



Planning Elections and Engagement Panel

Monday, July 20, 2020

MINUTES

Attendees:

APAPA TVC - Marsha Golangco
CCC City Clerks - Margaret Wimberly
CCC Communications & Media - Susan Shiu
CCTV - Chris Verdugo
Concilio Latino - Consuelo Lara
Contra Costa Democrats - Renee Zeimer
Democrats of Rossmoor - Carolyn Peters
Democrats of Rossmoor - Carol Weed
East County NAACP - Victoria Adams
West County NAACP - Willie Robinson
First 5 Contra Costa - Fran Biderman
General Public - Nancy Kaplan
General Public - Nancy Pratt
Libertarian Party - Kurt Shultz

LoWV - Janet Hoy
LoWV - Lietta Wood
LoWV Diablo Valley - Gayle Saxton
LoWV Diablo Valley - Martha Goralka
LoWV Diablo Valley - Shawn Gilbert
LoWV DV - Martha Goralka
LoWV DV - Shawn Gilbert
LoWV West CCC - Madeline Kronenberg
LWV Diablo Valley Suzan Requa
RYSE Youth Center - Jamileh Ebrahimi
San Francisco Foundation - Myra Chow
Thirty-Second District PTA - Velma Wilson
Voter's Edge - Marian Shostrom

Staff:

Clerk-Recorder and Registrar - Debi Cooper
Assistant Registrar - Scott Konopasek
Elections Services Manager - Sophie Lehman
Elections Services Manager - Sara Brady
Elections Outreach Coordinator - Eren Mendez

Elections Processing Supervisor - Chuck Waters
Elections Processing Supervisor - Rosa Mena
Elections Processing Supervisor - Jessica Datangel
Civic Engagement Assistant - Karen Tedford
Executive Secretary - Melissa Hickok

1. Welcome

Debi Cooper, County Clerk-Recorder and Registrar, opened the meeting. She welcomed the group and acknowledged that the new format of the meeting was not ideal. The Division prefers a more interactive process and is interested in feedback about how the meeting goes, as well as comments or ideas for improvement. We plan to continue to fine-tune the new remote meeting format.

Debi emphasized that the Elections Division needs our community groups as partners to help us with messaging to their members and constituents. We appreciate the support the groups provide to the election process and the community. She thanked our partners and then turned the meeting over to Scott.

2. Meeting Rules

Because of the new Zoom format, we have everyone muted except the speaker, with questions logged into the chat function. Instead of the question and answer discussion at the beginning of the meeting, the answer session will happen once staff reports are completed.

3. Office COVID Responses to Date

The March 3rd Election happened when the pandemic first started. Many poll workers were concerned but still showed up; it was a heroic effort. The Elections' permanent staff, temporary employees, and stipend volunteers worked to finish the canvassing and audits while dealing with social distancing. The Elections Division still completed the work by March 20th (a full week before the deadline).

The Division held an all-mail election in May, so November will be the 3rd election during the pandemic.

Staff are now working both remotely and in the office as COVID health orders change and evolve.

4. November Plans

Governor Newsom has issued two Executive Orders stating that all registered voters in California will get a ballot mailed to them, and that in-person voting shall be available.

Sara Brady, Elections Services Manager, and Sophie Lehman, Elections Operations Manager, reassured the group that our workforce is professional and that in spite of the virus, the team will be able to finish the necessary work. From March until very recently, the lobby was closed to the public but open by appointment. In April, we began working on new sub-district boundaries, outreach has continued, and candidate filing is currently set up in the Board Chambers of the County Administration Building to ensure public distancing. As we look ahead to the in-person voting that usually takes place here at the office, we recognize that our lobby will not allow enough space for onsite voting. We have secured a location just across the street in the former Moose Lodge. Staff members continue to do their work, though performing those jobs differently than in previous elections.

Contra Costa has 665,000 registered voters; 510,000 of those are Vote-by-Mail voters. While 76% of voters are VBM, up to 150,000 voters are familiar with voting at a polling place. The in-person locations at the March Primary will also be polling places in November. Most Poll Workers have indicated that they are willing to work again, although we are always looking to expand our numbers. The application is online at <https://www.cocoteam.us/PollWorkerReview.aspx>. Preparations for 2020 included the purchase of new mail sorting equipment. In November, new electronic Poll Books at polling places will allow poll workers to know, in real time, if a voter has already cast a ballot. This will greatly reduce the number of Provisional Ballots processed during the canvass. Poll workers will still be trained and will have online, remote learning opportunities before the election.

