

# VOTE-BY-MAIL TRANSITION REPORT

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## INTRODUCTION

Across the country, voters are finding that voting-by-mail saves time, is convenient and extremely easy. To allow King County voters to join the 34 other counties in Washington that conduct all elections entirely by mail, the King County Executive proposed and the Metropolitan King County Council adopted Ordinance 15523<sup>1</sup> on June 19, 2006 authorizing vote by mail elections. This recommendation was endorsed and supported by various stakeholder groups and oversight committees, and is reinforced by the voting patterns of King County voters.

As King County moves to this single, common voting system, voters will be kept well informed regarding voting procedures and instructions. Voters will experience a more efficient system in which they will be able to verify that their ballot was received and track its progress on the way to tabulation. The streamlined system outlined in this report will allow King County Elections (KCE) to focus its efforts on the election system preferred by the majority of voters and deliver an effective system that features transparency and accountability.

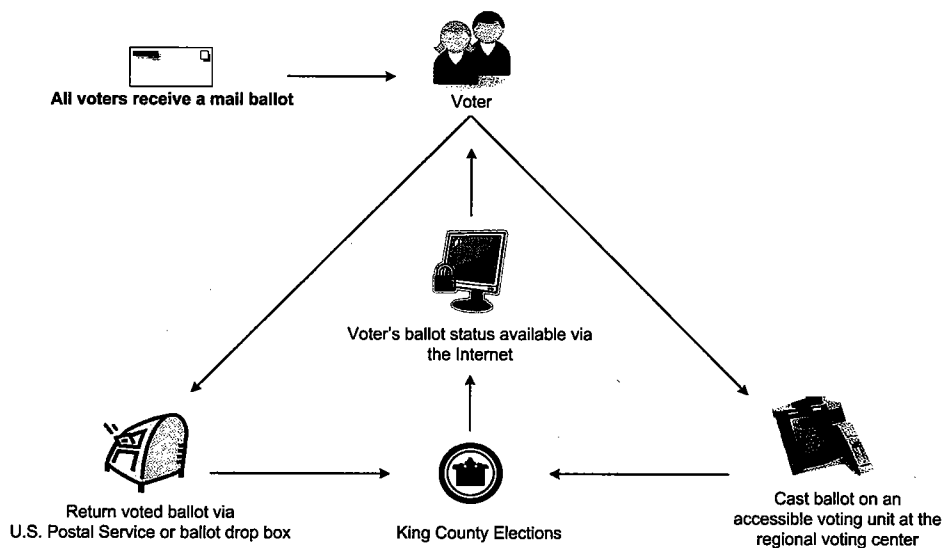
A vote-by-mail (VBM) system will be just that: all registered, King County voters will receive their ballot in the mail prior to the election, and must return their ballot postmarked by Election Day. To the 62 percent of voters in King County already casting their ballot by mail, the process with which they have become familiar and comfortable will continue. Voters new to this process will be educated through a variety of outreach efforts and public information to help make the new process clear and understandable.

The vote-by-mail transition in King County will eliminate traditional polling places. The structure and expectations King County establishes now, in moving to vote-by-mail, will have a long and lasting impact for its citizens and stakeholder groups. In addition to being secure, transparent, and accountable, this system must also be sustainable. The policy decision to conduct all elections by mail has been made. Therefore, policy decisions that follow should reinforce that public policy by prioritizing voting by mail alternatives based on legal requirements, such as eliminating barriers to casting a private ballot, and by resisting the temptation to replicate the polling place model when implementing the regional voting center and ballot drop box concepts.

All of the criteria and options presented in this report will accomplish the critical objective of ensuring County residents that all voters will have accessible voting options that ensures their privacy, continuing to build public trust and confidence along the way.

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<sup>1</sup> Full ordinance text can be found in the appendix, page section 1.



### The vote-by-mail elections process in King County

This report reflects considerable due diligence in reviewing existing options and practices currently in place. The criteria outlined here are based on best practices and lessons learned from those jurisdictions who currently conduct all vote by mail elections. Based on previous lessons learned, it is expected that the transition to VBM will occur during a non-countywide special election early in 2008, in order to fine-tune improvements in anticipation of the primary and General Election in 2008.

Although not included in this report, the ballot tracking and tabulation business cases will be a comprehensive evaluation of current business practices and the technology solutions that meet the County's mandate for secure, transparent, and accountable elections. The technology King County invests in today must withstand years of population growth, high turnout, and wear. Due diligence and careful approach now will ensure the purchase decision can be supported internally for years to come. Mail handling equipment with redundant quality control and multiple audit tools has finally arrived to the market place and King County must be prudent in this purchase and base its decision on impacts the technology will have on the entire voting system. This detailed analysis requires additional time to research vendor options as more information will facilitate a sound decision.

