

Wisconsin Elections Commission

State of Wisconsin

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WEC Releases County and State Recount Cost Estimates and Recount Timeline

Madison, WI – Wisconsin’s county clerks have submitted cost estimates totaling approximately \$7.9 million for a statewide recount, according to the Wisconsin Elections Commission.

“We still have not received any indication that there will or will not be a recount,” said Meagan Wolfe, Wisconsin’s chief election official. “But we want Wisconsin’s voters to know we are ready.”

Part of that readiness includes collecting recount cost estimates from all 72 counties and assembling a statewide estimate, which must be paid before any recount can begin.

“Our county clerks have carefully estimated their costs for recounting 3.2 million ballots, which is approximately \$7.9 million,” Wolfe said. “These estimates are significantly higher than the actual costs of the 2016 recount, but they take into account factors not present four years ago, including the need for larger spaces to permit public observation and social distancing, security for those spaces, the higher number of absentee ballots, a compressed timeframe over a holiday, and renting high-speed ballot scanning equipment.”

The Wisconsin Legislature changed state law in 2017 following the 2016 presidential recount to allow the Wisconsin Elections Commission to include its costs in the estimate. WEC costs are less than \$30,000 of the total estimate. If the estimated costs exceed actual costs, the candidate’s committee will receive a refund for the difference, Wolfe said.

Last week, the WEC contacted the presidential campaigns to inform them of the procedures for requesting a recount. A copy of the letter is attached.

Wolfe also announced the potential timeline for a recount, if one is requested. The timeline permits the recount to be completed and the results to be certified by December 1, 2020.

Tuesday, November 17, 2020 – The last county canvass is received. There are several counties outstanding, and some have indicated they will not be finished before November 17.

Wednesday, November 18 by 5:00 p.m. – The deadline for the aggrieved presidential candidate to file for a recount and submit payment.

Thursday, November 19, 2020 – The Commission Chair issues the Recount Order. This starts the 13-day recount clock and is also the first day that recount boards can meet.

Saturday, November 21, 2020 at 9:00 a.m. – The deadline by which county boards of canvassers must convene for the recount (no later than 9:00 a.m. on the third day after the recount order is issued).

Tuesday, December 1, 2020 – The deadline to complete the recount. This is also the deadline, under Wisconsin law, for WEC to certify results from the General Election. Therefore, recounts must be completed and results must be filed with WEC by noon on December 1, 2020.

Wolfe said WEC understands the timeline will be difficult to navigate, but noted that state law does not account for the many challenges on the calendar, including the Thanksgiving holiday. The Wisconsin Legislature changed the recount law in 2017, shortening the recount request window, which compresses the timeline even more than in 2016.

Recount Facts

- Wisconsin does not have automatic recounts, even if the unofficial results are extremely close.
- The second-place candidate must wait to request a recount until after the last county reports its certified results to the state. This is expected to happen on November 17.
- For presidential recounts, the aggrieved candidate has just one day to file for a recount. The Wisconsin Legislature changed this deadline from three days to one day following the 2016 presidential recount.
- According to unofficial results, the margin of victory between the top two presidential candidates is 20,470 votes, or 0.62%, which makes the race eligible for recount if the losing candidate wishes to request one.
- Because the margin is more than 0.25%, the aggrieved candidate must prepay the estimated costs of the recount at the time of requesting it.
- Complete information about Wisconsin's recount laws and procedures is available here: <https://elections.wi.gov/manuals/recount>.

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The Wisconsin Elections Commission is responsible for administration and enforcement of election laws in Wisconsin. The Commission is made up of six Commissioners – four appointed directly by the State Senate Majority Leader, Speaker of the Assembly and the Minority Leaders in the State Senate and Assembly. The remaining two Commissioners are by the Governor with confirmation by the State Senate from lists of former municipal and county clerks submitted by the legislative leadership in each party.