

# Office of the Vermont Secretary of State 2020 Elections Timeline



Secretary of State Jim Condos

# Vermont Secretary of State's Office

**It's all a blur, so the order and timing of these events are approximate.  
First up, the coronavirus becomes a reality for Vermont.**

## **March:**

- Town Meeting Day (just under the wire)
- Sent staff home to remote work
- Legislative phone meetings begin about OML & Elections
- Act 92 signed into law by the Governor, granting SoS & Governor temporary authority for elections procedures to respond to COVID-19
- Directive allowing 2020 municipal elections to be postponed

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**Start planning for the worst and hoping for the best.**

## **April:**

- Strategize how to safely conduct 2020 elections
- Start regular meetings with Clerks and with Gov's team
- Directive permitting new local elections processes (may proactively mail a ballot, curbside voting, outdoor voting, polling place health and safety)
- Governor does not agree to permit universal mailed ballots for the GE at this time - wants to wait until after the primary to decide
- Work with US Postal Service begins

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**Lining up resources early even though our path was in doubt.  
Watch other states and learn.**

## **May:**

- Governor continues to want to wait until after the primary despite our discussions about the infrastructure needs to be completed before
- Legislature restarts the process to remove Gov's role – at his request
- Engaging partners about election communication
- Watching other states' primaries and learning from them
- Lining up mail and printing vendors
- Securing PPE for polling places
- Work with USPS

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**Lots of legislative work while still planning for a primary.  
Have to assume we will have a mass mailing to all voters in the fall.**

## **June:**

- Work with USPS
- Legislative work continues - proposed amendments, fear of fraud and ballot harvesting
- Primary postcard, ballots, envelopes, buck slip designs
- Clerk meetings continue
- Ballot request postcards mailed out
- Act 135 (removing Governor) becomes law w/out Gov's signature

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**Full speed ahead with mailing. Primary approaching fast.  
Communication and planning with the Clerks.**

## July:

- Directive issued setting out approach for the primary and general (mailing every active registered voter a ballot for the general election)
- Early voting begins
- Voter education and outreach begins
- Conduct Media availability
- Work with USPS
- Postmaster General expresses concern about mail delivery times, plan on 7-10 days

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## **Conducting a primary while still planning for a mass mailing to all voters in the fall.**

### **August:**

- Communications push: register, request and return!
- Sign, select, seal and send...or vote in person!
- PRIMARY ELECTION DAY
- Recounts
- Post-election work, finalize ballots for general
- Post Office concerns continue, AGO lawsuit

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**Logistics. Lots of them.**

**Getting the word out about the changes and options available.**

## **September:**

- Clerks meeting to debrief, lessons learned for general
- General election ballot, envelopes, instruction design
- Seek out firms and people to do messaging
- Survey and grants for additional drop boxes
- Lawsuits challenging VBM dismissed
- Heavily engaged with communication partners for voter education and outreach



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**How to get the word out? Ballots start hitting mailboxes.  
Emails really start hitting our inboxes.**

## **September (cont'd):**

- CEIR Grant application
- How to coordinate ballot requests after the mass mailing
- First ballots mailed out
- Big batches every few days – all ballots mailed by Oct 1
- Lots of media, lots of questions
- Bar code issue

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**Got 'em out by October 1<sup>st</sup>.  
Time to focus on in-person voting.**

## **October:**

- Initial ballot mailing completed (437,920)
- Mailing fallout
- Hone polling place guidance
- Hone election day guidance
- Make sure we have enough trained poll workers
- CEIR grant awarded, can we spend it?
- Early mail voting at record pace

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**Election Day just around the corner. Did we miss Summer?  
Still preparing for worst case scenarios.**

## **October (cont'd):**

- In person voting preparation
- Communications and outreach – vote early, use a drop box, bring to polling place or vote in person
- Poll watcher threats, security planning - worked with federal, state, and local law enforcement partners
- Polling place guidelines issued
- Addendum to Directive (poll watchers, in -person voting, additional mailing of requested ballots)

