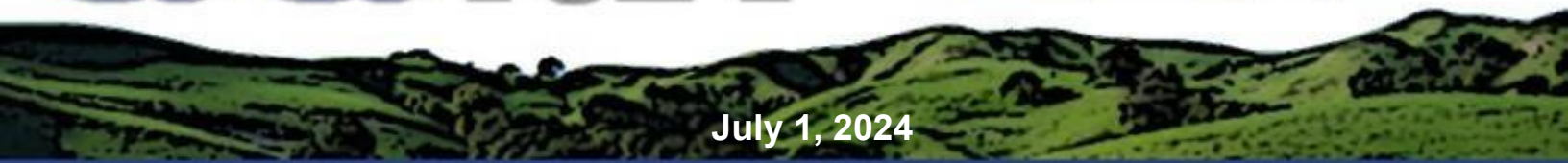




Promoting accountable, cost-effective and efficient government and opposing unnecessary taxes and spending



July 1, 2024

Speaker Presentation

CoCoTax Officers

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Summary of CoCoTax Board Meeting 6-28-24 Speaker Presentation

Kristin Connelly, Clerk Recorder Registrar of Voters

Contra Costa County was named a Center of Elections Excellence in 2022 and was just 1 of 16 elections jurisdictions across the country to receive this distinction which came with a \$2 million grant which is only limited that it cannot replace anything the county invests in currently.

The three Divisions within the Clerk-Recorder-Elections Department are currently facing a period of declining revenues due to a reduction in real property recordings which started with the Federal Reserve raising interest rates starting in March of 2022. In the past, the Department was a net benefit to the general fund because recording revenue more than paid for elections expenses. That is not the case now. They are running at a net deficit. The Fiscal Year in which a Presidential Primary election is conducted is the most expensive for the department. In the Fiscal Year starting July 1, the Department will need just over \$10 million from the county's General Fund to support the office divisions. One of the biggest challenges facing the Elections Division is the potential for a 7-card ballot. The Elections Division estimates the processing Election Day ballots in November will take an additional 5 hours. They were done before 1:00 AM in March but like will go until 6:00 am November 6th because of the length of the ballot.

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Speaker Presentation, Continued

The Board of Supervisors has directed departments not to lay off staff, but does expect the Department to carry a vacancy factor to help balance the budget. When Clerk-Recorder staff leave they are not being replaced for the time being. Currently, the Department has 12 vacancies in the Clerk-Recorder Division that they expect to keep vacant through the fiscal year unless recording volume increases. There are 30 full-time employees in the Elections Division with 2 vacancies for outreach positions approved by the Board of Supervisors in December to be funded with Measure X revenue.

The Elections Division is using a significant portion of their grant funding to launch a Trust in Elections campaign. They conducted a recent survey of registered voters and got 1,255 completed responses showing that more than 60% rated the department as trustworthy. Survey respondents mentioned that having a website dedicated to explaining election security would help them trust the process more. They are currently working with a local communications firm on all this work. Kristin encouraged everyone to go to this new website at secure-elections.org to review the security measures in place for the 2024 General Election. Kristin is willing to speak to any community group that invites her in hopes of being an effective community ambassador for the department. Part of the Trust in Elections campaign involves training residents to act as social media ambassadors and community ambassadors to spread the messages about why this election will be safe and secure.

Kristin shared an example of the ways her department is transparent. Proponents of local measures can review rejected signatures. Signature verification is a very important part of the process and the single largest line item in Kristin's Elections Division budget in terms of staff time. Advocates in San Pablo submitted signatures for a local rent control measure. In performing a random sample of signatures under the Election Code, staff found that less than 75% of the signatures were valid which means that the petition failed to qualify. Elections Division staff shared the rejected signatures with advocates which takes time but is required under the law. It is a painstaking review process.

Issues that face the department: 1) Auto Voter Registration at DMV is an issue every year in the legislature, but proposed changes did not make progress this session. In response to a question about citizenship, Kristin explained that California residents registering to vote have to provide a social security number or a driver's license for citizens.

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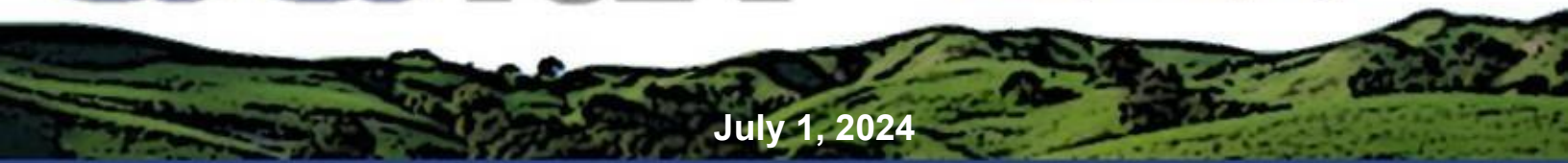
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Speaker Presentation, Continued

They sign under penalty of perjury that they are eligible. The Elections Division is not funded to investigate nor do they have the authority to question eligibility of registered voters. Kristin would like to see California join the Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC), a nonpartisan, nonprofit membership organization created in 2012 to help voter rolls be more accurate. People are not good about letting their clerk’s office know when they move out of county or out of state so mail-in ballots continue to be sent to the old address. Kristin discussed signature curing in response to a question. The most common reason signatures are rejected is that voters forget to sign their ballot. Cure letters are sent to these voters and the ballots can be corrected until 2 days prior to certification. Voters are notified by mail if their signature cannot be verified. Kristin described a new technology they piloted in the March primary that allows voters to cure their signature using their smart phone.

All vote-by-mail (VBM) ballots require verification of signatures. The elections department makes every effort to verify signatures. Since 2020 when we started mailing ballots to all voters, 90-94% of ballots that are received in any election now are VBM ballots. Only 3-10% of ballots are voted in-person at polling places or Regional Early Voting sites. The County has 147 polling places open on Election Day. Starting 29 days before Election Day when ballots are mailed, you can vote early at the Elections Division office (555 Escobar Street, Martinez) or drop your ballot. One half of the processing of ballots is accomplished over 3 weeks leading up to Election Day. The other half of the work must be accomplished in the three days surrounding Election Day because people are voting closer and closer to Election Day. Kristin has made it a point to include language when releasing results on Election Night to make clear to the public that these results only include Election Day voting and VBM ballots received through the Saturday before the Election. The Division reports the number of unprocessed ballots on a daily basis to the Secretary of State as required. Kristin releases a plan for when results get issued. Updated results typically get issued on the Friday after the Election and again on the following Friday. VBM ballots post marked by 8:00 pm on Election Day will be accepted if they are received up until seven calendar days following the Election (known as E+7 in the CA Election Code). Typically, results released the Friday after the Election tend to hold true as the final result, but more and more district elections at the local level mean that close elections will be more likely in the future. Kristin emphasized that every vote counts and there is no room for error.

The processing costs of a Special Election are expensive. If a city or district consolidates their election, the estimated cost is \$1.50-2.50 per registered voter. If the City or District holds a Special Election the cost is \$12-\$14 per registered voter.

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