

Hello Citizens of Rye,

May 31, 2024

I write to you today as the newly-elected Town Moderator. I am hoping to get electronic poll pads in use for the September primary, and would love your support. First and foremost: *this has nothing to do with the actual voting, the voting machines, or ballots*. This is simply a new way to check in voters. Lots of information below, but

I have a big ask: once you read through this, if you agree that poll pads are a good idea to implement in the next election, please consider either attending the Select Board meeting on June 10th at 6:30pm at Town Hall (10 Central Road), writing a letter of support addressed to the Select Board... or even just responding to this email with your support with a short reason why you'd like them.

At the last meeting where this was discussed, there were people in the audience who were opposed to poll pads, and they voiced their concerns (some of them are addressed below). Because the audience present skewed "against", it made it seem as if the majority of citizens oppose them; I believe the opposite is true- that most people in Rye would love to upgrade the voting experience.

What is a poll pad?

They are basically iPads that contain the voter checklist (it is currently on paper, split into 3 or 4 alphabetized paper books). **They are not connected to the internet on election day**, instead are on a closed, protected system and communicate via bluetooth.

How does the voter benefit?

- **Shorter lines.** First, a voter can go to any line, not just the one containing their letter of the alphabet.
- **Shorter check-in.** The average check in with a poll pad is 15 seconds. A paper checklist is probably (at least) around 45 seconds to a minute. Doesn't make a lot of difference with a few voters, but multiply that by all the voters in Rye, and you start to see a real difference in the whole voting experience, including available parking spaces. Plus, absentee voters are checked in separately, further speeding up the in-person voting line.
- **Peace of mind that you were properly checked in.** Ballot clerks are well-trained and conscientious. But they are also human. When there are long lines, especially in a primary, there are opportunities for error. Clerks have occasionally forgotten to check a voter in, or accidentally crossed off the wrong voter (a spouse, or a "Sr" instead of a "Jr" or a person with a similar name); or neglected to indicate which ballot an undeclared voter received. With a poll pad, all of those errors are eliminated, because the screen prompts do not allow a clerk to proceed until all the information is verified by the voter.
- **Quicker, more accurate, race results.** Currently, all reconciliation at the end of the night is done by hand. Clerks literally go page-by-page hand counting the checklist. At the end of an extremely long day in an elementary school gym, errors are common, and therefore must be done again. With poll pads, it's a click of a button to run a report, getting an accurate number instantly.

- **There is a paper list as a backup.** Right now poll pads are only "conditionally" approved, which means we must also maintain a paper list. A separate team behind the guardrail will be working diligently to keep that list as current as possible, in case of a power outage or system failure (though so far, that has never happened in New Hampshire, and poll pads have a 4 hour battery). We will also compare that manual checklist to the one generated by the poll pad to ensure both lists are accurate.

How much do they cost?

The initial cost of these poll pads is roughly \$11,000 to purchase the equipment, warranty for each pad, and a current voter list upload for each election.. basically **\$2.20 per registered Rye voter**. Once the poll pads are purchased, they will require a \$300/pad warranty payment per year (\$1500 total), plus \$300/election uploading fee. So in 2025, the cost will be \$1800, or **\$.36/per registered voter**. Although there is no line item in the 2024 election budget for new poll pads, there is a contingency fund with \$15,000 that has not yet been spent, and could be used.

Concerns

At the Select Board meeting on Tuesday, people expressed some concerns about poll pads, which I totally understand. Change can be hard, and it is important to look at all angles, pros and cons when looking to make a big change to such an important institution. Here are some of the concerns people voiced:

This technology is too new. Poll pads have been in use since 2018 in some municipalities. They are currently used in 28 states and 31 cities and towns across New Hampshire, including North Hampton, Portsmouth, and Exeter. After every election, the moderator of every town must submit a report to the Secretary of State, which details the whole experience of the voters and election officials. The reports that I have read have been overwhelmingly positive.

We shouldn't introduce such a new thing in 2024 when the election is already going to be a crazy zoo. We should wait until the 2025 town election, when things are slower, turnout is lower, and emotions aren't running as high. I'd like to introduce these in the September primary, when turnout is typically lower than a presidential general, and not significantly higher than a town election. We will be able to see them in action, and test them to see if we think we are ready to use them in November. If we feel confident in their use, and feel properly trained, we will go forward in November. *But if we- the Town Clerk, Supervisors of the Checklist, Select Board and Moderator- feel the slightest hesitation for any reason, we will go back to the paper checklist and revisit the poll books in March.*

The poll books will scan my drivers license. I don't want the poll pad to save that information. First, letting a ballot clerk scan your license is completely optional. Although scanning speeds up the process and helps eliminate checking in the wrong voter, a clerk can look up a voter manually. **But the poll pad does not save drivers license information in any way.** The poll pads cannot access any information besides your name and address. Also: most people let their licenses get scanned at a variety of places like the doctor's office and airport already.

Name, address and party affiliation information will remain on the poll pad between elections. Yes, this is true... however all voter information is public knowledge. A paper copy of the checklist is already available for anyone to review at the town clerk's office throughout the year. The only difference is that the poll pads will remain locked in a safe between elections.

What if malware infects the poll pad, and changes the check-in information... or crashes it? Viruses and bad actors are always feared when dealing with technology. But after every election, the checklist from the poll pads will be printed and compared to the paper one (which will be available to check in voters in the case of emergency). Any discrepancies would immediately be detected. To date, all of the poll pad systems have been kept safe.

We will need a lot more poll workers, which will cost the town a lot of money. Surrounding towns have noted that they have only needed a couple extra people throughout the day to help make the paper checklist check-ins go smoothly. And in the last election, only a handful of election workers requested to be paid; most volunteered their time. I, as town moderator, am budgeted to receive a \$300 per election stipend; I will gladly donate the entirety towards the cost of poll books/additional clerks if they are adopted.

If you have any other concerns, please let me know so I can try and address them. But again, if you think we should move forward for the September 2024 election,

please come to the meeting on June 10th at 6:30pm (most effective!), write a letter of support to the Select Board (Bill Epperson, Chair, Bob McGrath, vice-chair, and Rob Wright),(next best!) and drop it off or mail it to Janice Ireland's attention: 10 Central Road, Rye, NH 03870. Or you can simply reply to this email, and I will register your support (still greatly appreciated!).

Please feel free to forward this email to anyone who might want some poll pad information. I've also attached a flyer and information about the security measures in place, if you'd like to read about them further.

Thank you for getting to the bottom of this email (phew!), and I look forward to seeing you all September 10th in the Rye Elementary School Gym from 8am-7pm. *And don't forget: June 4th is the last day to change your party affiliation before that election.*

I hope you all have a lovely weekend.

Best,

Nina Parrott
Town & School Moderator

Poll Pad Information Flyer: [Click Here](#)

Poll Pad Security Information: [Click Here](#)