#### Transition Overview

The transition to vote-by-mail (VBM) will be a collaborative and inclusive effort that will involve support and collaboration from the King County Executive and staff, Council members and Council staff, and every staff member of King County Elections. Implementation of the overall vote-by-mail system components represents a new way of doing business for King County Elections and will require support and involvement of stakeholders, media and the general public.

Transition work and planning will be led by the Vote-by-Mail Transition Leadership Team (TLT), which includes managers from the Records, Elections and Licensing Services (REALS) Division and the Elections Section working with Waldron & Co. on transition planning, organizational effectiveness and management and leadership development. The TLT will be supported by the Vote-by-Mail Transition Team, staff solely dedicated to the vote-by-mail transition work. Please refer to the organizational chart in section 2 of the appendix for more detailed information regarding the structure of the TLT and the Transition Team.

## RESPONDING TO MOTION 12299

The purpose of this report is to lay out the plan and process by which King County will transition to conducting all elections entirely by mail. As part of the authorizing legislation, and prior to conducting all elections by mail, Motion 12299 requested the County Executive to:

*“transmit to the council a report that identifies the estimated capital and operating cost of regional voting centers and drop boxes, including staffing costs for temporary workers and sheriff deputies that may be needed at regional voting centers and in the transport of ballots, a map identifying the location of regional voting centers and drop boxes and security measures that will be put in place for regional voting centers and drop boxes. Implementation of vote-by-mail shall not occur until the council has approved the report by motion.”*

This report is responsive to the above motion. The plan for regional voting centers and a separate plan for ballot drop boxes are included in this report. The Regional Voting Center (RVC) Plan outlines the purpose, anticipated services, security, and staffing model in a regional voting center. Additionally, the RVC Plan includes:

1. the criteria to be used in the identification and selection of RVCs,
2. the timeline anticipated in order to facilitate the implementation of RVCs for the transition to vote-by-mail.

The County Council's expectation that this report be reviewed and approved by motion provides KCE the opportunity to receive policy direction on the criteria and process outlined for identification and selection of RVCs and ballot drop locations.

In addition to the above two plans, the County's 2007 Adopted Budget includes a proviso requiring the Executive to submit a detailed plan for the transition to vote-by-mail. The above noted proviso requires the following:

*“...The detailed plan for the transition to vote-by-mail shall include itemized tasks required for implementing vote-by-mail, showing task duration, dependencies between tasks, resource requirements and availability, timing of tasks, milestone dates and other relevant information. The tasks shall include a comparative analysis of available options for election equipment and software, including equipment and software to be purchased with the Help America Vote Act grant funding that the county has been awarded, as part of preparing the business case for purchase of that equipment and software, taking into consideration relative security, costs, reliability, functionality and usability, among other relevant factors.”*

This report includes a narrative description and various other project planning documents that are responsive to the proviso and that will be used to manage the implementation of vote-by-mail for the duration of the transition process.

In preparing this report, Elections' staff prioritized the regional voting center ballot drop box plan in order to meet the required February 15 report deadline and to create a timeline by which decisions for tabulation equipment and ballot tracking and accountability equipment can be made.

# VBM TRANSITION PLAN

This plan presents an overall work program and schedule for making the transition to a vote-by-mail elections system. The following eight major elements must be addressed in the coming 12 – 14 months, before King County transitions entirely to VBM to ensure a successful transition:

1. Placement of ballot drop locations
2. Establishment of regional voting centers
3. Communications
4. Ballot tracking and accountability
5. Precinct alterations
6. Upgraded ballot tabulation system
7. Automatic signature verification
8. Election Distribution Center supply management

## ASSUMPTIONS AND RISKS

As with any project, there are several baseline assumptions and known risks that have been documented for the purpose of moving the planning process forward. The following list of assumptions and risks have formed the foundation by which all future work will be built. They include:

### Security

The security of King County's election system is a paramount priority. Strong security engenders public trust and confidence in the administration of elections in King County and in our democracy. Effective security does not rely on a single process, feature, or policy. Effective security requires a number of interrelated processes, systems, and policies that complement and build on each other. King County's elections security includes: an open and transparent elections environment, physical and personnel security, legal and procedural security, and technical and systems security. The following security assumptions have been made:

### Assumptions

1. The County Council will work collaboratively with KCE and the Office of the Secretary of State to ensure the integrity and security of the elections system and update and revise the existing security plan.
2. Security will be a primary element in the consideration and evaluation of various vendor solutions in the business cases developed for upgrading ballot tabulation and ballot tracking and accountability.
3. The King County Election Security Plan<sup>2</sup> will be updated during the transition to VBM and is included as an element in each of the major tasks necessary to transition to VBM.
4. KCE will incorporate working with an outside independent security expert to assist with the design of security elements in a consolidated elections facility.

