



Memorandum

To: Honorable Gavin Newsom, Mayor

Honorable Members, Board of Supervisors

From: John Arntz, Director of Elections

Date: January 31, 2008

RE: Preparations for the February 5, 2008 Presidential Primary Election

For the past several years the Department of Elections (Department) has issued memoranda detailing the Department's handling and processing of ballots. This memorandum continues the Department's efforts to keep the election process as open as possible and will provide an overview of the Department of Elections' plans for receiving, distributing, transporting, and processing ballots for the February 5, 2008 Presidential Primary Election.

NEW VOTING SYSTEM

This election will be the first time that San Francisco uses its new voting system from Sequoia Voting Systems (Sequoia) and purchased after an open bidding process. The Sequoia system includes high speed optical scanners located in City Hall for primarily processing absentee ballots, an optical scan machine to be placed in each polling place, and one touch screen unit placed in each polling place so that each site can provide accessible voting equipment.

Voters will notice minimal differences while voting as compared to their voting experiences during the past seven years. The format of the ballot card that voters will receive for vote-by-mail voting and will use in the polling places will be identical to the ballots used in San Francisco since November 2000. Voters will still place their voted ballots into an optical scan machine at each polling place, and the vote-by-mail ballots will be still processed using optical scan equipment located in City Hall. The one difference is the touch screen device to provide accessible voting has now replaced the AutoMARK machine that San Francisco used for the past three elections.

The Sequoia system allows the City to avoid the delays and additional costs that arose during the November 2007 election. The Department was able to issue one results report on election day. The report represented the absentee ballots received by the Department before election day. The ongoing results reports of votes cast at the polling places could not be released since conditions placed on the voting system by the Secretary of State required the Department to transport all polling ballots to City Hall for processing. Thus, the Department released one report on election night and its second reporting of results took place the following day at approximately 4 p.m.

BALLOT CARDS

All San Francisco voters will receive one ballot card for the upcoming election. Since this is a primary election, voters will receive a ballot card associated with their party affiliation. For those voters who registered as non-partisan, they will receive a ballot card containing only the state and local measures. However, the American Independent and Democratic parties will allow non-partisan voters to “cross over” and vote on ballots listing those parties’ candidates for the office of President of the United States.

VOTER INFORMATION PAMPHLET

The Department organized the mailing on January 7, 2008 of Voter Information Pamphlets (VIP) to all voters who were registered 40 days before the election as required under San Francisco Municipal Elections Code section 500. The Department will also mail VIPs to those people who registered to vote on or before the January 22 registration deadline.

PERMANENT ABSENTEE BALLOTS

The Department mailed all ballots to permanent absentee voters on January 7, 2008. For this election approximately 143,000 voters have permanent absentee voter status, and nearly 4000 voters requested absentee ballots be mailed to them at addresses from overseas.

EARLY VOTING IN CITY HALL

Early voting began January 7 in City Hall outside the Department’s office in Room 48 and will take place each weekday from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. through Election Day. Weekend voting will be offered from 10 a.m. until 4 p.m. in City Hall the two weekends prior to the election (January 26 and 27; February 2 and 3). On Election Day, voting will begin in City Hall at 7 a.m. and continue until all voters in line by 8:00 p.m. have cast their ballots.

REPORTING ELECTION RESULTS

The Department will begin tabulating results from the absentee ballots received prior to Election Day after 8 p.m. and after the polls have closed. The first release of results will occur at approximately 8:30 p.m. and will represent the absentee ballots the Department has processed prior to Election Day. After this initial report, around 9 p.m., the Department will be able to include results from the City’s polling places.

The Department will post all results reports on its website. We will also provide results to SFGTV, and will have results projected onto a large screen in City Hall’s North Light Court. The Department plans to update the results posted on our website, SFGTV, and the results projected onto a large screen in the North Light Court at least every half-hour.

OBSERVING THE ELECTIONS PROCESS

All election activities are open to public observation. For every election we update our *Observers’ Guide* to explain the various activities taking place during the election and how to observe these activities. The *Observers’ Guide* will be posted on our Web site and available in our main office at City Hall Room 48. To request more information about observing the elections process, please contact our office.

