



King County

**King County
Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee**

**Annual Report
on King County Elections**

January 2011

King County Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee

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The Washington State Democratic Party
The King County Republican Party
The King County Democratic Party
Washington State Assoc. of County Auditors
(Thurston County Auditor)

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Introduction

Ordinance 15453, enacted 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 requiring annual reports to the Council. The report is brief and 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 or meet with members if greater detail is needed.

Overview

Looking back on 2010, King County Department of Elections completed another year of successful elections administration while developing and instituting new programs and processes that helped achieve department business goals. The improvements, some small, others more important and creative, have resulted in greater transparency, improved customer service, and greater accuracy. The changes have also resulted in significant, ongoing financial savings for King County and increased voter awareness.

Officials from Montana, Oregon, California, Colorado as well as officials from other countries toured King County's elections facilities and observed their procedures in order to see how they might make improvements to their own operations or because they are considering moving to all-mail elections. King County has become an international model for the efficient and accurate administration of elections. The CEOC is pleased to have been a partner with the Council, the Executive and the Director of Elections to help achieve this status. The following report describes (1) the activities of the CEOC, (2) issues on which the CEOC was a resource to the department or the director, and (3) highlights of election administration activities for 2010.

CEOC Activities

1. Observed elections – The CEOC actively observed every special election, primary election and general election. The CEOC’s observations were discussed with the Director of Elections after each election so that any suggestions for improvements could be considered by the Director.

The CEOC placed special emphasis on observing the general election of 2010. It chose to do so because the U.S. senate race was anticipated to be very close, and there was a great deal of media attention on a race that could have resulted in a machine recount or even a hand recount. The CEOC agreed that it should have a very visible presence not only at election headquarters, which it did, but also at ballot drop boxes. Every CEOC member engaged in observing ballot drop box closings on election night, or ballot processing and tabulation, or both. CEOC members were pleased to see the good planning and implementation of the closing of ballot drop boxes at 8:00 p.m. sharp so that late votes would not be counted. Voters who showed up late were given information about the option to deliver their ballot to the Riverton post office to be postmarked before midnight.

2. Enhanced voter communications – CEOC members met with King County Elections (KCE) staff to review and suggest improvements to the design and content of the official voters pamphlet to discuss ways to better inform and connect with voters. They also had an opportunity to discuss and review ballot layout.
3. Election law changes – The CEOC studied changes to elections laws in the state legislature and Congress. At the state level, a notable change was the reversal of the requirement for signature flaps on return ballot envelopes.

At the federal level the Military and Overseas Voting Empowerment (MOVE) Act places significant new deadlines on local elections officials to get ballots sent to military and overseas voters. Ballots must now be sent 45 days in advance of an election rather than 30 days before. In Washington State this may require changes to the date for the primary election. Washington received an exemption from the law in 2010 but KCE was able to meet the required deadline. State officials have been told they should not expect an exemption in 2011.

CEOC as a resource

4. Signature flap – The Director of Elections consulted with the CEOC before making the decision to eliminate the flap covering the voter’s signature on the return envelope. The CEOC supported this decision. The flap provided no actual security for voters since their signatures are a matter of public record on their voter registration files. Elimination of the signature flap is expected to save the County nearly \$175,000 annually.