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<sup>2</sup> The King County Elections Security Plan is located in section 3 in the appendix.

## **Stakeholder Involvement and Communication**

For increased confidence in elections administration in the county, the transition process must be transparent and accountable, and communication must be effective. Poor communication could risk the implementation timeline, public acceptance, voter participation and possibly erode public trust and confidence in the administration of elections.

Extensive outreach, education and public information will need to occur to inform voters of the transition to vote by mail at least four months prior to the first VBM election. Both internal and external communications plans are being created and initial meetings have taken place with some key stakeholders.<sup>3</sup> Implementation requires a mailing to all voters 90 days prior to the first election conducted entirely by mail.

With the County Executive and County Council's support improvement in operations as well as public confidence will continue to improve. The following steps are imperative:

1. KCE will maintain open lines of communication in seeking stakeholder input, and implement an optimized system.
2. KCE will provide stakeholder updates and will have public information and outreach strategies with regard to voter groups.
3. Internal staff communication will also be critical to ensure seamless transitions and that work has already begun.
4. KCE will continue to demonstrate the improvements through results in successful elections, even before the start of countywide, all-mail balloting to continue to build public trust and confidence now and in the future.
5. A successful transition to vote-by-mail will be ensured through on-going progress by KCE with the help of internal communications, sound oversight, clear policy direction and key legislative changes.

## **Oversight**

### ***Assumptions***

1. KCE will submit vote-by-mail transition plans and business cases as required to the King County Executive and King County Council in a timely manner. Thorough submissions by King County Elections in conjunction with timely review and approvals are essential to maintaining the transition schedule.
2. Technology projects will be managed within the Information Technology Governance structure. It is imperative funding to support the VBM transition work and schedule be released on a timely basis to adhere to the approved time frame.
3. KCE will continue to look to the recommendations of the Citizens' Election Oversight Committee (CEOC) and previous recommendations made by other oversight groups as the transition to all-mail voting continues.

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<sup>3</sup> King County Election staff have identified critical stakeholders whose input in the transition to vote by mail will be critical. A list of those key stakeholders is located in the appendix, section 4.



## **Legislative Processes**

### ***Assumptions***

1. The King County Council will approve the proposed ordinance increasing the current number of registered voters allowed per precinct in King County Code to match the State's legal limit. Under a VBM system, permanent absentee voters can no longer be subtracted from precinct totals. If this legislative change is not made, 1,200 new precincts and additional ballot versions could be required, adding greater complexity to administering elections, and increased processing time and cost. Increasing the number of voters per precinct to the State's limit will allow KCE to keep approximately the same number of precincts.
2. The King County Council will not place the elected auditor issue on the ballot earlier than 2009, for possible implementation in a subsequent year. An earlier time frame will have a negative impact on King County's ability to recruit, hire and retain the best candidates for a new REALS Director to lead the VBM transition.
3. In 2007, the Secretary of State will certify use of the accessible voting unit (AVU) for provisional voting, and adopt new requirements for automated signature recognition equipment and software.
4. To enable implementation of VBM, the selected tabulation equipment will be state and federally certified, or will receive certification before December 2007.
5. It is assumed that there will be no unforeseen or unanticipated King County, Washington State, and/or federal legislative changes that will impede the transition to VBM by King County Elections.
6. The schedule for transition to VBM in 2008 incorporates the assumption that the 2007-2008 elections calendar will not be altered unexpectedly. This includes the presidential preference primary in February or March 2008.

### **Facilities**

To ensure the success of a countywide vote-by-mail system, voters will need to feel that the new system will be convenient and easy to use as KCE continues to build confidence and credibility in a system aimed at making the public's vote count. To meet this need, initial policy direction indicated that regional voting centers and ballot drop boxes will be available for VBM elections. This report contains various criteria that should be reviewed and used as a guide for determining where these facilities are located.

While not required to conduct VBM elections, a single consolidated facility for KCE remains a high priority. Consolidation will achieve outcomes articulated by the CEOC, including higher security, better on-site management, greater staff productivity, increased staff morale, and ultimately greatly elevated public confidence. This is a recommendation of both the CEOC and the King County Executive and has been endorsed by the King County Council.