BALLOT STORAGE

ABSENTEE BALLOTS

The Department continues to outsource the preparation and mailing of absentee ballots to voters who have requested permanent absentee voter status. The Department does keep small quantities of absentee ballots for voters who participate in early voting in City Hall. These ballots are tracked on ballot custody forms from the time of delivery by the printing vendor and securely stored in City Hall Room 59. At the end of each day, we will account for each ballot in our possession and move the voted ballots to a secure room within our office. The tracking and logging of these ballots will continue through Election Day.

When voted absentee ballots arrive in the mail to City Hall, the Department secures the envelopes containing the voted ballots in a room within our main office. Staff scans the barcodes on the envelopes to track the receipt of each voter's ballot. Our data entry personnel compare each signature on every absentee ballot envelope to the electronic image file of the voter's signature in the voter registration database. It must be noted that voters' signatures and addresses on the envelope are not viewed in conjunction with voted ballot cards when opened. In fact, before the ballots are removed from the envelopes, our staff organizes the envelopes so that the addresses and signatures are not visible to the staff removing the voted ballot cards.

After the signature on each envelope is verified with the image file in the voter registration database, the envelopes are moved to City Hall Room 59. Department personnel will sort the envelopes in precinct order before opening the envelopes to extract the ballot cards. When the ballot cards are removed, they remain in precinct order until two staff members move the ballots for counting to the Department's computer room.

PRECINCT BALLOTS

For previous elections, ballots for the polling places were staged in a facility located at 240 Van Ness Avenue. The Department of Real Estate has ordered the Department out of this facility since the building is potentially unsafe. For this election, ballots that will be used at the polling places will be staged in Brooks Hall which is located underneath Bill Graham Auditorium. The Department will distribute ballots to the poll workers from 240 Van Ness Avenue for the last time for this election since the move to Pier 48 and the implementation of a new voting system did not allow time to reconsider all existing processes associated with the Department's use of the building at 240 Van Ness Avenue.

Department staff inspects each box of ballots to ensure the contents match the shipping invoice. They then log each set of ballots received from the printing vendor and this log is continually compared to the order placed with the vendor. We track the ballots at each step of the elections process until the canvass after the election takes place. During the canvass we compare our tracking records to all of the voted and unvoted ballots in our possession.

The Department distributes the precinct ballots to polling place inspectors beginning January 30, which is six days before the election. Before inspectors obtain ballots they must have a precinct assignment from the Department and have completed the proper training classes. The inspectors must sign ballot custody logs indicating the number of ballots, the type, and the precinct in which the cards will be voted. We also scan barcodes affixed to the ballot containers to record the transfer of possession of the ballot cards from the Department to the poll workers.

ELECTION DAY

ELECTION DAY SUPPORT

As in past elections, the Department of Elections will dispatch Field Election Deputies (FEDs) throughout the City on Election Day. FEDs provide direct support to polling places by delivering additional ballots and other supplies, addressing technical or staffing problems that arise during the day, and assisting in the opening and closing of polling places.

The Department will train the FEDs to visit each polling site and discern whether the pollworkers are providing the best possible service to voters. As in past elections, pollworkers receive training that includes assisting voters who are unfamiliar with the elections process or otherwise need assistance when casting their votes.

TRANSPORTING AND SECURING VOTED BALLOTS AFTER THE POLLS CLOSE

Now that the Department has finally acquired use of sufficient space at one site at Pier 48 that can support both warehouse and operational activities, the movement of election materials after the polls close is greatly reduced. Once ballots arrive at Pier 48 from the polling places, the ballots will remain in Pier 48 during the canvass and during the 22-month retention period required by state election law after an election's results are certified. There is no need to move the ballots from Pier 48 until after the retention period.

The overall process of securing ballots begins when voted ballots are inserted into *and stored* in the optical scan voting machines used at the polling places. Voted ballots are not removed from the machines until the polls close at 8 p.m. After the polls close, Deputy Sheriffs collect both voted and unvoted ballots, provisional ballots, and absentee ballots that voters have dropped off at the polling places. During this collection, the Deputy Sheriffs sign a Custody and Security Form (CSF) in quadruplicate format to confirm receipt of the ballots and give a copy to the polling place Inspector. This form is used later to track the custody of ballots. The Deputy Sheriffs then deliver the ballots to the Elections Processing Center at Pier 48.

