



## Memorandum

To: Elections Commission  
From: John Arntz, Director   
Date: May 22, 2020  
RE: Director's Report: May 27, 2020, Elections Commission Meeting

Following is a brief listing of the work and related information in which the Department of Elections (Department) has been engaged since the previous report issued in relation to the Elections Commission meeting on February 19, 2020.

- I. **The Department has taken steps to prepare for mailing ballots to all registered voters for the November 3, 2020, election as required under the Governor's Executive Order N-64-20.**
  - A. On May 8, 2020, Governor Newsom issued Executive Order N-64-20 (Appendix 1) requiring California elections officials to mail a ballot for the November 3, 2020, election to every registered voter. This Executive Order sets a deadline of no later than May 30, 2020, to finalize the minimum requirements for in-person voting and further states that these and other necessary directives may be issued via subsequent Executive Order(s). Subsequently, Secretary of State Alex Padilla indicated that his office is working with the Governor's office and the Legislature to address other actions not included in the Executive Order, including extension of the voter registration deadline, expanded use of remote accessible vote by mail, and extension of postmark +3.
  - B. In collaboration with its printing vendor, the Department has established an earlier production schedule and secured the printing of nearly 1.3 million ballot envelopes (outgoing and return envelopes) to be distributed to voters this fall. In keeping with guidance from health officials, the Department redesigned the ballot return envelope which now features a "peel and seal" strip allowing for sanitary self-sealing. The Department is working with the Mailpiece Design unit of the United States Postal Service (USPS) to conduct test runs of processing the envelopes through USPS equipment and to ensure ballot envelopes meet current USPS guidelines for official election mail.
  - C. The Department has been preparing to send nearly 20,000 notices in June to City voters born in Chinese, Spanish, Filipino, Burmese, Japanese, Korean, Thai, or Vietnamese-speaking countries with no language preference on file as well as voters who did not provide their birthplace when registering to vote. These mailers include bilingual information about official and facsimile ballots available in several languages and options for selecting a language preference. Voters may select their language preferences on the notices and return the notices, postage-paid, to the Department. Department staff will process returned notices by entering voters' stated language preferences into the registration database and use this information for mailing the official and facsimile ballots this fall. To reach new voters who register after the initial notices are sent, the Department will continue sending mailers on a rolling basis up through the mailing of vote-by-mail packets in October. Additionally, the Department will send digital notices to voters with email addresses on file to further extend outreach about the availability of translated materials.
  - D. The Department has been working with the Office of the City Administrator and the City's Real Estate Division to identify additional space for vote-by-mail ballot processing. With a limited space in City Hall, the Department is unable

to continue its current ballot processing on site while maintaining the health and safety of staff and observers through proper social distancing measures. The Department is working with the City and current lessee of Bill Graham Civic Auditorium (Bill Graham) to fund the securing of space in that facility. Bill Graham lacks a secure fiber connection, which means that the Department will be able to only partially relocate ballot processing activities, such as ballot extraction, adjudication, remake, processing of ballots on ImageCast Central scanners, while scanning of the ballots through the Agilis Ballot Sorting System and signature verification will remain in City Hall. The Department has been working on identifying electrical needs necessary to operate ballot-processing equipment at Bill Graham and considering floor plans for processes that will be relocated while noting social distancing requirements for personnel.

- E. The Department evaluated its ballot processing capacity and is currently working with the City on procuring additional equipment used for extraction of ballots from the returned envelopes. In recent elections, the Department used six Opex Model 72 openers/extractors. The ballot extractors were operating at maximum capacity to handle the number of vote-by-mail ballots received during recent high voter turnout elections. With the November 3 election likely being the highest turnout election in the city's history with a record number of voters choosing to vote by mail, the purchase of four additional ballot extractors is vital to the Department's ability to provide timely results while meeting statutory requirements for processing vote-by-mail ballots.

**II. The Department has been engaged in planning the many processes required to conduct the November 3 election while protecting the health and safety of election workers, voters, and the general public.**

