

Voter Service Annual Report 2020-2021

Voter Registration

With the passage of emergency voting reform legislation, new voter handouts were designed, listing the dates for state and national primary elections, registration deadlines, expanded early voting, and vote by mail procedures. Distribution of paper handouts was very limited due to the pandemic lockdown of public places. The handouts were distributed during the suffrage Centennial Car Parade, at a Black Lives Matter Amherst Regional High School student picnic event, in newspaper advertising, on the website, and via social media. As soon as LWV issued guidance on COVID – safe, in-person voter registration, we partnered with the Amherst Survival Center in August – October to offer voting information handouts and registration forms during their free lunch distribution outside. In October we had a voter table at the Amherst Farmers Market on the common wearing masks, offering hand sanitizer, and practicing social distancing. Many thanks to everyone who ventured out to help people vote!

National Elections

League members also urged people to vote by displaying yard signs with the message Vote! It counts! The League even purchased 25 more signs. A new banner with the same eye-catching message and dates for early voting and Election Day was displayed across South Pleasant Street October 26 – November 1. It's worth noting that November's voter turnout in Amherst was down 25% in 2020 from the 2016 presidential election, due to the closure of the University of Massachusetts campus and departure of most of the student body.

Other issues

The League also weighed in against the consolidation of polling places in Amherst and in promoting the location of the new ballot drop box at Town Hall.

The new Town Charter directs the use of ranked choice voting for local elections, but this must be supported with special legislation from the State House and purchase of new voting equipment. VS has agreed to assist the Town with voter education when ranked choice voting is implemented.

The voting reforms authorized by emergency legislation expire at the end of June, 2021. During the first six months of 2021 VS has been working to pass the new VOTES Act by educating League members, participating in the Virtual Lobby Day, and submitting letters to the editor of the Daily Hampshire Gazette.

--Submitted by Bonnie Isman, June 6, 2021