



COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO

AGENDA ITEM

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

GREG COX
First District

DIANNE JACOB
Second District

KRISTIN GASPAR
Third District

NATHAN FLETCHER
Fourth District

JIM DESMOND
Fifth District

DATE: October 29, 2019

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TO: Board of Supervisors

SUBJECT

RECEIVE THE VOTE CENTER MODEL FEASIBILITY STUDY, FUND FOUR SATELLITE LOCATIONS AND CONSIDER NEXT STEPS RELATED TO THE VOTE CENTER MODEL (DISTRICTS: ALL)

OVERVIEW

On July 9, 2019 (5) the Board of Supervisors directed the Chief Administrative Officer to conduct a vote center model feasibility study and report back to the Board within 120 days. This study would include:

- studying the feasibility of the pilot vote center locations and the ultimate implementation plan,
- analyzing security, staffing, siting of vote center locations, and voter fraud prevention,
- comparing costs of the current model, an all-mail ballot model, and the vote center model, and
- studying the feasibility and cost of conducting an independent audit of the San Diego County voter registration list.

Today's item presents the completed Feasibility Study of the California Voter's Choice Act - Vote Center Model ("Study"). In short, the Study finds implementing the Vote Center Model for the 2020 election cycle is not operationally feasible; however, it is technically, operationally and legally feasible in the future given enough implementation time. The Study provides an in-depth look at how elections are administered in the County's current environment while recognizing how voter-focused state laws are changing that environment by adding increased complexity and cost to the administration of elections, a thorough cost analysis, an examination of how the Vote Center Model differs from the County's current polling place and precinct model (Polling Place Model), and an implementation plan to establish four satellite locations for the 2020 election cycle. The Study concludes with recommendations and the feasibility of an independent audit of the voter registration list.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER

1. Receive the Registrar of Voters Feasibility Study, California Voter's Choice Act – Vote Center Model. Find that receiving the Study, appropriating funds, implementing four

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satellite voting locations for the March 2020 election, and studying the Vote Center Model (the Project) is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA guidelines Sections 15061(b)(3) (Common Sense Exemption), 15301 (Existing Facilities), and 15303 (New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures).

2. Establish appropriations of \$900,000 in Registrar of Voters, Salaries & Benefits (\$350,000) and Services & Supplies (\$550,000), to establish four (4) recommended satellite locations for the 2020 primary election, based on reimbursement from Proposition 41, Help America Vote Act (HAVA) and Assembly Bill 1824 (\$155,000), reimbursement from jurisdictions participating in the election (\$130,000) and available prior year General Fund Fund Balance (\$615,000). **(4 VOTES)**
3. Continue to study the Vote Center Model, including analyzing the vote center counties' experience from the 2020 primary and general elections and supporting state legislative recommendations outlined in the Feasibility Study, California Voter's Choice Act – Vote Center Model, and add those recommendations to the Board's Legislative Program.

FISCAL IMPACT

Funds are not included in the Fiscal Year 2019-20 Operational Plan in the Registrar of Voters. If approved, this request will result in additional costs and revenues of \$900,000 for four satellite locations in Fiscal Year 2019-20. The funding sources are reimbursement from Proposition 41, Help America Vote Act (HAVA) and Assembly Bill 1824 (\$155,000); reimbursement from jurisdictions participating in the election (\$130,000); and available prior year General Fund Fund Balance (\$615,000). There will be no additional staff years.

BUSINESS IMPACT STATEMENT

N/A

ADVISORY BOARD STATEMENT

N/A

BACKGROUND

On July 9, 2019 (5) the Board of Supervisors directed the Chief Administrative Officer to conduct a vote center model feasibility study and report back to the Board within 120 days. This study would include:

- studying the feasibility of the pilot vote center locations and the ultimate implementation plan,
- analyzing security, staffing, siting of vote center locations, and voter fraud prevention,
- comparing costs of the current model, an all-mail ballot model, and the vote center model, and
- studying the feasibility and cost of conducting an independent audit of the San Diego County voter registration list.

