

New Options for Australian Ballot Voting

February 28, 2022

Act 60 of 2021 gives towns new options for distributing and processing voter ballots. If a town uses the Australian ballot method of voting, the selectboard can now vote to mail ballots to all the town's active registered voters for special or annual town meetings. Additionally, the board of civil authority (BCA) can vote to install one or more outdoor secure drop boxes around town for the return of voted ballots. Both optional election procedures require timely action.

A selectboard desiring to mail ballots to all the town's active registered voters for the next special or annual Australian ballot town meeting must vote to do so at one of its duly-warned meetings. 17 V.S.A. § 2680(g). **The deadline for mailing ballots is no later than 20 days before the election or as soon as they are available, so the selectboard's vote must precede this 20-day deadline.**

The BCA may vote at one of its duly-warned meetings to install secure ballot drop boxes pursuant to 17 V.S.A. § 2543a. Drop boxes must be located on town property, and, if there's only one drop box, it must be located on the property of the clerk's office. Voters may return their early or absentee voted ballots to any secure ballot drop box at any time of day, up to the close of business on the day before the election. (The BCA may vote to extend the return of ballots to drop boxes until the closing of polls on election day.) Importantly, drop boxes must be available for voters not later than 43 days before the election. Therefore, the BCA must vote at some time prior to ensure that drop boxes are installed in a timely manner.

[Click this link](#) to read more about Act 60 of 2021.