



King County

**King County
Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee**

**Annual Report
on King County Elections
For the Year 2016**

February 2017

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
Glenn Avery	Washington State Republican Party
Paul Berry	Washington State Democratic Party
Chuck Gerringer	Independent research and policy institute
Bruce Huang	Chinese-speaking community
Sven Kalve	Municipal League of King County
Sheryl Moss	Office of Secretary of State
Frank Radford	Registered voter
Kristina Swanson	Washington State Assoc. of County Auditors
Linh Thai	Vietnamese-speaking community
Monica Tracey	King County Republican Party
Emily Willoughby	King County Democratic Party

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Introduction

Ordinance 15453, which was passed 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, which requires annual reports to the Council. The report 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 if desired.

Overview

During 2016, the King County Department of Elections successfully administered and certified two special elections (February and April), a Presidential primary, a regular primary in August, and the November 8 general election with complete ballot reconciliation. After each election, the Department publishes reports, including the results for each election, on its website, <http://www.kingcounty.gov/elections/>. In addition, the Director of Elections reports on current operations to CEOC members at the committee's regular meetings.

King County Elections projected a 34 percent turnout rate for the Presidential primary election. Thirty-three percent of registered voters returned 406,298 ballots. Since 2016 was a Presidential election year, Elections projected an 80 percent turnout rate for the general election. The actual voter turnout rate for the general election exceeded Elections' projection by two percent (82 percent turnout). Over one million ballots were returned for the general election.

In 2016, Julie Wise, who had previously served as Deputy Director, began her first term as the Director of Elections. The transition of leadership was seamless. Director Wise immediately began implementing new initiatives in Elections and engaged the CEOC early in the process.

Elections continued and maintained the lower number of seasonal staff hires that it has achieved through cross-training and process improvements.

This report describes: (1) the activities of the CEOC, and (2) issues on which the CEOC was a resource to the department or the director.

CEOC Activities

1. **Election observations.** While the CEOC considers observing all aspects of the election process one of its most important responsibilities, committee members felt that with the increased public scrutiny that occurs during presidential elections, they should step up their efforts in this area. CEOC members increased their visits to the Elections office to observe signature verification, envelope opening, ballot scanning and adjudication and made multiple visits to drop-boxes to observe signage, traffic flow, and voter activity.

The CEOC observed each special election as well as the Presidential primary, 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 was pleased that Elections incorporated a number of its suggestions into their procedures and considers observing elections one of its primary duties.

- a. **Logic and accuracy tests.** Logic and accuracy (L&A) tests of accessible voting units and of mail ballot scanning and tabulation equipment are required to be certified by the Secretary of State for primary and general elections under state law. The CEOC observed no issues with these tests.
 - b. **Ballot drop boxes.** In 2016, 33 new ballot drop box locations were added in various areas in King County. Over 50 percent of ballots were returned via a ballot drop box in the general election – a record high. As in prior years, the CEOC observed ballot drop box closings which, by law, must take place promptly at 8:00 p.m. The CEOC continued to note issues around traffic flow and signage as well as lack of clarity around queuing rules for vehicles versus walk-up voters.
 - c. **Other operations.** CEOC observed all aspects of ballot processing including signature verification, envelope opening and ballot adjudication and tabulation.
2. **CEOC role.** In order to fulfill its responsibilities it is necessary for the CEOC to receive appropriate and timely information from Elections on critical business decisions. In 2015, CEOC members expressed to councilmembers the need for Elections to engage the CEOC early on in the decision-making process. In 2016, Elections provided timely information to the CEOC and solicited feedback on two notable business decisions described below.
 - a. **Ballot drop box location criteria.** Elections engaged CEOC members in the development of criteria to select the locations of the 33 new ballot drop boxes deployed in King County. CEOC members also assisted Elections in partnering with the University of Washington to relocate the campus drop box.

- b. **Tabulation system replacement committees.** The CEOC was also engaged in the Request for Proposal process for the tabulation system replacement project. Elections developed a steering committee and a project team, both of which included CEOC members, Chair Ellen Hansen, Paul Berry and Chuck Gerring. Mr. Berry and Mr. Gerring are on the project team. They reviewed and commented in detail on the initial draft RFP, and received regular detailed updates on RFP submissions by competing firms, consideration by team members on short list selection, and scheduling of interview and demonstration sessions for the short listed firms. They observed and commented on the interview and demonstration sessions in January 2017 and will participate in the demonstrations that will occur in February 2017. The CEOC Chair is on the Project Steering Committee and is kept fully informed of project progress and decisions. Elections management and staff were enthusiastically open to CEOC participation; eagerly considering and utilizing comments and suggestions of CEOC participants.

3. Communication and outreach.

- a. **Voter concerns:** CEOC members served as points of contact for voter concerns, either by addressing such concerns directly with voters by providing information about Elections operations and policies, or by alerting Councilmembers when necessary and referring such concerns to Elections for resolution. In preparation for the August Primary election, some CEOC members received phone calls regarding an online issue with Elections' candidate filing form for Precinct Committee Officers. Elections had experienced a technical issue with its elections management system. The issue was resolved in consultation with the King County Information and Technology Department.
- b. **Community engagement:** In 2016, King County Elections, in partnership with The Seattle Foundation, launched its Community-Based Outreach Pilot Program to increase voter engagement outreach to underrepresented King County citizens. The pilot program granted awards to 22 community-based organizations, by a competitive process, at various funding levels, to implement the organization's voter outreach field plan in its community. Bruce Huang, a CEOC member, helped Elections identify the grant awardees for the pilot program. The first group of community-based organization awardees were deployed in July, in time for the primary election. In addition to the launch of the Community-Based Outreach Pilot Program, Elections also added two languages in its production of voting materials – Spanish and Korean.
- c. **Focus groups.** In 2016, Elections conducted a number of focus groups in King County to ascertain how the department could decrease the various barriers to voting. Several of the CEOC members attended the focus groups and were able to hear first-hand the feedback from voters from various backgrounds.

- d. **Ambassador program.** Elections also launched its Ambassador Program in 2016. The department hired four community ambassadors to serve as liaisons and technical resources to the Ethiopian, Filipino, Russian, Ukrainian and Samoan communities. Chuck Gerringer, a CEOC member, also worked with the Ambassador Program's community ambassadors to facilitate voter registrations.

CEOC Served as a Resource

4. **Process concerns and improvements.** CEOC members engaged Elections staff in numerous discussions on ways to address emergent issues or voter concerns, leading to, among other improvements, the creation of a form for collecting observation data and the incorporation of questions into the voter survey about alternative formats for participating in elections.

CEOC members also provided support and assistance to Elections staff in discussions and negotiations with other agencies regarding siting of drop box locations, including attending meetings with representatives of those agencies to determine specific siting.

5. **CEOC as Liaison.** CEOC members serve as liaisons between members of the public, King County Elections and the County Council. Members are frequently approached by friends, neighbors, colleagues, community groups and others with elections questions. 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.

Conclusion

CEOC members are proud of the role they played during 2016 helping to ensure fair, accessible, and accountable elections in King County. Members look forward to working with Elections staff, the Executive, and the Council to continue to improve elections during 2017.