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Summary

San Diego County’s elections are conducted using a traditional Polling Place Model. Every registered voter who wishes to receive their ballot by mail must request one. Voters can make this request on an election-by-election basis, or they can choose to permanently receive their ballot by mail. In the county, 72% of registered voters are permanent mail ballot voters. Those who do not vote by mail must go to their assigned polling place on election day or go to the Registrar of Voters (“ROV”) office in order to cast their ballot. In specific situations authorized by state law, the ROV may designate a precinct to vote by mail.

In a Polling Place Model, each voter is assigned a specific polling place because his or her ballot type - set of contests a voter is eligible to vote on - has been issued to the poll workers at this polling place. Depending on the type of statewide election (i.e. primary/general and gubernatorial/presidential), there is anywhere from 1,500 to 1,600 polling places that must be established. Due to the more than 430 political districts in the county, there are hundreds of ballot types that are required for each scheduled statewide election. When factoring in the federally required languages the County must translate voting materials, including ballots, and the qualified political party ballots during presidential primary elections, the number of ballot variations may climb as high as 10,000 to 12,000.

In addition, poll workers assigned to work at each polling place are issued a paper roster of voters which lists those eligible to cast a ballot at that polling place. In order to ensure the integrity of each election, any voter who goes to a different polling place than the one he or she is assigned would have to vote provisionally.

In a Vote Center Model, 100% of eligible voters receive a ballot in the mail, and voting locations, known as “vote centers”, are established and opened throughout the county prior to and on election day. Some of the vote centers are open for as long as 11 days and others are open for four days. Any voter can go to any vote center for services. These services include dropping off their mail ballot, voting, registering to vote (and voting), updating their registration status, and/or receiving a replacement ballot.

To implement the Vote Center Model in accordance with the Voter’s Choice Act (Senate Bill 450), there are a number of additional requirements that must be fulfilled. These include the establishment of drop-off locations throughout the county, voter education and outreach efforts, mailings, public notices, public meetings and workshops, a Language Accessibility Advisory Committee and a Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee, and a detailed administrative plan that must be outlined and approved in advance of implementation.

Feasibility Study

Today’s item presents the completed Feasibility Study of the California Voter’s Choice Act - Vote Center Model (“Study” – Attachment A). The Study provides an in-depth look at how elections are administered in the County’s current environment while recognizing how voter-focused state laws are changing that environment by adding increased complexity and cost to the administration of elections, an examination of how the Vote Center Model differs from the County’s current polling place and precinct model (Polling Place Model), a thorough cost analysis, and an

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implementation plan to establish four satellite locations for the 2020 election cycle. The Study concludes with recommendations and the feasibility of an independent audit of the voter registration list.

Key Findings

Through this Study, the ROV finds that conducting elections under the Vote Center Model is not operationally feasible for the 2020 election cycle; however, it is technically, operationally and legally feasible in a future election cycle.

- A decision to move toward a Vote Center Model must be made giving the greatest amount of time possible in order to focus efforts in the area of human resources, siting of vote centers and voter education and outreach.
- The Vote Center Model provides a more centralized and uniform model, allowing an election to be better monitored and managed, and, as such, poses less risk in the administration of elections.
- The ROV would have the capacity to manage the additional issuance and return of mail ballots.
- The on-going cost of conducting elections under the Vote Center Model is anticipated to be higher. There are two main contributors in the higher cost: 1) the conversion from a poll worker stipend reimbursement structure to an hourly paid seasonal election worker structure, and 2) the increase in processing returned voted mail ballots.
- Attention and funding must be allocated in the area of voter education and outreach to socialize the change to voters.
- Additional security will be necessary to address the number of days vote centers are open and available. Seasonal election workers, unlike poll workers, would be background checked, allowing for an additional layer of security. Many of the security measures in place in the Polling Place Model are portable to a Vote Center Model.
- The propensity of a voter who receives a mail ballot to vote is higher than a person who does not receive a mail ballot. That said, there is insufficient data at this time whether the Vote Center Model will increase voter turnout. A more representative population, similar to that of San Diego County, will better inform the County on voter turnout impacts.
- The Vote Center Model is expected to not have an adverse impact on voter turnout.
- The unincorporated area of the county has a higher adoption rate in mail balloting. Although mail ballots comprise most of all ballots counted, the ratio is higher in the unincorporated area of the county, in comparison to cities.

