

Joint Elections Advisory/Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee

December 12, 2024, Meeting Notes

Members in Attendance: Andrew Brewer, Betty Fitzpatrick, David Poland, Carrie Parks, Edri Geiger, Greg Kimsey, Clark County Auditor; Cathie Garber, Elections Manager; Rich Cooper, Elections Assistant Manager; Sharla Comastro, Elections

Presidential Election wrap-up:

- The Presidential Election was very busy and went well. There were very long lines on election day, but everything worked as expected. Sheriff deputies were on site, which along with the extra security precautions implemented by the county department in charge of security made election day very secure.
- The Elections Office had an unprecedented line of people in line either requesting to register, update their address and receive a ballot or get a replacement ballot. The lines on the Monday before election day were 1-1/2 to 2 hours long. On election day, the line was a 3-1/2 hour wait with several hundred voters waiting in line at 8 p.m. This was the first Presidential Election since the pandemic where same day registration was available. (431 people came in person to update their address and get their correct ballot and 476 people came in person to register to vote.)
- The expansion of the Elections Office work areas should significantly reduce the length of the line for future Presidential Elections by increasing the number of front counter work stations from seven to thirteen. The space where the Dragon Fly Café was previously located was used as a voting room with a staffed ballot box. This was very well received.
- Discussion by elections staff stated that voters were less angry and misinformed than the last presidential election in 2020 by about 80%.

Fisher's Landing Ballot Box

- On Oct. 28th the ballot box at Fisher's Landing had an incendiary device placed on it. This explosion caused ballots to catch on fire inside the box. A replacement box was installed the same day.
- Extra staff were hired to monitor all the boxes 24/7 during the remainder of the voting period. Governor Inslee provided funding for the cost of this. Law enforcement presence was enhanced.
- The ballot box had 494 ballots and remnants of ballots identified and retrieved. There were 488 ballots where the voter could be identified. As of October 30, 355 voters had obtained a replacement ballot for their damaged ballot. Subsequently replacement ballots were provided to the 133 voters whose ballots had been damaged and could be identified. The

Elections Office received 469 of those 488 replacement ballots. The remaining 19 voters had their damaged ballot duplicated to the extent possible and counted. There were an unknown number of ballots that were completely destroyed.

- A \$25,000 reward was announced by the FBI for information leading to the arrest of the person who placed the incendiary device on the ballot box and caused the fire.
- Although all ballot boxes currently have recently installed fire suppression devices, we are looking at changing them out for new fire suppression devices that would be more effective.
- Greg will be going to the county council asking for funding for a study to determine the current status of surveillance cameras at ballot boxes, installation of additional cameras and, funding for the ongoing expense of storing surveillance images and responding to public records request of the images.
- SB 5010 is being introduced that would direct the Secretary of State to provide grants to purchase and install cameras.
- Greg spoke with a legislative committee regarding the Ballot Box incident. He recommended to the committee to consider lowering the number of “targets”. Currently, there is a requirement for a ballot box for every 15,000 registered voters and in every city or town and Census Designated location. He asked them to consider raising it to one for every 30,00 registered voters. The Committee praised Greg on Clark County’s response to the event.
- There is a trade-off between security and accessibility. Providing a higher level of security would be easier if there are fewer targets. Edri Geiger believes all ballot boxes are at risk. She questioned how reducing the number of boxes make it less enticing to a bad actor. Carrie Parks suggested to not decrease the number of boxes but place them in areas such as libraries where most people visit and less chance of bad activity occurring. Greg commented that Clark County’s strategy has been to locate ballot boxes where voters can deposit ballots from the driver’s side of vehicles.

Machine Recounts

- There were two recounts required based on the results of the November General election. The recounts were for County Council District 4 and Senator for the 18th Legislative District. The candidates from the County Council 4 race requested a machine recount, rather than the required manual recount. This is an allowable alternative procedure provided by law and saved approximately \$50,000 in taxpayer dollars.
- There was no change at all to the results of the County Council 4 race. There was a net change of 1 for the 18th Legislative Senator race. A ballot filled out lightly and partially with purple pen caused the ballot to be counted as an undervote but was actually a vote for Adrian Cortes. This resulted in one more vote for Adrian Cortes and one less undervote. The amended abstract was certified on December 12th.

City of Vancouver Petition

- Certain cities and charter counties may have the ability to allow voters to utilize the initiative and referendum process. The Elections Office received a petition from the City of Vancouver, a first-class charter city, regarding an initiative for Street and Development Standards. The signature verifiers began reviewing signatures on Monday, Dec. 9th and are 50% completed. The review process is expected to be completed by Monday, Dec. 16th. For this initiative petition to be valid, it must contain 4,270 valid signatures of voters residing within the city of Vancouver's boundaries. The City Council could choose to adopt the law rather than place it on the ballot for voters to decide. (Editor's note: This petition was completed on December 13th and was certified as sufficient after verifying 4,475 valid signatures.)

February 11 Special Election Resolutions

- There will be six jurisdictions participating in the February special election. About 300,000 (87%) of voters in Clark County will receive ballots for this election. The biggest hurdle for this election will be the limited space due to the work being done to expand the elections office work area. Ballot inspection boards will be located in the new signature verification area. This limits the number of boards being able to process ballots to eight boards, so less people, longer hours.

Work area expansion and move-in Date

- The Elections Office will be vacating the north side of the building by January 9th and moving to the South side. The completion of this work is expected to be by June in time for the August Primary.

Cathie's Retirement

- Cathie Garber will be retiring on January 9th. A retirement party will be held in the Elections Office on Jan. 9th from 2-4 p.m. All are invited.
- Rich Cooper will be appointed as the new manager when Cathie retires.
- Sharla Comastro will be appointed to fill the position Rich currently holds.

Other Business

- Greg talked about a lawsuit that was filed by the Washington State Republican Party alleging that 1,042 voters who provided an NCOA change of address to USPS and incorrectly voted in the 18th Legislative District. The Elections Office believes all voter registration records were updated, and ballots were processed in accordance with applicable RCWs and WACs.

- Discussion was held regarding the observer trainings that will be conducted in 2025. Going forward, there will be three observer trainings per year. The trainings will be classroom training setting, along with a tour of the facilities. The January class is already full.
- David Poland was commended for his participation in a workgroup with the Secretary of State's Office to promote secure and accessible voting to underserved and marginalized populations. This workgroup engaged various stakeholders to develop potential solutions that will increase voting accessibility for underserved and historically marginalized populations. This workgroup started in 2023, meeting many times over the two years and have completed their study.

Meetings in 2025 – To be Determined