- A. On May 5, the Board of Supervisors (Board) adopted Resolution File No. 200435 (Attachment 2) urging Governor Gavin Newsom and Secretary of State Alex Padilla to adopt and implement statewide election reforms for the November Presidential Election that include providing a vote-by-mail ballot to every registered voter, in addition to providing equitable alternatives to cast a ballot in person safely..
- B. On May 19, the Board of Supervisors (Board) enacted Ordinance File No. 200400 (Attachment 3) amending the Municipal Elections Code to require the Department to expand use of vote-by-mail ballots in the November 3 Election; to report to the Board regarding planning for that election; and to report to the Board regarding implementation of the Voter's Choice Act in future San Francisco elections. The Department has been working and will submit a report on the November 3 planning to the Board, with a copy to the Elections Commission, no later than June 30, 2020. The report will address the following topics: (1) voter outreach, education, and services, including to limited-English speaking communities and persons with disabilities; (2) staffing needs, hiring strategies, and staff training; (3) voting equipment and capacity; (4) preliminary voting locations and hours, dropbox or curb-side drop-off locations and hours; (5) ballot collection and processing; and (6) public health measures and procedures for both voters and poll workers.
- C. In April, the Department conducted an audit of polling places used in recent elections, identifying buildings that serve communities at higher risk for severe illness from COVID-19, such as senior care facilities, nursing homes, and senior centers, as well as sites with areas insufficient to protect voter privacy and support current social distancing guidelines (spaces with less than 500 square feet). While the requirements for in-person voting are yet to be released to the counties, the Department has compiled a list of former polling sites inadequate for use in the November 3 election and has been researching alternative locations. While undertaking this research, the Department has also been assessing the potential impact on vulnerable communities, striving to ensure that polling place location changes

maintain or increase poll accessibility for language minority voters as well as for seniors, students, and voters with disabilities.

- D. The Department has been considering changes to its poll worker training programs with a focus on expanding the availability of digital learning resources, such as videos and interactive slideshows, presented with audio and closed captioning. In April, the Department conducted a survey to gather feedback from poll workers about the prospect of completing training online instead of attending traditional in-person classes.
- E. The Department has been working on developing a three-prong outreach plan that focuses on sending multiple voter notices, developing comprehensive digital resources, and extending remote reach through local partnerships. Although the current social distancing rules prohibiting large gatherings have required the Department to postpone its participation in live outreach events, the Department intends to reach City residents using mostly no-contact outreach strategies and partnerships with local agencies and organizations.
- F. The Department has been developing its Health and Safety Plan to ensure the health and safety of all employees and visitors when the office re-opens. This Plan will address practices at all facilities from which the Department conducts its operations, including posting health notices; establishing social distancing protocols; reconfiguring workspace layouts; procuring and distributing personal protective equipment (PPE); introducing regular sanitation schedules to minimize exposure to COVID-19; and modifying procedures related to hiring, onboarding, and training of nearly 300 seasonal employees hired to aid full-time staff in conducting the November 3 election.

**III. The Department continues to provide information to City voters, candidates, and the general public, and to undertake the many activities associated with the maintenance of the voter roll.**

- A. Since the March 16, 2020, Public Health Order (Shelter in Place) went into effect, the Department has been continuing to respond to public inquiries received through email and its main phone line on a daily basis. The Department posted a notice on its homepage, advising voters and members of the public seeking election information to send an email to [sfvote@sfgov.org](mailto:sfvote@sfgov.org).
- B. The Department continues to process statewide ballot initiative petitions. The Department completed the raw count and random signature check for four state petitions received in April and May, and is currently in the process of completing these steps for two additional petitions.
- C. The Department continues to facilitate the official candidate filing processes and the intake of local ballot measures through the initiative petition process. The Department is currently scheduling and facilitating curbside pickup and drop off of candidate filing paperwork and signatures-in-lieu, offering virtual candidate appointments, and continuing to respond to inquiries via email and by phone.
- D. The Department continues the many activities associated with the maintenance of the voter roll remotely. These include the processing of registration affidavits received by mail, dropped off in person, or submitted online; updating voter records based on notification received through official sources, such as the USPS, Department of Motor Vehicles, and the state Department of Public Health; and other ongoing activities that ensure the continual accuracy of the voter roll in accordance with relevant laws. The Department continues to provide outreach, including mailing of voter notification cards and address confirmation postcards, to voters who register or update their information on file.

**IV. The Department is planning for budget reductions to help the City close an anticipated \$1.7 billion deficit.**

- A. The City is projecting \$1.7 billion deficit in the upcoming fiscal year. The Mayor asked all city departments to identify 10% reduction in FY2020-21 budget, and additional 5% reduction should economic conditions continue to worsen. In FY2021-22, all city departments must identify 15% reduction in their budgets. For this Department, these reductions represent \$632, 676 and \$948,414, respectively. The Department is currently reviewing its submitted budgets and considering ways it can absorb the reductions while maintaining adequate level of election services, including using funds in program budgets such as for open source voting systems.
- B. The City revised its schedule for the FY2020-21 and FY2021-22 budget process to allow the departments to effectively respond to COVID-19 and adjust to the new financial outlook. The revised calendar delays the Mayor's Budget introduction by two months, and moves all departments to August budget introduction to the Board instead of May. Budget hearings for this Department are scheduled on August 12 and August 19.
- C. The Secretary of State's office indicated that additional election funding is expected to come in two phases: funds that exist now under the recently approved federal funding and funds that may be available through the state budget on July 1. The federal CARES Act included \$400 million for election funds of which California received \$36 million. The SOS is yet to disburse the funding to the counties and is expected to do so soon.