



King County

**King County
Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee**

**Annual Report
on King County Elections**

January 2012

King County Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee

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The Washington State Republican Party
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 2011, the King County Department of Elections completed another year of successful elections administration. There was one notable incident related to the timeliness of ballot mailings that occurred during the General Election that will be discussed later in this report. The ongoing system improvements implemented by the department, 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 as well as increased voter understanding and awareness.

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 2011.

CEOC Activities

1. **Observed elections** – The CEOC actively observed every 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.

The CEOC considers observing elections one of its primary duties. This year there were several very close races in the general election that required recounts. CEOC also observed this process.

2. **Ballot drop boxes** – The CEOC observed activity at ballot drop boxes during elections, particularly the closing of drop boxes, which can be challenging to close promptly at 8:00 p.m. as required by law. An effective plan was developed and executed so that voting laws were not violated. CEOC also reviewed the placement of ballot drop boxes and the supporting criteria, and provided input regarding location issues to the Director.
3. **Move back to Renton** – The CEOC was regularly briefed on the move back to Renton. Members toured the reconfigured facility. Operations are enhanced by the new space plan and it is a top-flight facility for elections. Investment in this facility was a wise decision by King County.
4. **Site visit to new ballot printing and insertion vendor** – Members toured the new ballot vendor facility, observed the security and ballot accountability processes that ensure quality control and that each voter is sent the correct ballot. Special attention was paid to the security measures employed by the vendor.
5. **Election law legislation** – The CEOC was briefed on proposed changes to elections laws in the state legislature.
6. **The federal Military and Overseas Voting Empowerment (MOVE) Act** – This act places significant new deadlines on local elections officials to send ballots 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 required a change to the date for the primary election, which will be two weeks earlier in 2012. The department is getting a federal grant to help implement the act. The CEOC received regular briefings from department staff and has been kept up to date on planning and implementation activities.
7. **State-level voter address update issue** – Received information from the director and the Secretary of State's representative on the CEOC regarding the confusion between the Department of Licensing and the Office of the Secretary of State related to updating voter registration

addresses. The representative from the Office of the Secretary of State has informed the CEOC that this issue has now been resolved.

8. **Monthly trainings** – The CEOC requested and has begun receiving monthly refresher courses on different aspects of election administration, such as a review of the signature-checking process and how to “cure” ballots rejected due to mismatched/no signatures and maintaining / updating the voter database. This training will help maintain a high level of awareness of elections procedures and will ensure that new members appointed to the committee gain an understanding of elections administration.
9. **New members** – Developed a plan for orientation of new CEOC members.
10. **Delayed mailing of ballots for the general election** –CEOOC members were briefed on the issue of approximately 11,300 ballots that had not been inserted and mailed on schedule, as well as the steps taken to notify voters and stakeholders and to get ballots to the affected voters. The director also briefed the CEOC on efforts by the vendor to investigate the cause of the problem and on process improvements to prevent a similar problem in the future.

Fortunately the problem was identified quickly and remedied so that all affected voters received ballots in time to vote. The CEOC reviewed the full incident report ordered by the Director of Elections that diagnosed the problem and was briefed on the department’s plan for a solution. The CEOC notes that this was a serious event and commends the immediate actions taken by the department and prompt investigation into the cause.

The cause was technical in nature and an event which had not happened before. It was an unanticipated event that required a system adjustment to prevent recurrence, and the Election Department has applied additional quality control processes to ensure that the problem does not occur again. The CEOC will observe the new procedures and continue to be a resource for reviewing any needed change.

CEOC served as a resource

11. **Voter survey** – The Elections Department developed and conducted a statistically valid survey of voters to evaluate voter satisfaction, evaluate the effectiveness of voter information resources, and identify emerging trends. The CEOC reviewed the draft survey and provided input regarding the survey questions.

Election Administration

12. **Audit of Elections Department** – 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. As required by law, in 2011 King County Elections and the Secretary of State completed a follow-up contact to verify that all recommended changes have taken place. The Elections Department was commended on their dedication to the election process and their commitment to continuous improvement.
13. **Awards** – The Secretary of State presented King County Elections an award for outstanding voter outreach and education.
14. **Quality control** – Reconciliation of ballots remains exceptionally high. The Department 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 one identified processing error each for August primary and general election respectively.
15. **Balanced budget** – The Director continues to find savings/efficiencies that meet the budget target while providing for the proper administration of elections.