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# Clock ticks until polls close in Northampton, Easthampton

By KRISTIN PALPINI, DYLAN KLEMPNER, CHRISTINA FONG and LAURIE LOISEL  
Staff Writers

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In a little more than an hour, it will all be over.

Months of campaigning, debating and fundraising for the Easthampton and Northampton mayoral, City Council and School Committee will be decided when polls close tonight at 8 p.m.

City clerks are anticipating a wave of voters will enter polling centers from 5 to 8 p.m. as people cast their ballots following the work day.

"That's when things really pick up," said Barbara LaBombard, Easthampton's city clerk.

Today's voting went smoothly, clerks in Northampton and Easthampton said, with a steady flow of residents coming in and out of the cities' nine polling places.

The only glitch was when a voting machine at the Northampton Senior Center suffered a paper jam at around 2:30 p.m. and was shut down for 15 minutes. A second machine was brought in to replace the jammed equipment.

"They couldn't fix it so they replaced it," said Rudy Lastowski, an election warden. "They didn't lose anything. All the votes were counted."

Voting in the two city elections - which include mayoral, City Council and School Committee races - may reach or exceed the predicted 50 percent turnout rate. Local elections typically draw 30 to 40 percent of registered voters to the polls.

By noon, 18 percent of registered voters in Easthampton, or 2,044 people, had already cast ballots, according to data provided by election officials.



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In Northampton, there was no firm tally as to how many people had already voted. While Easthampton has two polling places, Northampton has seven, a quality that makes it difficult to count votes prior to polls closing.

At Smith Vocational High School, the voting center for Ward 2 and Ward 5, precinct B, Nancy Driscoll, the deputy election worker for Ward 2A, said people were lined up outside the high school to vote when polls opened at 7 a.m., but traffic has since died down.

By 1:30 p.m. about a quarter of her precinct, or 277 people, had voted.

"When people get out of work, the real rush on the polls starts," she said.

Both cities are holding elections for mayor today along with races for city councilor and School Committee. Northampton residents are also voting on a nonbinding question about whether the city should expand the landfill over the Barnes aquifer.

In each city, longtime incumbent mayors - Clare Higgins in Northampton and Michael Tautznik in Easthampton - are facing serious challenges for their posts.

Higgins is running against Michael Bardsley, an at-large city councilor. Tautznik is facing three challengers: James "J.P." Kwiecinski, a district 1 city councilor; Margaret Prendergast, a community activist; and Albert DiCarlo, a Conservation Commission member.

Polls are open today from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. in both cities. The Gazette will be providing election updates online throughout the day and results after polls close.

### **Easthampton**

In Easthampton, election workers were seeing evidence of residents voting in droves.

The polls at Easthampton High School this morning were "very busy," according to Eleanor Kwolek, a poll warden. "There's a lot of candidates," she noted.

Voters said they were chiefly concerned with the mayoral race. Easthampton has 11,227 registered voters.

Jason Young, 25, of Bryan Avenue, who bought a house in Easthampton a year ago, said he would be voting for the incumbent Tautznik because of the improvements the city has seen over the mayor's tenure, including the construction of the Public Safety Complex and the Manhan Rail Trail.

"Seems like things are running pretty smoothly," he said.

At the city's White Brook Middle School, Edward Hanlon Jr., 69, of Northampton Street, cast his vote for Prendergast.

"I think it's time for a new mayor," said Hanlon, who was wearing a white and maroon Prendergast T-shirt under his brown leather jacket. "The mayor has made promises that haven't been kept."

Hanlon said he is not pleased with the progress of the Nashawannuck Pond dredging. According to him, the project is taking too long.

### **Northampton**

Meanwhile, Northampton residents said they were spurred to the booths to vote for mayor. Ahead of polls closing, voters made predictions on who would win the mayoral race.

Northampton residents Annie Bissett, who said she is in her 50s, and Lynn Koerbel, 50, both liked how "spicy" the campaign was this year.

"It was a nice spicy campaign. I like seeing that. It's good for the town to have different ideas

presented," said Bissett.

Both also believe Higgins will win. Bissett said, "I think Clare will win. But Mr. Bardsley has a lot of folks out with signs."

Joel Feldman, 46, of Northampton, said, "I think it went well. Both sides organized well and put out their messages." He added, "I think it's going to be very, very close. I think it depends on who gets their people out."

Outside the polls, people stumped for their candidates, holding political signs and waving at cars. A woman with a dog in a purple sweater wore a pro-Bardsley pin while a steady stream of residents packed into the center, which held a bake and magazine/book sale during the election.

"I belong to the anyone-but-Higgins crowd, and I've been that way for a while," said Eric Ciocca, 31, of South Street. Ciocca said he approves of Higgins' politics, but thinks she has mishandled some situations including the city's relationship with Smith College development.

### The landfill

Although Northampton voters said they primarily turned out to cast a ballot for mayor, the question of whether to expand the landfill was also on people's minds.

At Jackson Street School, Marci Couchon, 83, of Laurel Park, said she believes the city can expand the landfill in a responsible way that will not harm the aquifer below.

"I think they can do it safely," she said. "The cost to cart all that stuff away is absolutely ridiculous."

Several voters said they did not know enough about the landfill to make an informed decision.

"It's silly to have a nonbinding question on something that there is no information on," Wes Hardy, 24, of Marc Circle, said of the landfill question.

Hardy was drawn to the polls at Jackson Street School early today to vote for Jesse Adams for at-large city councilor. Hardy said he was convinced to vote, and eventually stand outside holding a political sign for Adams, after meeting Adams while the candidate was out stumping in downtown Northampton.

"It's not what he said necessarily," said Hardy explaining his vote for Adams, "it's that he's willing to listen and that was important for me."

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