Satellite Locations

Current law differentiates vote centers from that of adopting satellite locations. When speaking of vote centers, they are specific to the Vote Center Model and all the requirements outlined in Elections Code 4005. As a result, discussing the implementation plan and feasibility of “pilot vote centers” is not legally authorized. Instead, discussing the adoption of satellite locations, as found under Elections Code 3018, is permissible and more applicable to the County in managing the upcoming 2020 elections, particularly with new state mandates, including Senate Bill 72 which will allow conditional voter registration at every polling place on election day. In addition, the satellite locations will allow the County to gain a better understanding of how a transition to a Vote Center Model would occur.

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The ROV has thoughtfully analyzed the actions necessary to extend the operations beyond the ROV office and into other parts of the county. The Study outlines the implementation plan necessary to adopt nine satellite locations; however, to balance risk, the ROV is recommending the adoption of four of the nine satellite locations for the March 3, 2020 presidential primary election. Additional locations can be considered for the November 2020 general election cycle.

Feasibility of Independent Audit of Voter Registration List

Additionally, the Study finds that conducting an independent audit of the voter registration list is not organizationally feasible. The official system of record of the voter registration list resides at the State level as required by the federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA). However, the ROV has comprehensive practices and procedures to maintain the integrity of the voter registration list.

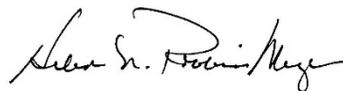
ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT

The Project is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to CEQA guidelines Sections 15061(b)(3) (Common Sense Exemption), 15301 (Existing Facilities), and 15303 (New Construction or Conversion of Small Structures) for the following reasons. Section 15061(b)(3) applies to projects that have no possibility for having a significant effect on the environment (i.e. the satellite locations are temporary and are established for convenience; they will not generate a significant amount of vehicle miles). Section 15301 applies to the project because it includes a minor alteration to an existing facility (i.e. location in existing facilities involving a negligible expansion of use). Section 15303 applies to the project because it includes constructing a limited number of new, small facilities or structures (i.e. tents and temporary structures). None of the exceptions to the exemptions described in Section 15300.2 prohibit the use of the categorical exemption for the project and there is no substantial evidence that the proposed project involves unusual circumstances, including future activities, resulting in or which might reasonably result in significant impacts which threaten the environment.

LINKAGE TO THE COUNTY OF SAN DIEGO STRATEGIC PLAN

Today's Feasibility Study and presentation supports the values represented in the County of San Diego's 2019-2024 Strategic Plan of integrity, stewardship and commitment by administering elections with the highest level of professional standards, accountability, security and transparency.

Respectfully submitted,



HELEN N. ROBBINS-MEYER
Chief Administrative Officer

ATTACHMENT(S)

[Note: Due to the size of the attachment, the document is available online through the Clerk of the Board's website at www.sandiegocounty.gov/content/sdc/cob/bosa.html.]

ATTACHMENT A - Feasibility Study, California Voter's Choice Act – Vote Center Model

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AGENDA ITEM INFORMATION SHEET

REQUIRES FOUR VOTES: Yes No

WRITTEN DISCLOSURE PER COUNTY CHARTER SECTION 1000.1 REQUIRED

Yes No

PREVIOUS RELEVANT BOARD ACTIONS:

July 9, 2019 (5) – Studying the Vote Center Model: Expand Voting Opportunities in San Diego County

BOARD POLICIES APPLICABLE:

N/A

BOARD POLICY STATEMENTS:

N/A

MANDATORY COMPLIANCE:

N/A

ORACLE AWARD NUMBER(S) AND CONTRACT AND/OR REQUISITION NUMBER(S):

N/A

ORIGINATING DEPARTMENT: Registrar of Voters

OTHER CONCURRENCE(S): Auditor & Controller, Audits & Advisory Services
County Counsel

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