### **Regional Voting Centers (RVCs)**

Regional voting centers will provide accessible options for early voting and will have mail ballot collection boxes that will allow voters to return their ballot at key sites without having to pay postage. Established primarily to allow voters with disabilities the ability to cast a private and independent ballot, RVCs will provide accessible voting options for early voting in the 20-day period before Election Day.

This report does not identify or select specific sites or provide the number of sites to establish. Tasks completed for this component include: research on other jurisdictions, confirming location criteria, space and staffing needs. Implementation will require creation of a disability advisory committee pursuant to state law, negotiations for securing locations, equipment procurement, policy and procedure documentation, staff training and voter education.

### **Ballot Drop Locations**

Ballot drop locations will provide voters the opportunity to return their ballot to King County Elections without using postage. It is recommended that several secure sites be identified throughout the county based on specific criteria. Tasks completed for this component include: jurisdictional research regarding the use and placement of mail ballot drop locations, receptacle and location criteria. Implementation will require equipment procurement, negotiations for securing locations, voter education, procedure documentation, and staff training.

### **Election Systems Equipment and Software**

This plan describes the elements and steps for putting new equipment and software necessary to hold VBM elections into place. Each of these components is essential to a successful VBM transition; however, the major dependency in the transition to vote-by-mail currently is the solution for upgrading the ballot tabulation system.

The ballot tabulation system must be looked at as an entire system – ballot building, central count tabulation, and accessible voting. Combined with the election management and voter registration system, the ballot tabulation system is the back bone for administering elections in King County. While research, investigation and initial planning on regional voting centers and ballot tracking and accountability can be accomplished, many specifics can not be determined until a solution for ballot tabulation technology is determined. Additional dependencies and detailed sub tasks can be found in the Detailed Transition Schedule in section 5 of the appendix.

### **Ballot Tracking and Accountability**

Automated ballot tracking and accountability will allow voters to track their ballot as it moves through the elections process enhancing voters' ability to verify participation and increase their confidence level in the process. Voters will be able to follow their ballot online and have updates on its progress at various points in the system. Such an automated system will enhance the efficiency of election operations by eliminating manual operations. Tasks required for this

component include research and selection of the ballot tracking system through the development of a business case, procurement, staff training, procedure documentation of the selected system and voter education.

### **Upgraded Ballot Tabulation System**

The ballot tabulation equipment that King County currently employs is not suitable for an entirely vote-by-mail elections system. To handle the capacity of nearly a million ballots, comprehensive research and selection of an upgraded, higher speed and higher volume tabulation system must occur. This upgraded system will provide security, efficiency and accurate tabulation of ballots. After development of a business case and selection of an upgraded system, tasks required for implementation include equipment procurement, equipment acceptance testing, policy and procedure documentation of the selected system, and staff training,.

### **Automatic Signature Verification**

Signature verification of absentee ballots is currently performed manually by trained staff as ballots are returned to King County Elections. Automating this process will have considerable impact on ballot processing time. An automatic signature verification system will serve as a component of the ballot tracking and accountability system, and new state-wide administrative rules must be written and procedures documented prior to implementation. This component will likely be a phased in approach and will include collaboration with the Office of the Secretary of State.

### **Election Distribution Center Supply Management**

A transition to a vote-by-mail system will involve new equipment and voting facilities. Tasks required for supply management in this new voting environment include: development of an equipment management plan to determine what will be stored, prepared, and maintained at the Election Distribution Center; and a plan for decommissioning existing equipment that will be unnecessary for vote-by-mail.

### ***Assumptions***

1. The new ballot tracking and accountability equipment and software will integrate with KCE's other existing systems or costs will be high and implementation will be significantly delayed;
2. The selected equipment and software solutions will be available and ready to be integrated within the existing timeline for implementation in 2008 to be possible; and
3. As identified in the January 26, 2007 KCE report to the King County Council, improvements will continue to be made in the Voter Registration System to document process changes, eliminate production backlogs and update registration records.

### **Phased-in Implementation**

Phased-in implementation of VBM will allow the careful work load planning, training, troubleshooting and ability to make adjustments that can ensure successful implementation. Based on research and lessons learned from other vote-by-mail jurisdictions, it is assumed that the first implementation of VBM in King County will be held in a non-countywide special election with a limited number of voters, such as a school district levy vote, to ensure KCEs procedures work well, ensuring time to fine tune and improve as needed prior to larger elections.

### **Management Leadership and Staffing**

Full management staffing and continued organizational development internal to the KCEs office are necessary for staff to be ready and able to conduct a successful transition to VBM.

