

City of Madison: What happens when the polls close

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City of Madison poll workers run through a checklist to make sure all votes are counted before they run the results on election night.

If there is a line of voters at 8 p.m., a poll worker stands at the end of the line to ensure that everyone who arrived before the polls closed will be able to cast a ballot.

Poll workers check and double-check that every ballot has been counted. They verify that the absentee ballot delivery bag is empty, and that all absentees have been processed. If there are absentee ballots that still need to be counted, poll workers will process those ballots before printing the election results.

A polling location may have anywhere from 300 to 3,900 absentee ballots to process on Tuesday. Poll workers begin processing absentee ballots when the polls open at 7 a.m., and aim to finish by 8 p.m.

Poll workers verify that the number of ballots counted by the tabulator (number displayed on the tabulator screen) equals the number of voters checked into the poll book. They verify these numbers every hour throughout Election Day, and must resolve any discrepancy before printing the election results. If the numbers do not match, poll workers verify that every absentee envelope was assigned a voter number and no longer contains a ballot, and that every voter registration was assigned a voter number. Poll workers take this opportunity to triple-check that all ballots have been counted.

Once poll workers are certain that all ballots have been counted, and that the number of voters equals the number of ballots cast, poll workers print a paper results tape and announce the results for that polling location. Poll workers sign a results tape for the County Clerk, and another results tape for the City Clerk.

After the results tapes have finished printing, the unofficial results are transmitted to the County Clerk via modem. The results are encrypted, using a private key and digital signature. After the County Clerk's Office posts the unofficial results online, the City Clerk's Office checks those results against the paper results tapes returned from the polls.

Poll workers secure the ballots in a bag bearing a unique serial number, and seal the bag closed with tamper-evident tape. They document ballot bag serial numbers on the polling place Inspectors' Statement. All poll workers review the Inspectors' Statement, which contains a record of all Election Day activity at that polling location.

Poll workers compare both copies of the poll list as they close the polls to make sure they match. One copy of the poll book goes to the County Clerk and the other copy goes to the City Clerk.

The polling location Chief Inspector returns Election Day documentation, results tapes, and tabulator memory stick (secured with a tamper-evident seal) to the City Clerk's Office on election night.

The City of Madison Board of Canvassers meets at 4 p.m. the Friday after the election to review all Election Day paperwork and to count the provisional ballots cast by voters who provided the Clerk's Office with a copy of their voter ID by the 4 p.m. Friday deadline.