



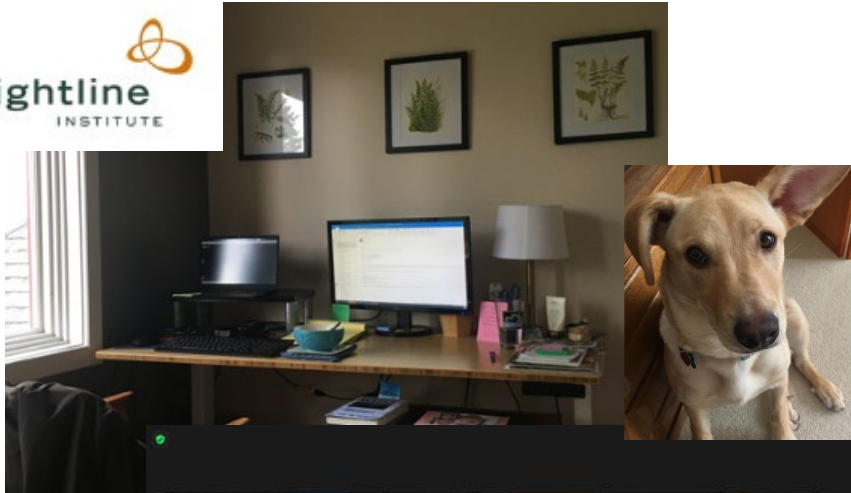
70th Annual Local Government Conference
November 9-20, 2020

Local Elections in Alaska During the Pandemic

Jeannette Lee, Sightline Institute

70th Annual Local Government Conference - November 9th – 20th, 2020 - *Fires, Foundations and Futures*

Sightline Institute: Who We Are



- Sightline is a regional public policy think tank focused on Alaska and the Pacific Northwest
- Nonpartisan
- Nonprofit
- Program areas:
 - Democracy
 - Housing
 - Transportation
 - Environment
- Democracy program focus: Safe and accessible voting during the pandemic and beyond
- Research available at www.sightline.org (all free!)

Live Poll Questions

- On a scale of 1 to 5, how did your local elections go this year? (1 = meh, not great and 5 = excellent)
- Did your local election occur during the pandemic?
 - Yes
 - No

(This slide can be removed.)

Local Elections in Alaska



Dillingham City Hall in October 2020, (Photo by Isabelle Ross of KDLG)

- Governed by a combination of state law and local ordinances
- Freedom to run local elections to meet community needs
- Local elections can be managed to fit the culture, seasonal patterns, geography, and other community characteristics.
- Flexibility has been useful during the pandemic.

Anchorage's Switch to Voting from Home

- Transitioned from poll-based elections to sending ballots to all eligible voters.
- Ballots are returned by mail or drop box
- Bipartisan decision by the Anchorage Assembly, made during a Republican mayoral administration
- Major cost: Leaving City Hall for a new Election Center