### **Assumptions**

1. As required by the King County Council, appointment of the REALS Director and Superintendent of Elections will occur prior to complete implementation.
2. The transition to VBM will redefine election processes and change staff roles and responsibilities, likely resulting in changes to the organizational structure. KCE will work collaboratively with staff in seeking their feedback and support regarding staffing impacts and adjustments.
3. Staff training on new and upgraded systems will be critical to the successful transition to VBM. KCE managers and staff are currently managing heavy work loads of the day-to-day operating demands of running up to six elections a year. Careful planning, monitoring and measuring of results during the transition will be important to ensure that a high level of performance is maintained.

### **Transition Schedule**

The change to an entirely vote-by-mail elections system will not occur overnight, King County Elections will pilot and phase-in system components, to allow for the best possible success.

This transition schedule targets the April 2008 special election as the first vote-by-mail election if all of the previous assumptions hold true. Under this timing, two vote-by-mail elections may be conducted in advance of the 2008 primary and General Election.

King County Elections is operating under the assumption that the presidential preference primary will be held in February or March 2008. A presidential preference primary or any large, countywide election would serve as a poor choice for the first election conducted entirely by mail. The voter turnout and focus of this countywide election would be difficult to ascertain because of the uncertainties and changing nature of the presidential nominating system. If the presidential preference primary is canceled, as was in the case in 2004, the schedule may be altered and the first election conducted entirely by mail could be in the February or March 2008 special elections.

The following reports and business cases will be submitted to the King County Council for their approval as stated below.

