



King County

**King County
Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee**

**Annual Report
on King County Elections
For the Year 2012**

February 1, 2013

King County Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee

Member

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Marilyn Knight, Vice Chair
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Registered Voters, King County
League of Women Voters of Seattle
The Municipal League of King County
Registered Voters, King County
Office of the Secretary of State, Wash. St.
Finn Hill Park District (Junior Taxing Dist.)
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
(Former Thurston County Auditor, now
Washington's Secretary of State)

Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee

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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 2012, the King County Department of Elections completed another year of successful elections administration despite the demands of a high-turnout presidential election. A significant amount of planning, training and process improvements went into making 2012 a successful election year. There was one software malfunction during scanning of ballots in the general election that will be discussed in more detail later. The ongoing system improvements implemented by the Department, some small, others more important and creative, have resulted in greater transparency and efficiency, improved customer service, and greater accountability. The changes have also resulted in significant, ongoing financial savings for King County and increased voter understanding and awareness.

King County has become a model for the efficient and accurate administration of elections. During the general election, individuals from 39 countries watched the County processing ballots via its webcams. The CEOC is pleased to have been a partner with the Council, the Executive and the Director of Elections to help achieve this status over a period of years. 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 2012.

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 and the Superintendent 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.
2. **Ballot drop boxes** – The CEOC observed ballot drop box closings which, by law, must take place promptly at 8:00 p.m. The process for closing boxes can be challenging and was improved upon this year. Security personnel and volunteers from organizations participating as a fund raiser received specialized training conducted by elections staff. Some CEOC members also attended the training.

There was some voter confusion this year that occurred when third parties conducted their own ballot collection services and some individuals went door-to-door offering to deliver voted ballots to the Elections office. This raised concerns with the Office of the Secretary of State, the King County Elections Department and several CEOC members. Informal ballot collection systems run the risk of disenfranchising voters through honest mistakes or through ill intentions.

3. **Site visit to new ballot printing and insertion vendor** – New and veteran CEOC members toured the new ballot printing vendor's facility, where they observed the security and ballot accountability processes in place to ensure quality control so that each voter is sent the correct ballot. Special attention was paid to the security measures employed by the vendor, which are impressive.
4. **Election law legislation** – The CEOC was briefed on proposed changes to elections laws in the state legislature.
5. **The federal Military and Overseas Voting Empowerment (MOVE) Act** – This act places established significant new deadlines for local 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. The Elections department has received federal grants to help implement the act. The CEOC received regular briefings from department staff and the department has received many thanks and compliments on the ease of voting from voters living out of the U.S.
6. **Regular trainings** – The CEOC requested and has begun receiving a number of refresher courses on different aspects of election administration, such as a review of the signature verification process and how to “cure” ballots rejected due to mismatched/no signatures, maintaining and updating the voter database and ballot duplication. This

training will continue in 2013. It helps CEOC members maintain a higher level of awareness of elections procedures and will ensure that new members appointed to the committee gain an understanding of elections administration.

7. **CEOC Membership** – In April, Council staff informed the CEOC that the County Council had amended the King County Code to provide for representation for the Vietnamese-speaking community on the CEOC. This action was welcomed by the committee. Mr. Linh Thai was appointed by the Council to fill this new position, and the Government Accountability and Oversight Committee approved the motion confirming his appointment. Action by the full Council is expected February 11, 2013. On a related membership note the County Council appointed and confirmed Sven Kalve as the representative for the Municipal League of King County. Finally the CEOC wishes to thank the Honorable Kim Wyman for her service on the CEOC as the representative for the Washington State Association of County Auditors, and to congratulate her on being elected as Washington’s new Secretary of State.

8. **Computer hardware/software problem in the general election** –CEOC members were briefed on this issue by Director Huff, Information Technology Manager Dale Hartman, other elections staff and a representative of the ballot tabulation system vendor, Justin Bales of Dominion Voting Inc. They provided the following explanation of the computer system malfunction that slowed down the processing of ballots.
 - There are several modules in the ballot scanning and tabulation system that must communicate with each other in order for the entire system to work.
 - Modules include the Assurance Security Manager (ASM) security module, the Premier Central Scan PCS scanner module, the Global Election Management GEM tabulation module, the Adjudication module, and the private (closed/internal) network and hubs.
 - One of the most important modules is the ASM security module. It allows for the various modules to communicate with each other during the processing of ballots. If it loses communications with any of the other modules the system is designed to stop processing ballots. This is what happened on November 7, Wednesday afternoon at approximately 3:00 P.M.
 - Ms. Huff had made arrangements before the election for vendor technicians to be on the premises in case of any technical problems. In addition to this staff, the vendor flew in a senior engineer familiar with our specific system to review the situation (Justin Bales was one of the individuals that had installed the system at King County Elections).

