



King County

**King County
Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee**

**Annual Report
on King County Elections**

January 2010

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
Hon. Evelyn Arnold	Washington State Assoc. of County Auditors
AJ Culver	The Municipal League of King County
Paul Guppy	The Washington Policy Center
Ross Marzolf	Registered Voters, King County
Sheryl Moss	Office of the Washington Secretary of State
Hon. Frank Radford	Finn Hill Park District (Junior Taxing Dist.)
James Rigby	The Washington State Republican Party
Michael Snyder	The Washington State Democratic Party
Monica Tracey	The King County Republican Party
Emily Willoughby	The King County Democratic Party

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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.

CEOC Priority Concerns/Election Focus Areas

Overall, 2009 was a productive year for the CEOC and was punctuated by three important events for King County Elections. Elections taking place in 2009 were conducted in an effective, accurate and open manner. Highlights are noted below.

- **Successful implementation of new ballot scanning and tabulation hardware and software.** The CEOC formed a subcommittee to oversee the testing and implementation of new, state-of-the-art ballot scanning and tabulation equipment. Rigorous testing of the equipment was conducted by the Office of the Secretary of State, as well as by a private computer security firm hired by King County. As a result of the security analysis, specific procedures and systems were put in place to ensure the integrity of the equipment and of the election process. The equipment was used first in the August primary election and functioned very well with one minor glitch involving approximately 20 ballots. The ovals on these particular ballots were filled in lightly such that the scanners treated them as undervotes. The ballots were examined by hand and counted properly.
- **Transition to all-mail elections.** Council passage of Ordinance 16557 allowed King County to join all but one of Washington's 39 counties that conduct elections entirely by mail. The August primary was the first election conducted by mail under the ordinance. In the opinion of many Washington state elections administrators, all-mail elections help contribute to accuracy by allowing for much better quality control. In a county with over one million voters, the transition to all-mail elections required significant planning, staff training and public education. The transition team created by the Director performed admirably and resulted in a smooth transition for voters and elections staff. The transition to all-mail

elections occurred at the same time as the first use of the new ballot scanning and tabulation equipment. Also at the same time, the Office had to move to a temporary facility at King County International Airport due to the threat of flooding. The successful management of these major changes was a remarkable achievement for the Office and for King County.

- **Hired a Superintendent of Elections.** After a long vacancy and several recruitment efforts, the Director hired and the Council confirmed a Superintendent of Elections. The new Superintendent is highly qualified having served as a county auditor for 19 years. A CEOC member participated in the interview process. The County should be well served by the skills of the new Superintendent.
- **Studied Ranked Choice Voting.** Motion 12854 requested the CEOC to study ranked choice voting and to report its findings back to the Council. The CEOC researched the issue, and spoke with proponents of and other experts on the voting system. We closely followed the Pierce County experience with ranked choice voting. The report we delivered to the Council summarizes our findings and provides a recommendation for your consideration.
- **Worked to increase content on the Elections web site.** The CEOC established a subcommittee to explore the potential of putting more content on the elections web site. Elections management responded positively and has expanded web content. It is likely this work will be ongoing as new ideas, trends and technologies emerge.
- **Supported State Legislation.** The CEOC worked with King County to support legislation to reduce the number of elections allowed each year, as well as other election reforms.
- **Observed elections.** One of the most basic yet important activities undertaken each year by the CEOC is the observation of elections. During 2009 the CEOC observed every election and many Canvassing Board meetings. We asked questions of staff and they appeared to be well trained and understood the task they were performing. The ballot reconciliation process has reached the very high level of performance known as the Six Sigma level (more on this below).
- **Maintained constructive working relationship with Elections Office.** The CEOC takes its oversight role very seriously. At the same time, it is necessary to have a constructive professional relationship with management and staff. CEOC members continuously strive to maintain this balance and appreciate the reciprocal efforts of Elections leadership and staff.

Continuous Improvement in King County Elections Office

The Elections Office continues to improve all aspects of conducting elections relating to staff performance and procedural matters. In particular, the CEOC notes the following improvements.

- **Six Sigma Quality Performance.** Since the 2004 primary election, the Office has conducted 26 elections without serious errors. For the last general election ballots were reconciled to zero net errors. Over the last year Elections met the business and industry quality standard known as “Six Sigma.” This means that the Office had fewer than 3.4 defects (un-reconciled ballots) occur per million opportunities (ballots).
- **Flood Planning.** Due to the potential for flooding of the Green River at its Renton facility, Elections was required to move to a building at King County International Airport. Because of the number of possible elections each year, it was necessary to plan and execute the move in a very short period of time. The Elections Office worked very effectively with the Facilities Management Division and other county agencies to achieve a successful move that did not disrupt the August primary election. All involved are to be commended.
- **Security Plan Approved.** Elections developed a security plan that the Council reviewed and approved. The CEOC also reviewed the plan and, while not security experts, found it thoughtful, logical and appropriate. Anyone who spends any time at all in the Elections Office can't help but be aware that security is one of the top priorities of the office and it is built into both the facility and operating procedures.

Looking forward to the balance of 2010

The CEOC will continue to observe elections and maintain oversight of issues as they emerge. From the current vantage point, it appears that 2010 should be a rather uneventful year, despite another move. After nearly eight years of challenges, leadership changes, equipment, facility and procedural changes and new state laws, 2010 may be a “normal” year. Time will tell.

Move back to permanent facility. Given the reduced threat of flooding, the CEOC looks forward to the Elections Office return to their headquarters in Renton. It has an ideal design for the operation and security and will contribute to good performance and oversight by the public and the CEOC.

Observe elections in 2010. This continues to be a high-priority activity for the CEOC. It is where the “rubber hits the road” in elections and each election is an opportunity to make small improvements. We credit the Director and her staff for their commitment to continually improve, and appreciate their openness to our suggestions. Each year Elections makes a few small changes or improvements at the suggestion of the CEOC which don't rise to the level of being reported in this document, but which are still helpful to the overall election process.