Setting Up a Vote From Home System



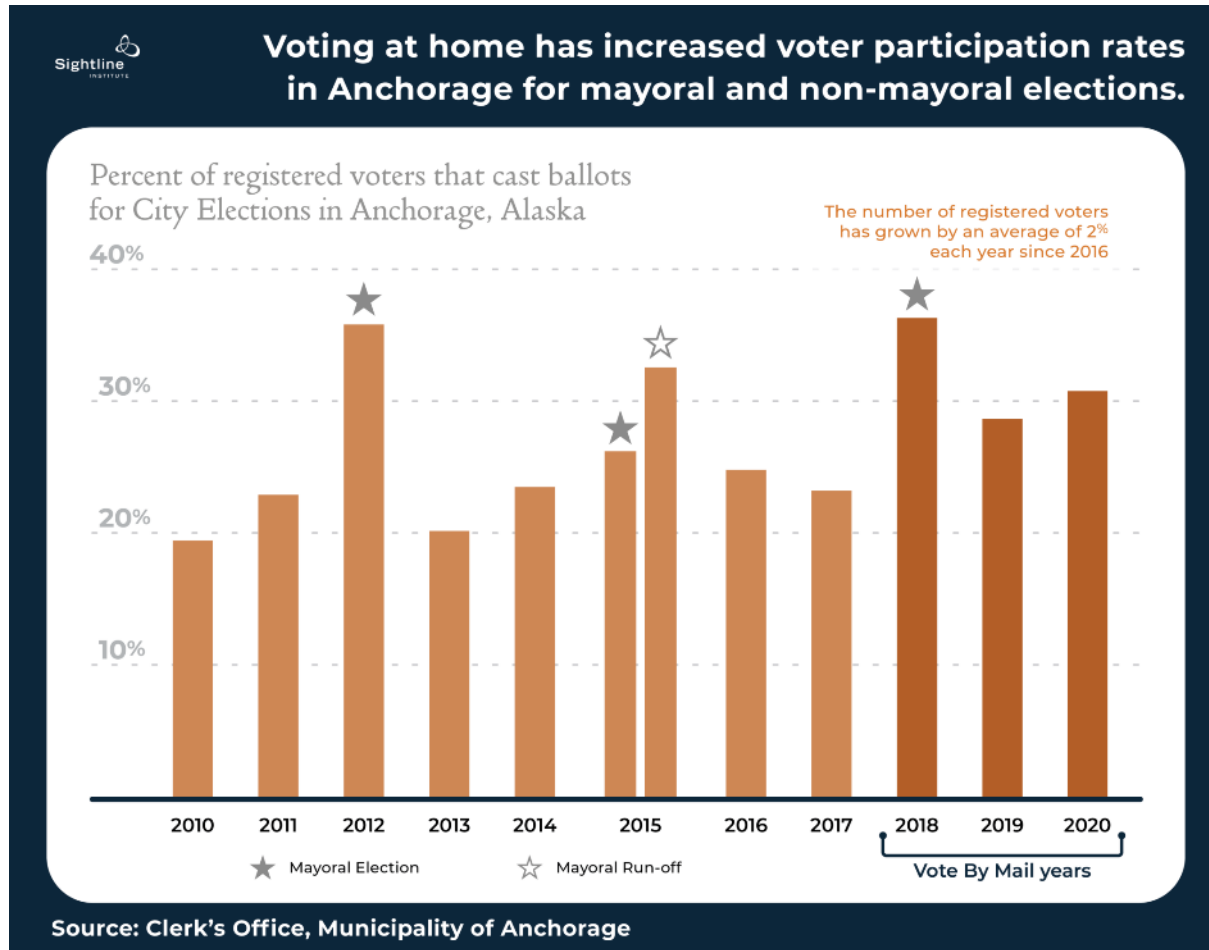
Above: City Clerk Barbara Jones and former deputy city clerk Amanda Moser

Below: Former city attorney Dennis Wheeler



- Coordinated with a large community advisory group
- Designed processes for voting and counting ballots
- Rewrote city election code.
- Wrote requests for proposals
- Vetted vendors and contractors
- Found and renovated a new election center
- Designed ballot envelopes.
- Set up safeguards to catch voter errors and fraudulent activity
- Trained workers on the new system
- Educated the public on a new way to vote

Three Elections Later...



- Voter turnout improves
- Number of poll workers plummets
- Pandemic election goes smoothly

Vote from Home Trivia Question

- Which political parties sent absentee ballot applications to registered voters in Alaska in 2020?
 - a. Republicans
 - b. Democrats
 - c. Both parties

Vote From Home: Fraud Protection



Cordova City Hall. (Photo by The Cordova Times)

- Incidents of voting irregularities in Alaska are extremely low
- Election systems are set up to catch purposeful fraud and inadvertent errors
- Irregularities tend to be honest mistakes

Ballot Security Measures

- Intelligent barcodes
- Signatures verification
- Secure drop boxes
- Election Center security cameras
- Limits on Internet connectivity
- No cell phones allowed
- Blue or black pens forbidden



*Drop box outside Fairbanks Regional Office Building
(Photo by Erin McGroarty, Fairbanks Daily News-Miner)*

A Pandemic Election in Juneau



- Ballots mailed to all registered voters in Juneau three weeks before election
- Ballots submitted by mail, drop boxes, and vote centers
- All ballots went to Anchorage for signature verification and counting
- Record-high turnout

*Primary election ballots from Juneau being transported to Anchorage in October 2020.
(Photo by Rashah McChesney/KTOO)*

Survey Question

Is your community interested in adding or improving options for voters to cast ballots without going to a polling place?

- Yes, we're actively considering it.
- Yes, it's possible we'd consider it in the future.
- No, we'll likely stick with our current way of running elections
- No, we'd like to make voting easier in our community, but adding or strengthening a vote from home option likely won't work for us.
- Other answer:

Sharing 2020 Election Stories

- Please introduce yourself and your community.
- What date was your local election?
- What extra challenges did you face because of the pandemic?
- How did you address those challenges?
- What were your key lessons learned?



Voting at Old St. Joe's Hall in Nome (Photo by James Mason for The Nome Nugget)

Beyond the Pandemic



Unalaska City Hall, October 2020 (Photo by Laura Kraegel, reporter for KUCB)

- What will work best for voters and boost turnout?
- How will the budget be affected?
- Are there grants available for strengthening options for voting from home?
- Are election logistics manageable?

Thank You!



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