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King County
Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee

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Annual Report
on King County Elections
For the Year 2017

February 2018

King County Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee

Member	Representing
Ellen Hansen, Chair	Registered Voters, King County
Marilyn Knight, Vice Chair	League of Women Voters of Seattle
Glenn Avery*	Washington State Republicans
Paul Berry*	Washington State Democrats
Chuck Gerringer*	Independent Research and Policy Institute
Bruce Huang	Chinese-speaking community
Sven Kalve	Municipal League of King County
Sheryl Moss	Office of Secretary of State
Frank Radford	Registered voter
Kristina Swanson*	Washington State Auditors Association
Linh Thai	Vietnamese-speaking community
Monica Tracey	King County Republican Party
Emily Willoughby	King County Democratic Party

**Member resigned in mid-2017*

Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee Annual Report for the Year 2017

Introduction

Ordinance 15453, which was passed by the Metropolitan King County Council on May 6, 2006, reestablished the Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee (CEOC). The ordinance also established its mission: "...to help King County restore and maintain public confidence in elections." The ordinance further directs the CEOC to make recommendations to the Council to:

- "Improve performance of the King County elections division" and
- "Help ensure that accountability and performance of the elections division is provided in a transparent manner that is meaningful to the residents of King County."

This report is submitted pursuant to Ordinance 15453, Section 5.B.5, which requires annual reports to the Council. The report focuses on the most important activities of the CEOC and of King County Elections. The committee would be happy to provide more detail to Councilmembers if desired.

Overview

During 2017, the King County Department of Elections successfully administered and certified two special elections (February and April), a primary in August, and the November 8 general election with complete ballot reconciliation. After each election, the Department publishes reports, including the results for each election, on its website, <http://www.kingcounty.gov/elections/>. In addition, the Director of Elections reports on current operations to CEOC members at the committee's regular meetings.

The voter turnout rate for the general election was 43 percent and over 550,000 ballots were returned. Also in the general election, Elections deployed its new ballot tabulation system created by the vendor, Clear Ballot.

This report describes: (1) the activities of the CEOC, (2) the role of the CEOC, and (3) issues on which the CEOC was a resource to the department or the director.

CEOC Activities

The CEOC has participated in a number of activities that have been valuable to the King County Council, the Department of Elections and the residents of King County.

1. Election observations.

- a. CEOC members continued to observe all aspects of ballot processing – including Logic and Accuracy tests, signature checking, separation of ballot envelopes and ballots, preparation and tabulation. Often, CEOC members are the only observers of the process.
- b. This year, CEOC members also observed training of seasonal staff in new procedures developed and implemented after the procurement of the new

ballot tabulation system. The new tabulation system has created many efficiencies in the ballot processing steps. Prior to the new system, the ballot duplication rate was at 23 percent. The new tabulation system has decreased the ballot duplication rate to 0.7 percent, which is a significant improvement. The CEOC commends the Department of Elections for the efficiencies realized in the implementation of the new tabulation system.

- c. CEOC members continued to visit the ballot drop boxes to observe signage, traffic flow, and voter activity. The CEOC observed each special election as well as the primary and general elections. CEOC observations were discussed in post-election debriefs with the director of Elections so that CEOC observations and any suggestions for improvements could be considered by the director. Elections continued to incorporate a number of the CEOC's suggestions into their procedures, and the CEOC considers observing elections one of its primary duties.

2. **Ballot drop box state mandate.** In 2017, the state legislature passed Substitute Senate Bill 5472, which required counties to provide, at a minimum, one ballot drop box per fifteen thousand registered voters in the county and a minimum of one ballot drop box in each city, town, and census-designated place in the county with a post office. Elections is now required to operate a total of 86 ballot drop boxes. Prior to the new state law, Elections operated 43 ballot drop boxes. Elections' plan was to deploy the additional ballot drop boxes in three phases: 13 in the 2017 general election, 15 each in the 2018 and 2019 primary elections, respectively.

As in prior years, the CEOC observed ballot drop box closings which, by law, must take place promptly at 8:00 p.m. The CEOC continued to note issues around traffic flow and signage as well as lack of clarity around queuing rules for vehicles versus walk-up voters. The CEOC also made an effort to observe the new drop box locations for any issues and possible relocations.

3. **CEOC role and membership.** The CEOC members convened a subcommittee to review the CEOC's history, duties, charter and membership. The CEOC is currently exploring options to increase diversity in its membership that would make it more reflective of King County residents. The CEOC plans to provide the King County Council with a proposal in early 2018.
4. **King County Auditor Office audit.** The King County Auditor contacted the CEOC to solicit feedback in preparation for the performance audit of the Department of Elections.

Critical Business Decisions

In order to fulfill its responsibilities, it is necessary for the CEOC to receive appropriate and timely information from Elections on critical business decisions. In 2017, Elections provided such timely information to the CEOC and solicited feedback on Elections' new ballot tabulation system.

Elections developed a steering committee and a project team, which included CEOC members. Chair Ellen Hansen served on the steering committee and Paul Berry and Chuck Gerring served on the project team. Their input was seen as valuable and incorporated in the selection process.

CEOC Served as a Resource

CEOC members serve as liaisons between members of the public, King County Elections and the County Council. Members are frequently approached by friends, neighbors, colleagues, community groups and others with elections questions. CEOC members are visible at many ballot drop box closings and voters frequently ask them who they are. With their CEOC badge in hand, members explain that they are part of a group appointed by the Council to observe the election process. Invariably this receives a positive response. Through these interactions and conversations members of the public gain a better understanding of elections administration, rules and laws, which benefits everyone.

Conclusion

CEOC members are proud of the role they played during 2017 helping to ensure fair, accessible, and accountable elections in King County. Members look forward to working with Elections staff, the Executive, and the Council to continue to improve elections during 2018.