Department staff at Pier 48 receives the ballots from the Deputy Sheriffs, and both the Department staff and the Deputy Sheriffs sign the CSF to confirm the receipt of ballots from each precinct and to maintain a record of custody. The Deputy Sheriffs receive copies of the forms and the Department files remaining copies for reference.

Once the Department gains possession of voted ballots, Deputy Sheriffs provide security for the ballots. This security begins at Pier 48 where two Deputies stay at the Pier until all ballots are canvassed. Whenever the Department transports ballots from Pier 48 to City Hall for processing, Deputies escort the vehicles to their respective destinations. The transport of absentee and provisional ballots to City Hall for processing will take place the day following the election. Department staff will use a separate custody form (a Ballot Transport Log, or "BTL") to track the transportation of ballots from Pier 48 to City Hall. Department staff will complete and sign the BTL forms when the ballots leave Pier 48, and again when they arrive at City Hall. These forms can be reviewed later to track custody of the ballots.

TRANSPORTING AND SECURING VOTE-RECORDING DEVICES AFTER THE POLLS CLOSE **Memory Packs**

The optical scan voting equipment used at the polling places contains a memory device called a "memory pack" that records votes in those specific polling places cast for candidates and for and against ballot measures. After the polls close, pollworkers print two copies of a report from the optical scan voting machine of the votes cast at that precinct. After printing these reports, poll workers must break a security seal on the machine and remove the memory pack. Poll workers enclose the memory pack with one copy of the report in an anti-static bag and then affix, and sign, a seal. The second report is posted outside the polling place and left for public inspection. Parking Control Officers (PCOs) from the Department of Parking and Traffic working under the direction of the Sheriff's Office, will retrieve the memory packs from the polling places and transport them to City Hall, using the McAllister entrance. In City Hall staff logs the arrival of each memory pack and afterwards will upload the vote totals stored in each memory pack for tallying.

Results Cartridges

PCOs will also retrieve "results cartridges" that the touch screen machines use to record voting results. The PCOs, who travel prearranged routes, will obtain the results cartridges from the pollworkers and place them in a special anti-static bag. After completing routes that consist of no more than ten stops, the PCOs will transport the results cartridges along with the memory packs to City Hall for uploading.

BALLOT PROCESSING

ABSENTEE BALLOTS

The Voter Services Division will verify voters' signatures on the absentee envelopes for all ballots arriving in the mail and for those that voters deliver to polling places. After this verification, the still-sealed absentee ballot envelopes are moved from City Hall Room 48 to Room 34, where the envelopes are opened and the ballots are removed. Absentee ballots are extracted from their corresponding envelopes by placing the side with the return address face down to avoid viewing voters' names and information. The ballot cards are moved to the Department's computer room, where they are tallied with the optical scan equipment.

Although these ballots are read before Election Day, state elections law prohibits the Department of Elections from tallying and reporting any results until after the close of the polls.

Tallied absentee ballots are secured and stored in City Hall Room 59. Deputy Sheriffs provide security for all absentee ballots and envelopes until the Department completes the official canvass and the election results are certified.

PROVISIONAL BALLOTS

Voters whose names do not appear in rosters specific to each precinct can still vote by using a “provisional ballot.” Provisional ballots are identical to the regular precinct ballots but after the voters mark their selections, the ballot cards are sealed in large pink envelopes and placed in a sealed red ballot box rather than inserted into the optical scan machine at the precinct. Before counting provisional ballots, Department staff must verify voters’ eligibility to vote according to the information voters provide on the envelope that contains the ballot cards. The verification process is similar to the process described above for verifying absentee ballots. The Department will tally provisional ballots in its computer room in City Hall after the Department has determined the eligibility of each voter who cast a provisional ballot.

DAMAGED BALLOTS

When ballot cards are damaged or contain stray marks that may interfere with processing by the vote tabulation equipment, Department staff duplicates voters’ marks on new ballot cards so that the votes can be counted (California Elections Code § 15208). Each “remade” card is cross-referenced with the original, damaged ballot card, in accordance with State law. The process of remaking absentee ballots can begin as early as January 25, and is conducted in City Hall Room 82. Remade and original ballots are securely stored together in City Hall room 56B with other absentee and provisional ballots.

