

QUESTION AND ANSWERS ABOUT THE MUNICIPAL CENSUS

What is the history behind the census?

Now known as the annual street listing, the Massachusetts annual town/city census goes back to the 1600's, when men who wished to become registered voters were qualified to vote if their property was of sufficient value. By 1860, the qualifications had changed from just property value to also include men's length of residency and having paid taxes. In 1890, women were also allowed to vote, under the same requirements, but only for members of the School Committee! The law requiring an annual municipal census has been amended over the years, and currently M.G.L. Chapter 51 requires that the Board of Elections conduct the annual census. While it was originally done house-to-house, since the 1970's the census information has been gathered via the mail.

Is it confidential?

The Secretary of the Commonwealth maintains the security of the Voter Registry Information System (VRIS) in accordance with Massachusetts data security laws. The voter registry and municipal census are part of the public record. Information about minor children (under the age of 17) and public safety personnel are protected as confidential.

How is the information used?

The information from the returned census has many different uses. Including the following:

- The Board of Elections uses it to maintain the list of registered voters and to keep an up-to-date list of residential addresses.
- The School Department can request reports to help them project future levels of school enrollment. A copy of the census containing the information of school aged children is provided to the School Committee as required by law.
- The Council on Aging uses information when applying for grants and to estimate the possible demand for services to those residents over the age of 60.
- The Veteran's Services Officer receives a list of the U.S. Military veterans in the city, so he/she can assist veterans with their needs.
- The Office of the Jury Commissioner uses each community's street list to compile a list of residents for jury duty. An accurate list provides for a fair and representative jury pool.
- The presence of a person's name on the municipal census may be used to establish residency for a number of reasons: to qualify for in-state college tuition, for job applications, special loan programs, adoption applications, veterans' bonus, etc.
- It's also important to return your annual census, because years from now, you may need to prove that you or your children lived in Fall River or resided in Massachusetts at a certain time, and the census for that year is proof of residency.

What happens if I don't return the census form?

Registered voters who do not return the annual census form and do not respond to a follow-up mailing must be designated as inactive voters on the municipal census and voter registry. All registered voters at the address will become inactive. Such persons will only be eligible to vote after they fill out an "Affirmation of Current and Continuous Residence" the next time they

come to vote. Every household that fails to complete the form has to be contacted a second time, which takes additional time, paper, and postage.

Last year I indicated that someone moved out, so why are they still on my census?

A registered voter who moved and does not register to vote in another community cannot be removed from our municipal census for three years. That is why you may have told us someone moved but they still appear on your form. The best thing to do is to ask them to register to vote in their new community, and by doing so his or her name will no longer appear on your census.

Who should complete the census form? What should I review?

Any adult residing in the home can complete and sign the form.

- Please look over the names listed on the form. If there are no changes to the pre-printed information, simply sign and return the form to the Board of Elections.
- Add any new people who reside at your address, and indicate with "M" or "D" if someone has moved away or died. Students away at school, federal personnel, and members of the Armed Forces who wish to retain a Fall River address can remain on the form.
- Check to see that the date of birth is correct for each individual person.
- Please add or correct occupations listed on the form.
- The "Party" column tells you the voter registration of each resident. "U" stand for "Unenrolled" which means you are not enrolled in any particular political party. The other designations are: "D" for Democrat, "R" for Republican and "L" for Libertarian. No letter in the party column means the person is not registered to vote in Fall River. Voters who make any political affiliation changes must sign the form.
- You cannot use the municipal census form to register to vote. Please call the Board of Elections office at 508-324-2630 to request a Voter Registration Card.

What if I have other questions or concerns?

Please feel free to call, email or stop by the Board of Elections office to ask for more information. The annual municipal census is a very important tool for the city, and the information needs to be as accurate as possible. The law regarding the annual street list can be found in M.G.L. Chapter 51, although other chapters of the law also apply.

Your cooperation is greatly appreciated!