

Challenge to the 2025 Wilde Lake Village Election

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Election Co-Chair Report to the Village Board on the Wilde Lake Election Challenges, 2025 Page 6

Challenge to the 2025 Wilde Lake Village Election

1 May 2025

To: Steve Campbell and Linda Odum, WLCA Election Co-Chairs
wlelectionchair@wildelake.org

I am presenting this information to you today to meet the formal requirements of the Wilde Lake Community Association Bylaws and the Wilde Lake Village Election Guidelines and Regulations for an election challenge.

The Election Guidelines specify that the “Election Chair certifies the results of the election to the incumbent Village Board after the deadline to challenges to Election by the end of April”. The term of office for The Board and the Columbia Representative is May 1 to April 30.

The 2025-2026 Board is now the Incumbent Village Board. Fortunately, there was no election for the Village Board this year so we may accept the Columbia Council Representative election report without conflicts of interest.

The new Board will take our seats at the meeting on May 5, 2025. The seating of a Columbia Council Representative will have to wait until your evaluation of these complaints and preparation of the final report of the election for review by the Board.

The Election Guidelines allow up to seven days for your evaluation of the Election procedures and the complaint. The May 5 meeting date gives you only four days. If this is not enough time, please let Sharon Cooper-Kerr know so we can arrange to accept and act on the report at a later date.

The 2025 Wilde Lake Village Election for the Columbia Council Representative was tainted by multiple instances of non-compliance. The most serious violations of the Election Guidelines were in the preparation of the ballots (I.A.1.a.), in the positioning of the voting tables (II.B.2.), in marking electioneering boundaries (II.B.3.), and in assuring that the voting places were not obstructed by other special events or displays (II.B.2.)

The specific violations of these sections of the Election Guidelines are discussed below. Photos are available on request. Please provide specific information about your evaluation of these complaints, along with your specific recommendations, in your Final Report to the Village Board.

Thank you.

Katharine C Rathbun

Director-elect, Wilde Lake Community Association Board of Directors

I. BEFORE ELECTION

A. Regular and Absentee Ballots

Complaint: The ballots used in this election promise the voter complete anonymity. In fact, every voter had to provide full identifying information and sign their ballot before it would be counted.

The 2025 Official WLCA Election Ballot was used as the mail-in ballot, it provided the pin for online voting, and it was used for in-person voting. The ballot which was mailed to all members had the name, mailing address of owners, and on-line PIN printed at the top of the ballot. This could be detached to preserve the anonymity of the voter.

The remaining ballot included two sections that could not be detached from each other. The left side was the actual ballot to be marked by the voter. The right side of the paper was a certification statement that must be filled out by the voter with their full legal name, property address, signature, and date.

Above the certification statement there is the assurance “When you cast your absentee ballot, this statement will be detached and filed separately; it cannot be used to identify individual members’ ballots.” Under the statement was the notice “BALLOT WILL NOT BE COUNTED UNLESS ABOVE INFORMATION IS COMPLETED AND SIGNED”

In fact, there was no way to detach the certification statement from the ballots. When the votes were counted, the statements were still attached. Everyone involved in counting, including the representatives of the candidates, could see the identity of the voter and how they voted.

II. DURING ELECTIONS

A. Voting Places

- 1. Voting tables should be in a clear, obvious place, not obstructed by other special events or displays.**
- 2. People setting up poll sites should be aware of the electioneering boundaries. Such Boundaries should be clearly marked.**

Complaint: Voting tables were not in a clear, obvious place.

The voting tables were set up the Board Room inside Slayton House. A voter had to go through two sets of closed doors to reach the hall outside the voting room. There was one small sign posted just outside the actual voting room. There were no visible signs on the exterior of the building indicating where to vote. People had to ask someone where to go to vote.

Complaint: The voting place was obstructed by displays outside both doors to the building.

Both entrances to the building were obscured by tables for other events which were placed inside the electioneering boundaries. An information table with a canopy marked DRUG ENFORCEMENT ADMINISTRATION was set up on the sidewalk outside the front doors of Slayton House. This was between the parking lot and the doors, and the canopy completely obscured the view of the doors. There was a plant give-away that obstructed the view of the side door.

Complaint: The voting place was obstructed by a special event that kept a constant stream of cars flowing between all available parking and the entrance to the building.

The Howard County Prescription Drug Take Back Program was set up in the parking lot and driveway which serve Slayton House. Cars were guided into one end of the driveway, past the tables and workers in the driveway and out the other end. The hours for the take back were the same as the hours for voting. Drivers and passengers were required to remain in their cars. This actively prevented Wilde Lake Village voters from getting to the polls.

Complaint: There were three small low signs obscured by bushes and not visible from the street or sidewalk. These were posted well beyond the electioneering boundaries prescribed in the election guidelines.