Election Administration Highlights

5. Full staffing – 2010 represented the first full year of service for the Superintendent of Elections who was confirmed on October 19, 2009. King County Elections also hired a human resource manager and a quality assurance manager. KCE now has a fully staffed, strong management team.
6. Ballot drop boxes – The number of drop boxes was reduced in January as a cost savings measure. King County Elections (KCE) received approximately 200 calls from voters during a special election complaining about this change. Additional calls were received in subsequent elections. A number of drop boxes were later redeployed in response to voter requests. (See number 17, below.)
7. Fewer undeliverable ballots – As a result of improved voter registration records, voting-by-mail, and improved messaging to voters, there has been a significant decline in undeliverable ballots. For example, in February 2009 there were about 41,000 undeliverable ballots. In February 2010 there were only about 11,000 undeliverable ballots. This decline represents significant savings for King County and better service for voters.
8. Efficiency – Elections staff increased the use of envelope and ballot tracking features on the Pitney Bowes mail sorting machine. This increased overall efficiency of the signature verification, challenge and reconciliation processes.
9. Audit of KCE – The Washington Secretary of State conducted a review of King County Elections during the August 2009 primary election and issued an official report in 2010. The evaluation was favorable and included some recommendations for additional improvements (which have been accepted by KCE) as well as praise for elections administration in King County.
10. Change of vendor – Premier Election Solutions (formerly Diebold) was purchased by Elections Systems and Software Inc. (ES&S) Subsequent to the purchase, because of antitrust concerns by the U.S. Department of Justice, ES&S sold the intellectual property rights to Premier's election equipment, but was allowed to continue to provide technical support to its existing customers including King County. Dominion Voting Systems acquired the intellectual property rights to King County's election management and ballot tabulation systems. The Oversight committee is paying close attention to the transition of ownership and support functions as the Director of Elections ensures that ES&S honors commitments made by Premier Election Solutions. The County also has the right to seek technical support from Dominion without penalty for ending its service contract with ES&S.

11. Ballot printing and insertion improvements – KCE has worked closely with its ballot printing vendor, ES&S, to build in new quality assurance steps for matching the correct ballot with the voter’s address. Using new technology, the ballot is scanned and compared to the bar code on the envelope. Any mismatches are fixed immediately before the ballot insertion process continues. This has allowed KCE to reduce its oversight staff on this process from 34 to 8 individuals.
12. New paperless ballot duplication process – This was a very significant improvement for ballot processing. KCE staff found a creative way to use the capabilities of the new ballot scanning equipment so that nearly all ballots that need to be duplicated can be done electronically. This saves time and money for the County and is also more environmentally responsible as ballots are printed on virgin paper stock. At the request of the CEOC, elections staff demonstrated the paperless duplication process so that members would understand it, be assured that it was being done properly to meet state guidelines, and so members would be appropriately informed when they observed the process during an election. It was very helpful to have the demonstration.
13. Awards – King County Elections and the King County Office of Information and Resource Management won two awards related to Vote by Mail. The first was CIO (chief information officer) Magazine’s Top 100 Innovative Organizations Award. The second was the National Association of County Officials (NACO) Achievement Award for Innovative Programs. Both awards were for quality, innovation and performance because of the successful implementation of the new ballot scanning and tabulation equipment.
14. Recognition – CEOC member Kim Wyman, Thurston County Auditor, was recognized by the Secretary of State as “Auditor of the Year” for 2010.
15. Quality control – Reconciliation of ballots remains exceptionally high. KCE tracks the number of ballots sent out, the number returned, and then how many are counted or not counted based on guidance from the Secretary of State and the canvassing board. In both the August primary with nearly 1.1 million ballots sent out and over 420,000 returned, and in the general election, with nearly 1.1 million ballots sent out and over 780,000 returned, King County Elections posted no discrepancies--having fully accounted for all returned ballots in both elections and reported two, identified processing errors.
16. Open data and election results – KCE worked with the County’s technology staff as part of the open data initiative, to make certified election results more available to the public. Results for both the 2010 Primary Election and the 2010 General Election have been posted on the Open Data portal and are available for political parties as well as

individuals or the media that have an interest in elections. Tutorials on use of the data were developed by Elections staff and are included on King County Elections' web site. KCE will work to migrate past elections information to the Open Data portal.

17. Ballot drop boxes return – A significant number of voters contacted King County about the removal of drop boxes during the primary election. As a result, the Director worked with the Executive and found cost savings that enabled the redeployment of nine drop boxes in time for the general election. The Council subsequently provided funding for these and some additional ballot drop boxes in the 2011 budget. Ballot drop box locations were reviewed and updated to better serve voters. In 2011, some additional drop boxes will be added to provide equity coverage for King County voters.
18. Balanced budget – The Director made some very difficult decisions associated with budget cuts to the Elections Department on top of the savings/efficiencies that helped to meet budget target while providing for the proper administration of elections.