

[City column – September 2016]

By Mayor Bill Droste

[As submitted for publication in the September 29, 2016 issue of The Independent Town Pages.]

It's time to think about voting in this year's general election. Wait, I promise: in this column, I'm not going to try to tell you whom to vote for -- there's plenty of that going around. What I would like to tell you about is the effort the City makes to carry out fair and efficient voting, and ask if you can help in those duties.

There are dozens of federal and state laws and rules about how elections must be conducted, but in most cases it comes down to your local government to carry them out. Dakota County provides the voting equipment, with new models this year. The City arranges the polling places at its facilities and in churches that are willing to help.

And it's up to cities to arrange for the citizens to run the polling places. With Rosemount's strong tradition of volunteerism, we've always had a good group to serve as election judges. But this year, we need additional residents. In all, we need about 150 people to serve in our seven precincts.

Election judges help protect the rights of voters on election day. Anyone eligible to vote is eligible to serve as a judge. There are just a few other rules if you have a relative running for office.

There is detailed training in advance. The hours are long on election day (although half-day shifts are available) and you are paid for your time at the polls and in training. But people who've served as judges tell us it's a worthwhile and even fascinating experience.

We have one judge who's celebrating her 50th year volunteering at the polls. Another two judges found themselves at the same precinct ten years ago and were able to reconnect a friendship started decades before in high school.

One step you can take to lessen the wait at polling places on election day is to register now if you haven't already and to vote in advance if you've already made up your mind. A person's registration becomes inactive if he or she has not voted for four years. You can check the status of your registration at the Secretary of State's website, mnvotes.org.

The first wave of absentee ballots went in the mail last week. You can apply online to get a ballot in the mail, or you can come to City Hall to vote in person. During the last week before the election, you can even put your ballot directly into a voting machine. Since 2014, you no longer need to give a reason to vote early.

Minnesota usually leads or is near the top of the nation in voter turnout, but hundreds of thousands of people who could vote do not. Even many high school seniors can qualify to vote. Qualifications are simple: you must be a U.S. citizen, turning 18 on November 8 or before, and live in Minnesota for the 20 days before the election. (Some people under a felony sentence or in guardianships are ineligible.)

If you would like more information on exercising your right to vote or serving as an election judge, please contact our city clerk, Clarissa Hadler, at 651-322-2003, or visit our website at www.ci.rosemount.mn.us/vote.

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