



Memorandum

To: Elections Commission
From: John Arntz, Director
Date: March 12, 2021
RE: Director's Report: March 17, 2021, 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 17, 2021.

I. The Department continues to carry out various administrative activities and processes.

- A. In consideration of the latest Shelter-in-Place Order issued by the San Francisco Health Officer, most of the Department's employees continue telecommuting. In the near future, most employees will continue to work remotely, with two employees now at City Hall every weekday, as well as between 4-10 additional staff at City Hall and between 1-2 additional staff at the warehouse working on an as-needed basis.
- B. The Department convened remote meetings with members of its Racial Equity Team— a working group comprised of management and direct service employees— to review a series of projects the Team will undertake over the course of the next year to advance equity in internal programs and practices.
 - i. Among the projects scheduled in the first quarter of 2021 are formalizing and documenting a recruitment process for open positions in the Department that addresses and mitigates barriers in the application process; developing new recruitment strategies to aid more applicants in finding employment opportunities with the Department; revising human resource documents and presentations, including job announcements, interview questions, and the Employee Orientation Presentation to reflect commitment to racial equity and inclusion; and amending onboarding training curriculum for seasonal employees to include implicit bias education and information about City career resources and longer-term employment opportunities.
- C. The Department convened a working group to review its website and consider any changes that would make it easier for all users to find the information they are seeking; streamline website text so it is up to date, informative, and concise; and enhance graphics and photos used on website pages to reflect the communities served by the Department.
 - i. Among some initial goals established for the current website review are removing and/or archiving November 2020 election content; developing guidelines for ensuring inclusivity and cultural competency of content shared; and conducting review of all visual elements to ensure equity, inclusivity, and accessibility.
 - ii. In anticipation of possible recall election(s) and transition to the Voter's Choice Act (VCA), the working group will also consider website updates to host information about the recall election(s); research the websites of counties that already transitioned to the VCA elections model, compile best practices, and develop a tentative plan for website changes were the City to adopt the VCA.

- D. On February 18, 2021, the Department submitted its budget proposals for the next two fiscal years to the Mayor's Office of Public Policy and Finance and the Controller's Office, following the directions and forms jointly issued by these offices.
- E. The Department prepared and provided additional training for its employees on how to stay safe and prevent the spread of COVID-19, to meet the requirements of the training required by the emergency regulations adopted by the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (Cal/OSHA).
 - i. As required by regulations, this training addresses topics such as where and how to report positive test results, what steps are being taken to protect employees from exposures to COVID-19, where should COVID-19 concerns be reported, etc.

II. The Department has been considering the impacts of potential statewide and local recall elections on its operational schedules.

- A. March 17 is the deadline for proponents to submit their petition to recall the Governor.
- B. If this petition has a sufficient number of valid signers, the Department projects the recall election would occur sometime between October and early November.
- C. On March 4, 2021, the Department approved a petition to begin the signature-gathering process associated with the recall of San Francisco's District Attorney.
 - 1. The deadline to submit the local petition to the Department is August 11.
 - 2. The petition requires a minimum of 51,325 valid signers to be successful and the proponents have 160 days to circulate the petition and the Department would have 30 days to review the petition upon submission.
 - 3. If the local recall petition is successful, the City must call an election at least 105 and not more than 120 days from the date of calling the election.
- D. On February 19, 2021, the Governor signed a Senate Bill 29 that provides for all registered voters to receive ballots in the mail automatically for each election through the end of 2021. Consequently, the Department has compiled and provided several estimates to the Mayor's Office of Public Policy and Finance, detailing cost impacts of new law in association with potential recall elections on the submitted budgets.

III. The Department has been engaged in assisting the City with future elections planning.

- A. On February 26, the Department submitted a report to the Board of Supervisors (Board) as well as to the Elections Commission, regarding the potential implementation of the Voter's Choice Act (VCA) in future San Francisco elections. The VCA was passed into law in 2016, allowing California counties to conduct "all-mail" elections provided all other conditions detailed in the VCA are met.
- B. Were San Francisco to adopt the VCA elections model, it would mean that: 1) all registered voters would automatically be mailed ballots for every election; 2) approximately 35 ballot drop-off sites would be open in different City neighborhoods, starting 29 days before Election Day; 3) the City's 588 polling places, which are only open for one day on Election Day, would be replaced by approximately 53 vote centers, all of which would be open prior to and on Election Day (approximately 11 vote centers open daily starting ten days prior to Election Day, and 53 vote centers open daily starting three days prior to and on Election Day); and 4) voters would no longer be assigned to a specific polling place, and could choose to visit any vote center to vote in person.
- C. A transition to the VCA in San Francisco would need to begin approximately 14 months before the first VCA election, i.e., April of 2021 for the June 2022 election or September of 2021 for the November 2022 election. Under the VCA, during this transition, the Department would be required to engage with community partners to solicit and

incorporate their feedback in the planning process, conduct robust voter education, and publically share its plans for administering elections under the VCA. Such plans would need to address numerous topics, including the number, locations, and hours for proposed vote centers and ballot drop-off locations, security and contingency plans at those locations, services for voters with disabilities, language access for limited English proficiency voters, and voter education and outreach strategies to inform voters about changes to the voting process.

- D. Should San Francisco transition to the VCA elections model, the Department would incur both one-time implementation expenses and increased ongoing expenses as compared to those incurred under the current polling place model. These one-time implementation costs are expected to amount to approximately \$1.9 million, with the total estimated cost of conducting a single election under the VCA model approximately \$10.4 million; this latter estimate is \$1.1 million higher than the cost of conducting a single election under the current polling place model.

IV. The Department continues to provide information to the general public and to undertake the many routine activities.

- A. The Department has been conducting in-person transactions in its office, by appointment only, and responding to public inquiries received through email and its main phone line on a daily basis.
- B. The Department continues the many activities associated with the maintenance of the voter roll. 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.
- C. The Department continues to process statewide ballot initiative petitions, including completing the raw count and random signature check. The Department is currently conducting full signature verification on the two recently received ballot initiative petitions (approximately 36,000 signatures), as directed by the SOS based on the random sample verification results from the 58 counties, and must complete signature verification by April 22.