

CITY OF NEWBURYPORT



IN CITY COUNCIL

ORDERED:

March 11, 2024

WHEREAS, the current Ward 1P Polling Place is located at the Plum Island Boat House, 300 Northern Boulevard, Newburyport, and

WHEREAS, said the Plum Island Boat House has fallen into a state of disrepair causing it to be consistently inaccessible.

WHEREAS, the People’s United Methodist Church located at 64 Purchase Street is within the boundaries of Ward 1 and is the current State approved Polling Location for Ward 1, and

WHEREAS, Amended Article 114 of the Massachusetts Constitution and 950 CMR § 51.00 encourages the fundamental right to vote by improving access for handicapped and elderly individuals to polling places and the voting process, and

WHEREAS, the People’s Methodist Church has passed the State mandated Polling Place Site Access Survey and approved locally by the ADA Coordinator.

Now, Therefore, the City Council of the City of Newburyport hereby states that public accessibility and public safety is better served by moving the Ward 1P polling place located at the Plum Island Boat House, 300 Northern Boulevard, Newburyport to the People’s United Methodist Church located at 64 Purchase Street and such move would not have a disparate or adverse impact on access to the polls based on race, national origin, disability, income or age and approves the relocation of the Ward 1P Polling Location from the Plum Island Boat House to the People’s United Methodist Church.

Councillor Sharif I. Zeid

In City Council March 11, 2024:

Motion to refer General Government by Councillor Zeid, seconded by Councillor Shand. Roll call vote, 10 yes, 1 absent (Khan), motion passes.

MEMO

Date: 2/28/2024

From Sharif Zeid, Ward 1 City Councillor

To: Newburyport City Council

RE: Plum Island Voting location

Dear Councillors,

I am writing to you regarding the Plum Island (Ward 1P) voting location and the attached proposal to change the polling location going forward.

As you know the Boat House located at the point of the island has been used as a voting location for many, many years. The building itself is in significant disrepair and access to it can, at times, be impeded by weather. I was approached by the City Clerk about a year ago to start discussing the future of this building as a voting location. In January of 2024, the Council had to act to move voting to Purchase St. (the longstanding voting location for Ward 1) to ensure everyone could cast their vote.

Before going further, I want to note that the City does own the Boat House building and is responsible for its maintenance and upkeep. The Coast Guard, by agreement, uses the building from time to time for training, etc. Unfortunately, the building has been left with no meaningful maintenance for at least a decade, perhaps longer. At one point, there was potential discussion about leasing the building in some form to a private party, but it never came to fruition. This building and its future are of significant concern to the residents of Plum Island. I mention it in this memo as some residents will inevitably feel that this order is a further abandonment of the property. As a failing capital asset now turned into liability, I hope the building can get some attention in the short term and longer term on behalf of the residents that I represent.

Back to the matter at hand, given that the Boat House has questionable long-term viability, the Clerk and I worked to identify potential other locations and the Clerk then worked to vet out these potential locations.

The general criteria were:

1. Located in the City confines (not legally mandatory but considered favorable)
2. Proximity and accessibility from the island
3. Capacity of the location to handle the additional volume
4. Longevity of the site for voting (stability)
5. Operationally feasible for the Clerk to run elections
6. Approvability by the State

Based on those criteria, here are the locations that were considered:

PITA Hall	Potentially suitable, operationalizable, likely approvable by the State but not located in the City of Newburyport
Audubon building	Within the City, operationalizable but disinterest from the operator of the facility. Unknown longevity if they could be convinced.
The Refuge headquarters (not to be confused with the refuge itself)	Within the City but disinterest from the operator of the facility. Unknown longevity if they could be convinced.

The People's United Church Purchase St.	Within the City. Has been used as a polling location for a longtime for Ward 1 precinct. Approved by the State as a polling location. Not the closest option to PI but accessible. Parking on street available. Utilized for special election in 2024 and worked well.
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Given the factors, the proposed Order was assembled to move the voting to the People's United Church going forward. My hope with the Order is to drive a substantive public process. The need to move the voting location as well as where to move it should be heavily scrutinized by Councillors and, of course, the public. I welcome the conversation.

Respectfully,



Sharif Zeid
Ward 1 City Councillor