**March 30, 2007**

Business case recommendations for ballot tabulation solution

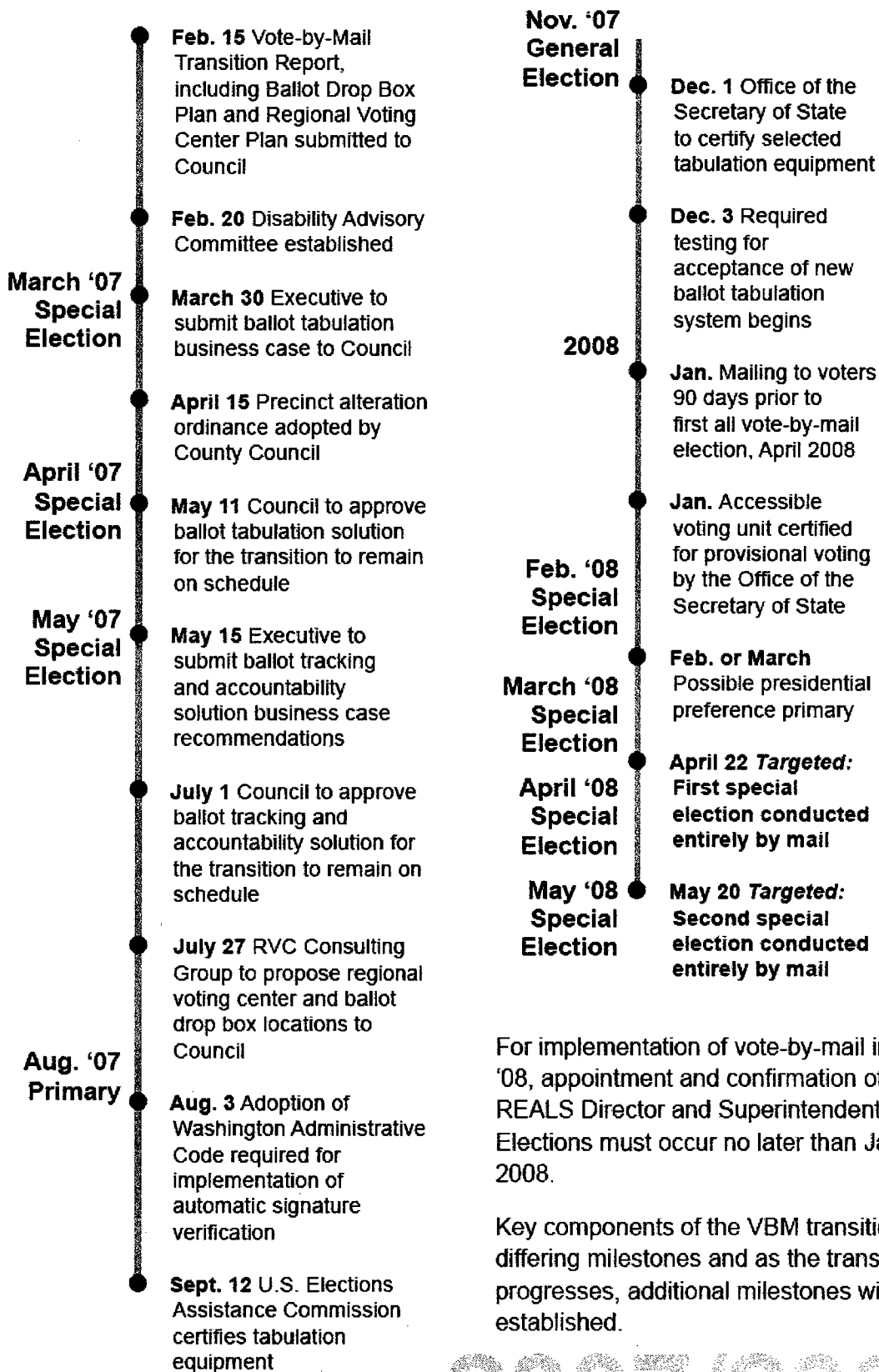
**May 15, 2007**

Business case recommendations for ballot tracking and accountability solution

**July 27, 2007**

Proposed recommendations for regional voting center and ballot drop locations

For the detailed transition schedule developed to guide work efforts, see section 5 in the appendix.



For implementation of vote-by-mail in April '08, appointment and confirmation of the REALS Director and Superintendent of Elections must occur no later than Jan. 1, 2008.

Key components of the VBM transition have differing milestones and as the transition progresses, additional milestones will be established.

## Vote-by-Mail Transition Milestones

# BALLOT DROP BOX PLAN

Though the majority of voters in King County already prefer to cast their ballot by mail, King County intends to offer voters the option to deliver their voted ballots by providing ballot drop boxes throughout the county. Specific locations will be selected using the criteria outlined below, by detailed demographic analysis and research involving voter turn-out statistics and presented to the Council by July 27, 2007. A proposed motion adopting the selection criteria is provided with this plan. These drop-off locations and receptacles will provide a secure, convenient option for individuals who wish to hand deliver their voted ballot.

## LOCATION CRITERIA

Jurisdictions in Washington and Oregon are using two types of locations for ballot drop boxes: private businesses and government facilities.

Jurisdictions using private businesses as drop locations have experienced a variety of difficulties. As a result, this plan focuses on voter density,<sup>4</sup> geographic examination, and an investigation of municipalities and public facilities.<sup>5</sup> Possible drop locations include city halls, King County Community Service Centers<sup>6</sup> and, in Seattle, Neighborhood Service Centers. Other possible locations might include other government facilities like libraries or fire stations and other accessible public buildings.

City halls are often cornerstones of local communities and usually very accessible by mass transit. Citizens are accustomed to visiting their local city hall for a number of government services. Placing a ballot drop box at a city hall or at one of King County's Community Service Centers would be logical to voters and easy to communicate to the public.

In Seattle, the geographic size, population density and travel habits of voters may result in a different solution. Using Neighborhood Service Centers would make for easy, local access.

Neighborhood Service Centers are located in most major districts within Seattle, including Ballard, Capitol Hill, Downtown, Lake City, Lake Union/Fremont, University, and Queen Anne/Magnolia. These facilities currently provide local government-oriented services, and ballot drop boxes there would be easy to communicate to the public.

The proposed site identification and selection criteria for ballot drop boxes are as follows:

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<sup>4</sup> Voter density in King County is illustrated on the King County Voter Density map in section 6 of the appendix.

<sup>5</sup> Locations are illustrated on the City Hall and King County Community Service Center Locations map in section 6 of the appendix

<sup>6</sup> Locations are illustrated on the Seattle Neighborhood Service Center Locations map in section 6 of the appendix.

1. Ability to place the drop box inside a facility to ensure security, this is paramount as drop boxes placed outside are viewed as a security risk.
  - a. Ability for the public to gain easy access inside the facility during reasonable hours in the days leading up to the election consistent with other selected drop locations and from 7am to 8 pm on election days
  - b. Facility accessibility meeting current federal and state standards including:
    - i. Parking
    - ii. Building entrance
    - iii. Passenger drop-off areas
    - iv. Sidewalks and walkways
    - v. Halls and corridors
    - vi. Doors
    - vii. Lighting
    - viii. Separate ingress and egress doors
  - b. The facility must be available for each August primary and the General Election in November in addition to possible special elections in February, March, April and May.
2. Voter population density
3. Geographic dispersion
4. Traffic flows and public access to the location via public and private transit
5. The cost of servicing or staffing the location based on arrangements that can be made with the facility owner.

### **SERVICES PROVIDED**

Research in VBM counties in Washington and Oregon suggests voters enjoy the option of delivering their voted ballots this way. King County Elections recommends beginning with a modest number of drop locations, and re-evaluating the number and locations frequently in terms of voter population density, rate of use, and relative costs.