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**It's finally here. Brace for impact!**

## **November:**

- ELECTION DAY – success!
- Election night results reporting – success!
- Statewide canvass – success!
- Vermont did it right!!!
- Contested results in other states continue
- Decision to postpone post-election audit
  - Coronavirus begins to surge
  - Consulted with VT Dept of Health

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**It's official.**

**Elections Team finally takes a deep breath and gets a few days off.**

## **December:**

- Electoral College meets and votes – Success!
- Onward to town meeting preparation!
- Began to meet with the Governor's team, Legislative leaders, City/Town Clerks, VLCT

## Lessons Learned: What worked well

### August Primary:

- # VTers opting to VBM
- Participation rates:
  - 2012: 12%, 17%AB
  - 2014: 9%, 15%AB
  - 2016: 26%, 19%AB
  - 2018: 22%, 16%AB
  - **2020: 34%, 73%AB**
- Early voting
- Outdoor voting, curbside voting
- Drop boxes

## **Lessons Learned: What worked well**

### **August Primary (cont'd):**

- Low numbers and general safety at polling places
- Clerk communication and buy-in
- Postcard mailing – central mailing
- USPS in general
- Checklist cleanup
- 30 day early processing of ballots
- PPE distribution
- Voter education with media, partners
- Clerk processing (ballot requests, address changes)
- Flexibility to use directives

## Lessons Learned: What didn't work so well

### August Primary:

- Defective ballots
- Mailing three ballots
- Bad addresses
- SOS elections and leadership team overwhelmed at times
- Clerks overwhelmed at times with requests and processing
- Joint authority with Governor



## Lessons Learned: What worked well

### November General:

- # VTers opting to VBM
- Participation rates
  - 2012: 65%, 25%AB
  - 2014: 45%, 17%AB
  - 2016: 68%, 30%AB
  - 2018: 56%, 26%AB
  - **2020: 74%, 75%AB**
- Early voting
- Outdoor voting, curbside voting
- Drop boxes

## Lessons Learned: What worked well

### November General:

- Low numbers and general safety at polling places
- 30 day early processing of ballots
- Clerk communication
- Voter education with media, partners, celebrities & grants
- Law enforcement coordination – federal, state, and local
- Central mail house and USPS
- Cyber defenses
- Low defective rates
- Election night reporting!
- Confidence in results
- Flexibility to use directives

## **Lessons Learned: What didn't work so well**

### **November General:**

- Not much!
- Some checklist issues; mailing errors
- Voter confusion - people thinking no in-person voting
- Misinformation - Disinformation from the President
  - Spread through Social Media
- Not enough hours in the day or SOS staff to support
- Elections needs at least 1 more FT Staff person
- Not all clerks equipped to handle mail volume

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## **\$\$ Cost \$\$**

### **Approximately \$3 Million:**

- Primary Postcard: \$444,000 (printing, mailing, postage)
- Primary postage: +/- \$360,000
- Ballot printing: +/- \$150,000 add'l cost (Primary and GE)
- Ballot mailing: +/- \$1.2M (envelope printing, postage, mailing service) – see below, next two bullets
- Mail house vs postage out – mailing service: \$479,000; postage out: +/- \$198,000
- Return postage: +/- \$341,000
- Drop boxes: \$54,400 for 64 towns
- Interior ballot boxes: \$60,000 (Primary and GE)
- PPE: \$132,000
- Media Outreach – PSAs, Digital, Social: +/- \$320,000

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## Conclusions

### Vermont's 2020 Elections Were a Success:

- No VTer had to choose between their health & right to vote
- We shattered participation records
- We kept mail participation high, in person voting low – and polling places safe
- Unofficial results still reported on election night (Primary & Gen Election)
- VT's handling of 2020 elections has received accolades from across the country and universal approval from voting rights advocacy groups and ALL political parties as well
- **VT did it right!**
- VT should carefully consider permanent vote by mail with the statutory changes & resources necessary to succeed