Bellefonte Police – 814-353-2320)
- Patton Site (Patton Township Police – 814-234-0271)
- Ferguson Site (Ferguson Township Police – 814-237-1172)
- State College Site (State College Police – 814-234-7150)
- Spring Twp Site (Spring Twp Police – 814-355-5134)
- Philipsburg & Centre Hall - Magisterial District Offices
  (Pennsylvania State Police – 814-355-7545)
- HUB (Penn State University Police – 814-863-1111)
- ALL SITES (Centre County District Attorney – 814-355-6735)

7 Attachments
Attachment A – Secure Ballot Return Receptacle Installation Form
Attachment B – Ballot Return Site Collection Form
Attachment C – Election Night Ballot Return Site Collection Closing Form