### **HOURS OF OPERATION**

State law requires that drop boxes be available from 7 am to 8 pm on Election Day.

The hours of operation for the days leading up to Election Day will be determined by arrangements that can be made with the facility owner. The goal in setting the hours for the drop locations will be consistency among the various locations so that messaging to the community is not confusing.

### **SECURITY**

Security of voted ballots is King County Election's most fundamental goal and accountability and transparency when retrieving and transporting ballots from the drop boxes is essential.

#### **Ballot Security**

Ballot security will be ensured through placement of the drop boxes inside facilities through either fixed permanent boxes or a non permanent box that is



monitored by staff. Pursuant to state law and code staffing would be bipartisan teams of two individuals.

For locations that have a fixed permanent drop box located inside a facility, teams of two employees would be assigned to retrieve ballots on a daily basis, in three teams of two.

All ballots will be transported in uniquely numbered sealed containers following protocols established in the King County Elections Security Plan. As ballots are returned on a daily basis from staffed locations or picked up from permanent fixed boxes, date and time notations will be made through scanning a barcode either on the returned sealed ballot container or fixed drop box. This will provide for easy accounting and record keeping.

### **Location Security**

Indirect security will be gained by locating drop boxes in high traffic areas. Sites with existing video surveillance equipment will be prioritized. Augmenting existing sites by adding surveillance equipment will be considered on a case by case basis. Many government facilities are secure locations, housing surveillance cameras, police departments or other security personnel.

### **Security by King County Sheriff's Deputies**

Ballots are currently issued, managed and tabulated at 509 polling locations throughout King County and in much of the nation without the presence of a police force. While KCE will continue to utilize deputies to provide site security at our mail ballot processing facility, this plan does not include using deputies to staff ballot drop locations or retrieve ballots from fixed drop boxes. It does not appear to be necessary nor would it be cost effective to employ King County Sheriff's Deputies, at overtime rates, for drop box security.

## **STAFFING**

Staffing needs and costs will be determined by the number of drop locations established. Further, these needs and costs will be dependent on arrangements that can be made with facility owners, the placement of a fixed drop box would not require staffing and locations where a fixed drop box could not be placed would require staffing.

Staff hired to perform ballot retrieval in teams of two will need to demonstrate appropriate knowledge, skill and abilities prior to deployment. These include, but are not limited to: the ability to operate a county vehicle and safely drive to a ballot drop-off location, ability to empty contents of the ballot drop box, ability to use a barcode scanner for tracking purposes, and ensure the safe and secure delivery of all ballots taken from all fixed ballot drop boxes to the King County mail ballot processing facility. These positions would be classified as Administrative Specialist I paid at an hourly rate of \$15.23 (2007 rate). The number of teams needed would be dependent on the number of locations established with permanent fixed drop boxes.

Staff hired to monitor drop boxes and return ballots in sealed containers at the end of each day would be similar to those currently used in polling locations. KCE would work with county political party organizations to identify individuals for these positions. They would be paid an hourly rate of \$7.93 (2007 rate).

# REGIONAL VOTING CENTER PLAN

A regional voting center is a non-precinct based voting location specifically designed for voters with disabilities. Any eligible voter may cast a ballot at the RVC, regardless of the precinct in which they reside. Voters will be able to cast a regular or provisional ballot on the accessible voting unit (AVU). In addition, the RVCs will serve as a mail ballot collection site which will allow voters to securely deposit their voted ballot. RVCs will be located throughout the county and open for the 20-day period leading up to and including Election Day.

## ***Focus on Accessibility***

King County has pledged to bring maximum accessibility to the voting process and King County voters. To ensure this pledge is met and well-received within the disability community, King County will re-establish the Disability Advisory Committee to assist in the establishment of each RVC. Group meetings will include discussions on outreach efforts, transportation and location planning, and accessibility assessments.

## **LOCATION CRITERIA**

Regional voting center locations will be selected based on a certain set of evaluation criteria. To assist in evaluating the needs of voters with disabilities, King County Elections is planning to collaborate with an academic research team from Rice University. In addition, King County Elections will re-establish a Disability Advisory Committee, as required by State law, to make recommendations and provide assistance in the location and selection process. Additional geographic and jurisdictional analysis will also be used. King County Elections will be prepared to submit a proposed list of RVCs by July 27, 2007, subject to Council policy guidance on the selection criteria and proposed plan. A proposed motion adopting the selection criteria is provided with this plan. RVC locations must meet the following criteria:

1. Availability of a minimum 2,000 square feet solely for Elections' use, depending on the geographic location of the facility;<sup>7</sup>
2. Geographic dispersion
3. Voter population density
4. Availability for lease for approximately 25 consecutive days, at least six times per year prior to elections conducted in February, March, April, May, August, and November
5. Government owned/controlled space preferred
6. Must be in an environment that is conducive to voting and that is relatively distraction free.
7. Facility accessibility meeting current federal and state standards including:
  - a. Parking
  - b. Building entrance
  - c. Passenger drop-off areas
  - d. Sidewalks and walkways

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<sup>7</sup> Please refer to section 7 for the layout with minimum 2,000 SF and 10 accessible voting units.

