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# E-Day: After the politicking, the voters will have their say Tuesday

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City clerks in Northampton and Easthampton say heated contests for mayor in those cities could lead to 50 percent voter turnout today - much higher than the typical 30 to 40 percent turnout for local elections without a presidential contest.

Longtime mayors Clare Higgins in Northampton and Michael A. Tautznik in Easthampton are facing challenges to keep their jobs, among other contested seats voters will settle today. Higgins faces At-Large City Councilor Michael Bardsley. Tautznik is up against At-Large City Councilor James P. Kwiecinski, community activist Margaret Prendergast and Conservation Commission member Albert J. DiCarlo.

Tautznik, who was elected in 1996, has not been challenged since 1999, while Higgins, who was first elected in 1999, has easily won re-election every term since.

In Northampton, there is one ballot question, which asks city voters whether Northampton should expand the Northampton landfill over the Barnes Aquifer.

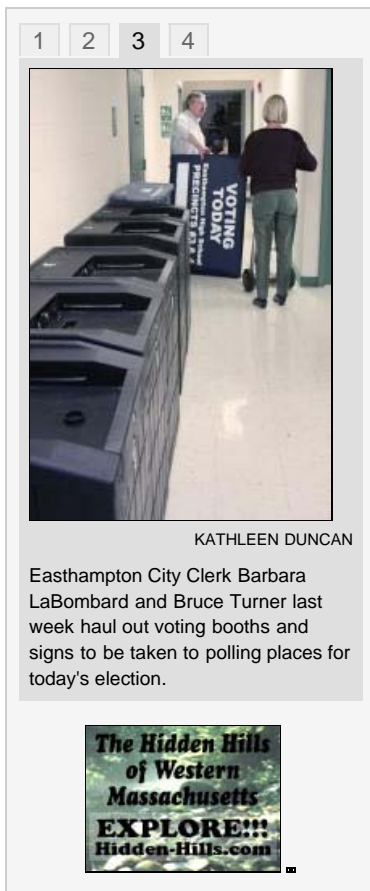
Based on past elections, veteran city clerks in the two cities predict about 50 percent voter. Northampton City Clerk Wendy Mazza said this election is comparable to 2005, when the community preservation ballot question and a Higgins match up with challenger Richard Feldman brought out 50 percent of the city's registered voters. Higgins defeated Feldman 61.5 percent to 38.5 percent.

Mazza noted that political watchers are predicting a 70 percent voter turnout today, but she disagrees.

"There's a lot of hype with this election, but it doesn't necessarily mean it's going to be overbusy," Mazza said. "I hope I'm wrong; I hope there's more."

In Easthampton, the largest voter turnout in a local election was in 1996, when Tautznik was elected mayor, and 58 percent of the city's registered voters turned out to vote. City Clerk Barbara LaBombard said 50 percent is a higher turnout than most local elections, which typically have 30 to 40 percent voter turnout.

"I think it's a pretty big race because of all the campaigning," LaBombard said. "The mayor's race will bring the people out."



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It takes a lot of person-power to pull off an election and locally that means approximately 50 people will work the election today in Easthampton and 250 to 300 people will work in Northampton, posting rules and Election Day materials, checking off and announcing the names of voters as they come in and maintaining order throughout the day. The number of helpers is the same from year to year, according to city clerks.

"I tend to keep the same crew of people because they're used to working with each other," LaBombard said.

Mazza said she had asked people to sign up to work at the polls, and she wishes more people would step up to work on Election Day.

"I think it would be a great thing if more people were interested and would see it as a civic duty," Mazza said. "They'll have a better understanding of the voting process."

Both Mazza and LaBombard said poll checkers independent of the official Election Day workers who are involved in mayoral campaigns will be in the polling places, checking off names of people who have come to vote. Mazza said the Higgins campaign confirmed it will have poll checkers, while LaBombard said Tautznik's campaign and Kwiecinski's campaign both confirmed they will have poll checkers. Poll checking for local elections is unusual, according to the city clerks.

"The voters need to be aware that it's perfectly legal," said Mazza, who noted some city residents were upset by poll checking at the Proposition 2 ½ property tax override vote in June. "They don't know how a voter's voting, they're just checking that a person has arrived at the polls. Please don't feel your voting rights are being infringed upon."

LaBombard said the poll checkers in Easthampton will stand near the tables as voters check in. Poll checkers typically phone candidate supporters who have not shown up to remind them it's Election Day and request that they vote.

Other contests include at-large city council races in both cities, and in Northampton, contested ward seats for the City Council. Four candidates are seeking election to two at-large seats on the Northampton School Committee, and while there are no other contested seats, there will be many new faces on both city's school boards.

Polls open at 7 a.m. and close at 8 p.m. Polling locations in Northampton are Jackson Street School, 120 Jackson St. for Ward 1; Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School, 80 Locust St., for Ward 2 and Ward 5 precinct B; Northampton Senior Center, 67 Conz St., for Wards 3 and 4; Florence Civic and Business Building, 90 Park St., for Ward 5; R.K. Finn Ryan Road School, 498 Ryan Road, for Ward 6 precincts A and B; JFK Middle School, 100 Bridge Road, for Ward 7 precinct A, and Leeds School, 20 Florence St., for Ward 7 precinct B. For more information, contact Northampton City Clerk Wendy Mazza at 587-1224.

In Easthampton, polling locations are White Brook Middle School, 200 Park St., for precincts 1, 2 and 5, and Easthampton High School, 70 Williston Avenue, for precincts 3 and 4. Call City Clerk Barbara LaBombard for more information or to check voter status at 529-1460.

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