



MEMORANDUM

Date: July 22, 2013

To: The Honorable Chairman and Members
Pima County Board of Supervisors

From: C.H. Huckelberry
County Administrator 

Re: **Planning for the Purchase of New Election Tabulation Equipment**

Attached is a July 18, 2013 memorandum from Election Director Brad Nelson regarding ballot tabulation system replacement. Pima County's current election equipment is approximately 15 years old. The individual ballot tabulation poll scanners are beginning to fail, the product manufacturer does not make replacement parts, and the system has been kept operational by scavenging parts from other units. This system needs to be replaced, and Mr. Nelson is now planning for such a replacement.

The biggest change in elections since the County acquired individual poll tabulation equipment with votes aggregated at a counting center was the advent of early voting. In the 2000 General Election, the number of early votes cast represented 38 percent of the total votes cast. In the 2012 General Election, early voting represented 68 percent of all voting. This trend clearly indicates that the need for vote tabulation at each polling location is not as important as it was 15 years ago.

Early votes are tabulated at a counting center; not individual polling locations. Based on the trend of early ballots being cast, the County will not pursue election equipment that scans and tabulates votes at the polling location, but will collect votes cast at these locations and transport them to a central counting station. This method of vote tabulation will take longer to receive total vote counts on Election Day.

In the 2012 General Election, 60-plus percent of the voting results were known by 8:00 PM (the earliest time voting results can be released by statute) with more than 90 percent of all voting known before 10:00 PM. Discontinuing the use of poll tabulation equipment will mean that ballots cast at the polls will not be known until much later in the evening. However, early voting results will generally be known at approximately the same time or shortly after the time period for the release of official election results.

Not tabulating ballots cast at the poll locations will eliminate one of the areas for potential voter fraud as well as significantly reduces the cost of replacing election equipment. Mr. Nelson has presented this concept to the Election Integrity Commission, and I have

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authorized him to pursue the replacement of our aging election equipment with a system that allows ballots cast at a polling location to be transported to a central counting location rather than using scanners at polling locations.

If you have any questions regarding this matter, please contact me.

CHH/dph

Attachment

c: Chair and Members, Election Integrity Commission
Brad Nelson, Director, Election Department



MEMORANDUM

ELECTIONS DEPARTMENT

July 18, 2013

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brad", is written over the printed name.

To: C. H. Huckelberry
County Administrator

From: Brad R. Nelson
Election Director

Subject: Recommendation to modify ballot tabulation procedures in Pima County to exclusive central count

Over the next several months, Pima County will begin the process of procuring a ballot tabulation system to replace the current ballot tabulation system. The current ballot tabulation system was purchased approximately fifteen years ago and has served the county well for the past elections. However, much has changed in the administration of elections in those fifteen years and a new tabulation system should reflect those changes.

Voting Trends

Chief among the changes in election administration is the increase in the number of voters who have chosen to vote by using an early ballot. An early ballot, or what some may refer to as an absentee or mail ballot, is a ballot that is provided to the voter in advance of Election Day either by mail or at the Records office and cast outside the polling place in advance of Election Day. In the past, when the current tabulation system was purchased, roughly twenty percent of all ballots cast in an election were early ballots. The number of voters using an early ballot has continued to increase during the past fifteen years to the point that in the 2012 general election nearly seventy percent of ballots cast were early ballots.

In previous years, Arizona Law required a voter to apply for an early ballot for each and every election. However the law changed to remove the need to apply each time. Now a voter can sign up to be on the Permanent Early Voter List (PEVL) and have all ballots

mailed to them automatically. Currently approximately sixty-one percent of Pima County registered voters have placed themselves on this list and the number of PEVL voters continues to rise with each election cycle.

Given the trend that fewer voters are casting ballots at the polls on Election Day, it seemed appropriate to consider that trend in the purchase of the new ballot tabulation system. Given the fall in the number of voters casting ballots at the polls, staff began to contemplate the possibility of not having a ballot scanner at the polls as has been done in the past. In the past voters at the polls cast their ballot by placing it in a scanner that tabulated the ballot at the time it was dropped in the ballot box.

In a review of law (State and Federal) staff could not find any requirement to have a scanner at the polls. Staff then posed the possibility of not having scanners at future elections to the Arizona Secretary of State. In informal discussions with staff members of Secretary of State they agreed that there is no requirement to have a scanner at the polls. County staff further researched the matter and found that numerous counties outside of Arizona do not provide scanners at the polls. The most prominent of these "scanner-less" counties is San Diego California. San Diego County has not had scanners at the polls since 2006.

Pima's Current Tabulation System

Pima's current inventory of scanners is old and beginning to fail with increasing frequency. The equipment is no longer in production and even the vendor that supports the equipment is cannibalizing old equipment for parts. Many crucial parts are no longer available from any source.

Given the frequency of equipment failures, it is time for Pima County to replace its current ballot tabulation system. But given that the law does not require a scanner to be at each polling place combined with fewer voters casting ballots at the polls, the purchase of individual precinct scanners may not be appropriate.

Based on recent sales agreements with jurisdictions outside of Arizona, a new scanner (including the necessary peripherals) had a unit cost of approximately \$6000.

During the 2012 general election Pima County had 280 scanners at the polls plus approximately forty scanners in reserve as backups in case some scanners malfunctioned on Election Day. Each of the precinct scanners needed to be individually programmed, tested and transported to/from the polls. It is estimated that the

programming, testing and transport of each scanner cost the county approximately \$75 per election.

If Pima County continues the practice of providing scanners at the polls for 2014, Pima County would incur the one time purchase cost of approximately \$1,800,000 (300 new scanners x \$6000), and the ongoing cost of programming, testing and transporting scanners for each polling place. It is estimated that for the 2014 primary and general election these ongoing costs would equal approximately \$45,000.

An Alternative

An alternative to having a scanner at each polling place is to have all ballots cast at the polls on Election Day brought back to the Election Office after the polls close (a la San Diego Style). These polling place ballots would be secured throughout the election in a secured/sealed ballot box and transported by two poll workers of different political parties. Thereafter, the ballots cast at the polls would be tabulated by processing the ballots utilizing the county's central count tabulation system. This alternative is not that much different from the current practice that involves bringing the individual precinct scanners back for upload into the tabulation system.

Recommendation

Given that Pima County needs to replace its current tabulation system, I recommend that Pima County no longer provide scanners at the polls and instead bring all ballots cast at the polls on Election Day back to the Election Office for tabulation immediately after the polls close. This scenario is recommended given the trends in early voting and the cost of purchasing 300 new scanners and the ongoing costs of programming, testing and transporting those scanners.

Early Voting Trends
Number/percentage of early ballots cast per election

Election	# of ballots cast	# of early ballots cast	% of early cast
2000 General	289193	110863	38%
2002 General	232564	101008	43%
2004 General	396321	173103	44%
2006 General	284935	153793	54%
2008 General	397503	227526	57%
2010 General	318995	201925	63%
2012 General	385725	261547	68%

Permanent Early Voting List (PEVL) Statistics

Current number of registered of registered voters in Pima County	496386
Current number of PEVL voters	304700
% of voters on PEVL	61%