

King County Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee Annual Report

1 February 2007

Introduction

This report of the Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee (CEOC) is submitted pursuant to Ordinance 15453, section 5.B.5, of the Metropolitan King County Council. The CEOC has made a conscious decision to focus on the highest priority actions that are needed to further improve the elections process, rather than try to address every possible issue of concern. For these reasons, this report focuses on the following actions that last year's CEOC recommended as the King County Elections Section's highest priorities. We appreciate that the Council has validated the recommendations with its own legislation.

Priority Concerns/Focus Areas

- **Secure leadership of the REALS Division.** The importance of longer-term competent leadership in the director and superintendent positions cannot be overstated. Every effort should be made to fill these positions, on a non-interim basis, with experienced, well-qualified individuals.
- **Consolidate elections operations into a single facility.** The Council is well aware that every advisory group that has examined the County's elections operations has concurred with this recommendation. Again, the Council and the Executive should do everything possible to expedite this action, which will facilitate management and security, reduce the potential for mistakes, and raise morale.

Based on briefings that the CEOC has received from the Facilities Management Division, it appears that King County is moving forward expeditiously toward consolidation of elections facilities, though CEOC members do have concerns about the nature and location of the facility that is chosen.

The CEOC understands that the two options currently being considered for a consolidated elections facility are: (1) the Earlington Business Center in Renton and (2) the new building that the County is considering building on "Goat Hill." Most but not all of the CEOC members strongly favor the Earlington Business Center location. The reasons for this majority opinion are listed below (without ranking).

1. The physical configuration of the Renton site—two large floors, rather than four or five smaller floors—is easier to manage and monitor and better from a workflow standpoint.
2. The transition to a permanent, consolidated, new facility should happen before the 2008 presidential election. That seems possible with the Renton site, which the Facilities Management Division (FMD) said would take 9 or 10 months to prepare (once the deal is negotiated); it is not possible with the Goat Hill site.

3. An esprit de corps has developed among King County Elections workers since they moved to the Temporary Elections Annex. This seems to be attributable to being together in a facility that is distinctly separate from the rest of county government.
 4. The Renton site would have free parking, or at least parking that is much less expensive than it would be near the Goat Hill site.
 5. The Goat Hill site, which is at the top of a steep hill, is harder to reach from local bus stops. In addition to the general inconvenience, there would be the issue of accessibility for regular and temporary employees and election observers that would not exist at the Renton site.
 6. There are safety issues about the immediate neighborhood in which Goat Hill is located.
 7. The Goat Hill site is a difficult construction site that could have impacts on adjacent facilities.
- Move expeditiously but carefully to vote-by-mail (VBM). The current process of running two elections makes King County very vulnerable to mistakes due to human error. King County runs the second largest mail-ballot operation in the U.S. while staffing over 500 poll sites. The CEOC supports the conditions the Council established in Ordinance 15523 that must be met before VBM can be implemented. The CEOC also feels strongly that VBM should not begin with the presidential election of 2008.

Overall Improvements

We are pleased to report, based on briefings by King County Elections Section staff and state elections staff and on our own direct observation of the 2006 primary and general elections, that the Elections Section has continued to improve all aspects of the conduct of elections relating to staff performance and procedural matters. In particular, the CEOC has learned of the improvements noted below.

- **Improved voter registration records.** Pam Floyd, Assistant Director of Elections, Office of Secretary of State, provided the CEOC a very detailed briefing on the shift in responsibility for voter records from counties to the state. It is clear that the state is in a much stronger position to perform the lead role of maintaining accurate voter records, given the resources and data available to the Secretary of State's Office. While there will always be challenges to achieving 100 percent accuracy in voter records, we are convinced they are significantly more accurate than at any time in the past.
- **Improved security.** By direct observation the CEOC has seen that security procedures in the conduct of King County elections have improved significantly.

The CEOC intends to continue its focus on the issues described above and other issues of concern, both through direct observation of elections as they occur and through briefings that the committee intends to request during the course of this year. At a future meeting, for example, the committee hopes to observe a vendor's demonstration of a ballot marking machine and a high-speed paper ballot tabulating machine.