- e. Halls and corridors
  - f. Doors
  - g. Voting area
  - h. Accessible restroom facilities
  - i. Lighting
  - j. Separate ingress and egress doors
8. Ability to secure sensitive equipment and ballots with methods consistent with the King County Elections Security Plan. This includes securing accessible voting units in a room or cage with a uniquely numbered seal on a nightly basis. Additional security options may include:
    - a. Unique keyed door knob lock cores
    - b. Video monitoring
  9. Close proximity to bus lines with regular and accessible service
  10. I-Net, KC-WAN, or Broadband connection to manage voter activity/information in real time
  11. Phone lines available in the immediate voting area
  12. Clearly marked streets from major arterials to facility

Once provided policy direction, King County Elections will work collaboratively with a Regional Voting Center consulting group to use the above mentioned criteria to locate and recommend viable locations for both the RVCs and ballot drop-off locations. The RVC consulting group will consist of two King County Elections' staff members, two Council staff members, two members of the Citizens' Election Oversight Committee, one member from the Disability Advisory Committee, and one member of the King County Elections' Voting Rights Act Section 203 Community Coalition. This consulting group and King County Elections will provide the Council with RVC and ballot drop-off location recommendations by July 27, 2007.

### **SERVICES PROVIDED**

Unlike a traditional polling place, the RVC is designed specifically for use by voters with disabilities. Voters choosing to cast their ballot at an RVC will do so using the accessible voting unit. Voted mail ballot drop boxes, voter registration/change of address forms and educational materials and literature will be available for voters.

The configuration of the vote center location can make a dramatic difference in the level of success and overall voter traffic flow. Recent research conducted on vote centers concluded that the following elements must be considered when setting up RVC facilities:

- Competent staffing
- Physical access to technology
- Spacing locations of voting machines within the vote center
- Floor space
- Site accessibility
- Parking

### **Casting a Regular Ballot**

Election workers at an RVC will have a real-time connection with the voter registration database via a computer through a broadband data communication line. Voters will check-in with RVC staff, show proper identification and sign their name using a stylus and digital tablet. If the voter is eligible to vote in that election, a voter access card will be issued allowing the voter to cast a regular electronic ballot. The federally required AVU is equipped with audio and visual technology that allows voters with limited vision to vote a private and independent ballot.

Once issued a voter access card, a real-time notation will be made in the voter's registration file indicating a ballot was issued at an RVC. This notation will prevent that person from future voting in that election, either at another RVC or by mail ballot. If a mail ballot has been received from a voter, a notation will be on the voter's record. This real-time connection and check-in system will ensure that a voter is only allowed to cast one ballot per election. If a voter does not meet eligibility requirements, either by failing identification or voter record indications, the voter will only have the option of voting a provisional ballot.

### **Casting a Provisional Ballot**

While certified at the Federal level, the AVU provisional ballot module is not currently certified in Washington State and is not yet in use in King County. King County Elections' staff and the Office of the Secretary of State are confident that the provisional ballot module will be certified for use at the RVC well in advance of the countywide implementation of VBM.

1. Utilizing the provisional ballot module on the AVU will streamline security and increase cost effectiveness in RVC operations. An RVC with the AVU provisional ballot option precludes the need to supply large-format paper ballots with every possible race offered while still providing the voter the most options on a ballot until eligibility can be determined. Offering print-on-demand paper provisional ballots requires security for blank ballot stock and database, as well as ongoing printing and maintenance costs and upfront capital costs for additional hardware.
2. Electronic provisional ballots are coded within the AVU to remain uncounted until the voter's eligibility has been determined by King County Elections prior to certification. While giving the voter the opportunity to vote for every race they believe they are entitled, only votes cast in races for which the voter is eligible will be counted.

### **Mail Ballot Collection Box**

A collection box for voted mail ballots will be located at each RVC site, open during the RVC's business hours. These ballots will be collected by election officials on a daily basis in accordance with specific security, chain of custody and operational procedures.

