Williamson County approves Early Voting polling places

By BRAD STUTZMAN

What’s usually done with a fast, routine vote sparked a round of discussion and explanations at Tuesday’s Commissioners Court meeting.

Following the Texas State Legislature’s decision to eliminate the one-day polling places known as mobile locations, commissioners adopted a list of sites for this fall’s Early Voting.

November 5 elections will be preceded by a two-week Early Voting period, from October 21 through November 1.

Typically, Early Voting has consisted of a dozen or more sites open for the full two weeks, plus a handful of one-day sites in outlying areas.

The Legislature, acting this past spring, changed that.

“We’re not able to do temporary branch voting,” Elections Administrator Chris Davis told commissioners.

The mobile locations typically were in rural areas, but for November 2018 elections the county also opened a one-day site at Southwestern University.

SU ruled out

Southwestern’s location drew 466 voters in one day during last fall’s Early Voting, Emily Sydnor said.

Ms. Sydnor is an assistant professor of political science at SU.

She said having a polling place on campus was convenient for students and Old Town residents.

“Shouldn’t it be convenient to vote?” Ms. Sydnor said.

Kay Proud, who is Mr. Davis’s polling place coordinator and recruiter for election workers, noted Williamson County operates with what’s called a “vote center” system, meaning any registered county voter can vote at any polling place countywide — as opposed to just in their own election precinct.

“When we went to vote centers in 2013 we assured our outlying areas we would serve them with a day of mobile voting,” Ms. Proud said. “Now we can’t.

“I’m disappointed ... by the folks in Austin,” County Judge Bill Gravell said, referring to the legislative decision.

Ms. Proud said the Texas State Legislature’s intent was to do away with a practice the Williamson County Elections office does not participate in.

She explained that in what’s sometimes called “rolling polling,” cities or school districts might move election sites around in order to produce a desired outcome.

The example typically given is a school district that tries to pass a bond by having a one-day site at a football stadium during a game.

Citing the potential for less accessibility and depressed voter turnout, the Texas Association of School Boards and the League of Women Voters of Texas each opposed the new legislation.

Ms. Sydnor asked commissioners to add SU to the list of Early Voting places that will be open for two weeks.

Commissioners declined her request, after Mr. Davis said it costs approximately $10,000 to operate each Early Voting site.

Early Voting will be from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily, October 21-30. There will be no Sunday hours. On the last two days, October 31 and November 1, polls will be open from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m.

The following will serve as Early Voting sites.

- Williamson County Inner Loop Annex, 301 Southeast Inner Loop, Georgetown
- Anderson Mill Limited District, 11500 El Salido Parkway, Austin
- Cedar Park Public Library, 550 Discovery Boulevard
- Cedar Park Randall’s, 1400 Cypress Creek Road
- Crow Creek Amenity Center, 1433 Cool Spring Way
- Georgetown ISD Technology

Building, 603 Lakeway Drive
- Georgetown Parks and Recreation Administration Building, 1101 North College Street
- Liberty Hill Annex, 3407 Highway 1869
- Pat Bryson Municipal Hall, 201 North Brushy Street, Leander
- Baca Senior Center, 301 West Bagdad Street, Building 2, Round Rock
- Round Rock Randall’s, 2051 Gattis School Road
- Brushy Creek Community Center, 16318 Great Oaks Drive, Round Rock
- Williamson County Jester Annex, 1801 East Old Settlers Boulevard, Round Rock
- Taylor City Hall, 400 Porter Street

Shouldn’t it be convenient to vote?

Emily Sydnor
assistant professor
politics, Southwestern University

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