

Annual Report of the San Francisco Elections Commission for the Year 2014

Written by Commissioner Richard Matthews

January 1, 2014 – December 31, 2014

(As amended and adopted by the Elections Commission on May 20, 2015)

Introduction

The bylaws of the San Francisco Elections Commission ("the Commission") require that the president produce an annual report at the end of his or her term as president for the year just completed. The intent, among other things, is that it will help preserve institutional memory for the Commission.

The Commission Itself

The Commission hired a new secretary, Debra Hayes, in May. Unfortunately, she chose to leave in July. The secretary position remained unfilled the remainder of the year, the bulk of the secretarial work being completed by me as president, Commissioner Christopher Jerdonek as a skillful web user, and Deputy City Attorney Joshua White who kindly volunteered to post the physical copies of agendas outside the usual meeting room.

Commissioner Catalina Ruiz-Healy, appointed by the Board of Education, resigned from the Commission on May 18, 2014.

My own term expired on January 1, 2015, subject to continuing to serve for a maximum of sixty days (i.e., until March 1, 2015) or until a successor is appointed by the City Attorney, whichever came first. I was fortunate enough to be appointed to the Commission by City Attorney Dennis Herrera in 2004 to complete the term of Commissioner Robert Kennealy, who withdrew due to illness. Mr. Herrera was kind enough to appoint me to two more terms of my own. The San Francisco Charter limits Elections Commissioners to two terms (plus up to one-half of someone else's term, if applicable). I am grateful for the opportunity to have served, both to City Attorney Herrera who appointed me and to all of the Commissioners and Deputy City Attorneys with whom I served.

Here is additional information about Commission membership in 2014:

- The Commissioners serving at the beginning of the year were Charles Jung, Jill Rowe, Catalina Ruiz-Healy, Rosabella Safont, Winnie Yu, and myself.

- Christopher Jerdonek was appointed to the Commission by the Board of Supervisors on April 1, 2014.
- Commissioner Ruiz-Healy was elected Vice President in January.
- Commissioner Jerdonek was elected Vice President in June after Commissioner Ruiz-Healy's resignation.
- The Board of Education did not appoint a replacement for Commissioner Ruiz-Healy in 2014.

Here is information about the Budget and Oversight of Public Elections Committee (BOPEC):

- The committee met four times in February, April, September, and December.
- Commissioner Ruiz-Healy was appointed Chairperson starting with the first meeting.
- Commissioner Rowe served throughout the year.
- Commissioner Safont served from February to April.
- Commissioner Jerdonek was appointed to the committee as Chairperson in June.
- The committee had a vacancy after Commissioner Ruiz-Healy's resignation.

Improvement in Access to Elections Commission Public Information

In 2014, Commissioner Jerdonek improved the Commission's web page by removing layers of links that were not intuitive for users, clarifying links, and reordering the information that was already there; he added historical information in logical places. He also revived a page that records Commissioner attendance at each meeting.

Commissioner Jerdonek also created a Twitter account for the Commission (@SFElectionsComm) as well as a YouTube channel by which one can hear the recordings of the meetings of the Commission or its Budget and Oversight of Public Elections Committee.

Oversight of Elections

There were two elections in 2014, a primary on June 3 and a general on November 4. On both occasions, the Commission discharged its duties under the San Francisco Charter sec. 13.103.5 by approving an Election Plan before each election, and made a post-election finding that the Department of Elections had substantially complied with the approved Election Plan.

Before the November election, for the first time in recent memory, the Elections Commission forwarded to the Board of Supervisors the Sheriff's transportation and security plan for the election. This is a requirement of Sec. 13.104.5 of the San Francisco Charter that may have been overlooked in prior elections.

Significant Election Events

The Department made a number of significant improvements starting with the November election. For example—

1. The Department created an e-mail list to which members of the public could subscribe for Departmental announcements.
2. The Department included all ballots in the 1% manual tally; and the Department finished counting all of the ballots, as well as releasing the corresponding precinct-level vote totals, prior to the 1% random selection.
3. The Department used 10-sided dice for the 1% random selection.
4. The Department released preliminary and final precinct-level vote totals in an open, machine-readable format, specifically TSV.
5. The Department notified voters after the election if their vote-by-mail (VBM) ballot was not counted, and why.

The Department also dealt with some significant challenges in the November election. For example—

1. The election required a lengthy 5-card ballot.
2. Approximately 1.2 million precinct ballot cards were misprinted by the vendor. The Department made up the lost time, with the vendor paying for the reprinting.
3. The envelopes of about 9,400 VBM ballots were damaged by the Post Office when being sent to voters. The Department mailed new VBM ballots to the affected voters the day after receiving information about which ones were affected, with the Post Office paying for the new mailings.
4. The election results web page had slowness issues on Election Night, which the Department is working to address for the next election.

Again, with gratitude for the opportunity to serve on the Elections Commission for over ten years, this report is respectfully submitted,

Richard Matthews

Elections Commissioner 2004-2015