- The entire system was carefully shut down per established procedures, then it was restarted per established procedures, and all data and ballots counted before the crash were verified to have not been lost or corrupted. Counting was restarted and continued.
- No further communication issues of the security module occurred but the cause of the original problem has not been identified. Ms. Huff and the vendor were in agreement that testing of the system to identify the source of the problem and identification of potential solutions for the future needed to wait until the election was certified.
- Separately, there were unrelated minor problems related to some adjudication work stations that made them unavailable. As the workspace is replicated on every scanner and adjudication workstation, if it is unavailable for more than a few days, it would take too much time to reestablish, adversely impacting the network for the remaining stations. Therefore since an adequate number of adjudication stations were available to meet the existing workload, it was decided after the second day not to bring them back up for operations.
- Also, a few of the adjudication and scanning workstations were indicating that they were running short of hard drive disc space, due to the volume of ballots being processed in the 2012 General Election. It was decided to delete unnecessary data from previous elections on the workstations (Special & Primary elections) to free up additional hard drive space. The deleted data is stored redundantly on site as well as off site.
- The issues with the scanner memory and the signature verification work stations did slow down the processing of ballots.
- Of note, KCE successfully completed a Logic and Accuracy test of the system on Oct. 23rd. During this test the system did not experience any slowdowns, malfunctions, or network issues.

The CEOC and Council staff requested that they be kept informed of the results of additional testing and analysis that occurs after certification of the election. So far, testing has been limited because state law does not permit the counting of ballots from a previous election as a way to test for system flaws. It is difficult and expensive to create the volume of voted ballots needed to replicate the stress on the scanning and tabulating equipment that existed during the presidential general election. The Department is working with its vendor to see if a large dummy ballot deck can be acquired to run additional diagnostics.

CEOC Served as a Resource

9. **Voter survey** – The Elections Department conducted a statistically valid survey of voters to evaluate voter satisfaction, the effectiveness of voter information resources, and to identify emerging trends. The CEOC was briefed on the survey results which were very positive. Overall the public is very impressed with King County election operations and feel their ballot is safe, that it counts and that the results are accurate and timely.
10. **Ballot Drop Boxes** – CEOC members watched the closing of many drop boxes through the year and made a number of recommendations that were implemented by the Director of Elections. Public service announcements also helped educate the public about not waiting until the last minute to vote. This made closing ballot drop boxes much easier and more orderly.
11. **CEOC as Liaison** – Over the last few years it has become clear to CEOC members that they serve as liaisons between members of the public, King County Elections and the County Council. Members are frequently approached by friends, neighbors, colleagues and others with questions regarding elections. 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.

Elections Administration

12. **Quality control** –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. For more than four years now the Elections department has accounted for every ballot sent out, returned, counted and not counted and the reasons why (such as ballots postmarked after election day).
13. **Expanded Observer Training Opportunities** – Elections management and staff recognized that because 2012 was a presidential year election that more members of the public as well as political parties and campaign staff would want to observe elections. CEOC members attended and observed, substantial training sessions for party and campaign observers before both the primary and general elections. This provided a better understanding and ease of observing for the observers, added credibility to the election process and minimized disruptions for very busy elections staff. This is one more example of the good planning for 2012 elections.

14. **General Election** – As noted earlier, this was a presidential-year election that required extensive planning and perfect execution. King County has more than 1.17 million voters. A total of **993,908** ballots were returned for the general election, a King County record. A total of **556,083** ballots were processed and reported on election night, also a new County record. Ballots are now counted faster because of process improvements. It now takes 1 ½ days to process a ballot, down from two days just a short time ago. All the changes are clearly visible to anyone who visits the elections office during an election. The workflow changes are particularly noticeable and beneficial.

15. **Balanced budget** – The Director continues to find savings/efficiencies that meet the budget target while providing for the proper administration of elections. The Elections Department has conducted a number of Lean events. In a Lean event, one part of the election process is mapped out in great detail by staff. Then staff looks for ways to streamline the process while maintaining quality standards. As a result of these Lean processes, Elections has reconfigured the layout of several areas to accommodate new workflows.