WRITE-IN VOTES

Write-in votes must be manually reviewed prior to being tallied. The voting equipment in the Department’s computer room in City Hall segregates ballot cards that have write-in votes. Once the Department verifies votes were cast for qualified write-in candidates, those votes are added to the report of votes cast.

State law specifies the procedures for tabulating write-in votes. Voters must properly mark the ballots for the write-in votes to be counted. Voters must not only write the names of the qualified write-in candidates in the appropriate space and under the correct office, but must indicate their vote by completing the arrow (California Elections Code § 15342).

Department staff must also remake ballots if voters write the name of a candidate who is already printed on the card. The remade ballot is then tabulated by the vote count equipment so the vote is properly captured.

After Election Day, the Department will begin to manually process and, if necessary, remake ballot cards with write-in votes. The remake process is generally the same as described under “Damaged Ballots.”

STAGING VOTED BALLOTS BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER PROCESSING

Over the past several years the staging of ballots involved the ballots arriving from the polls to the Processing Center at Pier 29, where they were organized during two days, transported to Brooks Hall for the canvass up to 28 days, and then archived for storage at the GRM facility in the city of Alameda lasting 22 months.

Now, voted ballots from the polling places arrive at Pier 48 and will remain at Pier 48 for canvassing and for the full retention period required by state election law. After processing the voted absentee ballots, the Department will send these ballots to Pier 48 for the retention period. Deputy Sheriffs will bring the Voter Verified Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) attached to each touch screen and which provides a paper record of the votes on each machine to Pier 48 on Election Night with the voted and unvoted ballots. During the canvass, the Department will hand tally the results on the VVPAT and compare those results to the information uploaded from the memory cartridges to ensure the machines functioned properly. All VVPAT records will remain at Pier 48 for the mandatory retention period of at least 22 months.

RESULTS REPORTING

REPORTING OF RESULTS ON ELECTION NIGHT AFTER THE POLLS CLOSE

The first results released will be the tally of ballots from vote-by-mail voters and from the City’s 19 mail-ballot precincts. The Department will release this first report at approximately 8:30 p.m. and then will continually release results from the polling places through the evening. The Department expects to have all precincts reporting by midnight. The Department will count ballots throughout Election Day and for several days afterwards and will release daily reports on the results at approximately 4 p.m. Candidates, members of the media, and the public may observe this vote counting process from a public viewing area outside the Department’s computer room.

Results will be reported in several ways. The Department will provide the results in the North Light Court, post the results on its Web site, www.sfgov.org/election, and provide the results to SFGTV Channel 26. The Department always has hardcopies of the results for distribution in its office in City Hall Room 48.

UPDATES: REPORTING OF RESULTS AFTER ELECTION DAY

Final election results will not be available on Election Day because the Department must still process all absentee ballots and provisional ballots received on election day as well as any ballot cards with write-in votes. The Department expects the counting process to continue

for three weeks. As in past elections, candidates, members of the media, and the public are welcome to observe the signature verification and processing of ballots and write-in votes.

After Election Day, the Department will release daily cumulative reports at approximately 4 p.m. which could encompass any polling place, absentee, or provisional ballots, or write-in votes counted since the last release of results.

REPORT OF FINAL ELECTION RESULTS

The Department expects to certify the final results no later than 28 days after Election Day as required by the State Elections Code. The Department will announce the final election results by issuing a press release, posting a notice on its website, and posting a notice both outside and inside the door of the Department's main office in Room 48 of City Hall. The Department will also provide election results to SFGTV.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

RESOURCES FOR VOTERS

The Department of Elections Web site contains many resources for voters, including a polling place and sample ballot look-up site, an electronic copy of the Voter Information Pamphlet, and absentee voting information. For more information, please visit www.sfgov.org/election, or call the Department of Elections' Voter Information Phone Bank: 415-554-4375 (English); 415-554-4367 (Chinese); 415-554-4366 (Spanish).

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