II. DURING ELECTIONS

A. Voting Places

B. Electioneering

1. Electioneering Boundaries

- a. No electioneering is allowed within one hundred feet of the polling tables.

2. Violations

- a. The Election Chair is responsible for warning candidates and their representatives if they electioneer within the electioneering boundaries.

Complaint: The village manager set up the boundaries well beyond 100 feet from the TABLES. When questioned about this, she stated repeatedly that the boundaries had been set up 100 feet from the DOORS, and she confirmed that the distance of 100 feet had been measured from the DOORS.

Complaint: The village manager and other individuals were allowed to engage in electioneering inside the boundaries, and to harass the representatives of the other candidate. At no time did either of the Election Co-chairs provide warnings against electioneering.

The Village Manager approached one of the candidates before the election started and warned her that she would not be allowed to stand or approach people within 100 feet of the DOORS of Slayton House. She gave this candidate specific instructions where to stand. The other candidate was allowed to wander freely within the boundary and greet and talk to voters.

The Village Manager approached and warned multiple people who were supporting one candidate that they must stay outside the extended boundaries. Supporters of the other candidate were wandering and chatting with voters within the boundaries, but they were never warned.

II. DURING ELECTIONS

2. Violations

- b. If a serious problem results, The Election Chair should document the violations in writing and may recommend that the Village Board invalidate the Election.**

Election Co-Chair Report to the Village Board on the Wilde Lake Election Challenges, 2025

The Election Committee Co-Chairs have reviewed a challenge to the election submitted by Kate Rathbun and dated 1 May 2025.

The Co-Chairs are responsible for making a final election report to the incumbent Village Board within 7 calendar days of receiving the challenge. [Wilde Lake Village Election Guidelines and Regulations]

This is that final election report to you from Co-Chairs Steve Campbell and Linda Odum.

The challenge asserts that the persons listed on the 2025 election ballot as candidates for the Village Board now constitute the Village Board. Review of the three legally constituted documents pertaining to Wilde Lake Village elections indicate that the results of the election must be presented to and accepted by the INCUMBENT village board, to whom this report is being submitted.

The challenge asserts that the process did not provide for voter anonymity and this is true. Anonymity could be a point for future election discussions, but anonymity is not now required by our legal documents nor promised by Wilde Lake.

The challenge asserts that community activities underway in Wilde Lake Village Center on April 26, 2025, may have “obstructed” the voting process. The challenge asserts that placement of the election volunteers and the registration tables may have affected voting success. The Election Co-Chairs find these claims to be immaterial. The tables with their paper registers of voters and the paper ballots were moved indoors due to rain. A scheduled community festival was canceled due to rain. Voting location was clearly marked with signs and village center staff were in place inside the building during the entire voting period to answer residents’ questions and indicate the voting room. In-person voting on election day was strong relative to past years’ experience and quorum was reached prior to election day via online and mail-in ballots.

The challenge asserts that the county Drug Take Back program, which offered drive-through surrender of drugs, prevented voters from getting to the polls. The Election Co-Chairs find the assertion to be immaterial. The parking lot was available to voters and shoppers without interruption; voter turnout was strong and steady in the voting room.

The complaint asserts that one candidate was allowed to “wander freely” in contradistinction to another candidate who was told “where to stand” in connection with electioneering. The Election Co-Chairs were aware that both candidates entered Slayton

House and the voting room in order to cast their votes. Both left the voting room promptly upon having cast the vote.

WLCA Articles of Incorporation, Article Seven A and B
WLCA Covenants, Article III, 9E and F, Page 5
WLCA Covenants, Article III, Section 3.01 and 3.02 A and B

The Election Co-Chairs' detailed review of the Wilde Lake Village By-Laws, Covenants, and WLVB Election Guidelines and Regulations prompted by the Challenge has surfaced another irregularity, not listed in the challenge.

The three legal documents [By-Laws Wilde Lake Community Association, Inc., Wilde Lake Village Covenants, and Wilde Lake Election Guidelines and Regulations] each recite the regulation which gives a single vote to any Lot or Unit within the village. It appears that the Co-Chairs were at fault in validating more than one nomination petition from the co-owners of a single lot.

Recommendations to the incumbent Wilde Lake Village Board re the 2025 village elections are:

1. Accept the results of the 2025 election as certified.
2. Modify the Wilde Lake Election Guidelines and Regulations immediately to conform the nominating process with the voting regulations as to one vote, or one candidate, per Lot or Unit, being clear that a non-family member holding a valid lease for a portion of a Lot or Unit may cast a vote or be nominated for office from that address.

Citations: WLCA Articles of Incorporation, Article Seven A and B
WLCA Covenants, Article III, 9E and F, Page 5
WLCA Covenants, Article III, Section 3.01 and 3.02 A and B.

3. Consider promulgating a protocol for inclement weather.

Steve and Linda

5/4/2025