From a voter's standpoint, November will look like past elections. Polling places will be open from 7 am to 8 pm, as usual. We are working with County Health officials to ensure everyone's safety. The Division purchased an additional 24 outdoor drop boxes to place across the county, so voters can drop their ballot in a secure outdoor location with no contact. People can sign up for free notifications about their official ballot via text, email, or voice message by visiting www.WheresMyBallot.sos.ca.gov. For voters who don't want to sign up for a service, they can continue to check if their ballot has been issued or counted by visiting www.cocovote.us and clicking on "My Voting Information". For the first time, each vote-by-mail ballot packet will include an "I voted" sticker to help reduce the number of people dropping their ballot off at a polling place.

Regional Early Voting sites will be open for three days in advance of Election Day, Friday and Saturday, October 30th and 31st and Monday November 2nd, plus on Election Day Tuesday, November 3rd. When selecting locations, we are paying special attention to areas where more people have historically voted in person. At least ten of these locations will be "outdoor" pop up locations in response to current guidance that outdoor activities are less risky than indoor. Registration and in-person voting options will be available at every Regional Early Voting site.

5. Messaging

This is the message that we are counting on you, our outreach partners, to deliver to your groups:

We will have nearly 150 polling places with 1000 workers, but in-person voting is not recommended during a pandemic. Voting early and voting at home is the most cautious and securest way to keep everyone safe. Outdoor, non-contact drop boxes will be available across the county for returning ballots if voters do not want to drop them in the mail.

Processing mail ballots during an election is not secret. We invite everyone to be an observer. Voting equipment goes through public logic and accuracy tests before each election. The dates of those tests are published in press releases and on social media sites several days in advance of the testing.

6. Questions and Answers

How do voters re-register if forced to move before the election?

You can update your registration online at <https://registertovote.ca.gov>, call 925-335-7800 or send an email to voter.services@vote.cccounty.us.

Where will the in-person voting sites for the low VBM areas be?

Some of the areas are West County, Pittsburg, Antioch, downtown Concord, and parts of San Ramon. The location selection will be finalized by mid-August, before the Voter Information Guide goes to print. We are looking at retail and companies' empty parking lots, hiring security guards, and using big enclosed tents. We listen to the Governor every day and outside sites are good! If it is poor weather, the voter can return the next day; there will be generators for power.

When will we get our ballot?

Ballots are mailed out on October 5th. If a voter does not receive their ballot by October 19th, please call the office or email ballot@vote.cccounty.us for a replacement.

How do all the envelopes get opened?

We have extraction events with staff, friends and family volunteers; November's may be held in a large gym near the office.

What are you doing about recruiting younger poll workers?

We have an existing high school poll worker program and relationships with teachers. We also have a program that allows county employees to work at the polls.

Why not use county parks for in-person voting?

The parks are not all accessible and usually have uneven grounds.

Are ballots forwarded out of state?

No. Ballots are not forwarded. Voters may request to have their ballot sent to any mailing address they provide.

Is there staffing for increased election calls?

Yes

What should someone do if they need a replacement ballot?

Email ballot@vote.cccounty.us or call the office and we will reissue one to the address provided.

If you mismark a ballot, how can a voter get a new one?

Make a note of the wrong vote and clearly mark the correct vote on the ballot. We will be able to determine voter's intent and count their choice.

What happens if a signature does not match?

We notify the voter if the signature is missing or does not match the signature on file and the voter has an opportunity to cure their signature. In March 2020, 2,000 ballots were unsigned or had signatures that did not match (less than 1% of all VBM ballots cast, less than 0.01% of total ballots cast). We were able to cure all but 1,030 of those (less than 0.5% of all VBM ballots cast, about 0.003% of total ballots cast).

Will there be a polling place in Alamo?

A polling place is planned at the LDS Church on Stone Valley Road, but if you have any suggestions, call us or send an email to outreach@vote.cccounty.us.

Will you have split shifts for the poll workers?

No, split shifts sacrifice security and continuity.

Will there be texting options?

We are not pushing for them this election cycle as everyone will get a ballot by mail.

Will there be videos on the website?

There will be information about VBM.

Do you need an appointment to observe?

No, just show up! You can call ahead to see what functions will be occurring and when.

What are you doing to reach young Black voters?

Our outreach efforts are geared to all voters but we can help and support targeted efforts. How can we help groups like you outreach to young Black voters? Let us know and we will support you.

7. The next meeting will be September 14, 2020.