



King County

**King County
Citizens' Elections Oversight Committee**

**Annual Report
on King County Elections
For the Year 2015**

January 2016

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
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
Linh Thai	Vietnamese-speaking community
Monica Tracey	King County Republican Party
Carolyn Weikel*	Washington State Assoc. of County Auditors
Emily Willoughby	King County Democratic Party

**served through June 19, 2015*

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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 2015, the King County Department of Elections successfully administered and certified two special elections (February and April), a primary election, and a general election (including one manual recount) with complete ballot reconciliation. Elections publishes reports, including the results for each election, on its website, <http://www.kingcounty.gov/elections/>. In addition, the Director of Elections presents reports on current operations to CEOC members at the committee's monthly meetings.

King County Elections followed the national trend of low turnout in the primary (25 percent of registered voters returned ballots) and general (40 percent) elections in 2015. Forecast turnouts for these elections were 30 percent and 48 percent respectively. By further comparison, for the 2011 primary and general elections (the previous "off-year" between a Congressional mid-term and Presidential election) the turnout rates were 30 percent and 52 percent.

Elections was recognized by the King County Council in April 2015 for its record of perfect reconciliation and other achievements, such as exemplary outreach to overseas and military voters. Through 2015, the record is 26 elections with perfect reconciliation.

Through cross-training and other process efforts, Elections maintained the lower number of seasonal staff hires that it has recently achieved.

The King County Council followed up the structural reorganization implemented by Elections in 2014 with a Code change establishing the position of deputy director (Ordinance 17794, passed June 2015) and eliminating Code reference to the Superintendent of Elections position. Council confirmed Julie Wise as the first Deputy Director of Elections in July 2015 (Motion 14397).

The CEOC bids farewell to the first elected Director of Elections, Sherril Huff, and continues its commitment to a collaborative working relationship with her successor, Deputy Director Julie Wise, and her staff as well as the Executive and Council, to maintain the record and reputation of the Department.

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.** The CEOC observed each 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.
 - 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. CEOC observed no issues with these tests.
 - b. Ballot drop boxes.** 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, as well as lack of clarity around queuing rules for vehicles versus walk-up voters, and on-site completion of ballots after the ballot box closing time.
 - c. Other operations.** CEOC observed all aspects of ballot processing including signature verification, envelope opening and ballot adjudication and tabulation.
- 2. Trainings and legislative information.** The CEOC requested and received a high-quality comprehensive all-day training facilitated by the Secretary of State's office at King County Elections in April. Ongoing training 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.

Additionally, the CEOC requested and received information from the Secretary of State and Elections about legislative items and actions, including about the state's approach to the presidential preference primary and the role of King County Elections.

- 3. CEOC role.** In order to fulfill its responsibilities it is necessary for CEOC to receive appropriate and timely information from Elections on critical business decisions. Examples of such decisions made in 2015 include the go-no go decision on the elections management system replacement and departmental re-

organization. The CEOC has continued to discuss with Councilmembers the need for Elections to engage the CEOC early on such decisions. Timely engagement in decisions such as the replacement of the ballot tabulation system would enable the CEOC to provide meaningful feedback on these major initiatives.

4. 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. These types of concerns included the voter pamphlet errors affecting Kirkland and the participation of the Department of Elections in a voting party in the general election.

- b. Community engagement:** Linh Thai convened two informational meetings with members of the Vietnamese community. On April 10, he presented to the Vietnamese Student Association broadly on the work of the CEOC and on how to sign up for Vietnamese language materials from Elections through the web. On October 17, he held a general meet and greet event for candidates, attended by Julie Wise both as a candidate and representative of Elections. Attendees included approximately 200 citizens, including representatives from six or seven Vietnamese community organizations. This gathering provided information suggesting the need to better disseminate information about the option to receive a Vietnamese language ballot. Only one attendee seeking ballot translation was aware that Elections provides this service.

CEOC Served as a Resource

- 5. 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.

- 6. 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 2015 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 2016.