VOTE BY MAIL PROJECT

PROGRESS REPORT

SEPTEMBER 21, 2017

Executive Steering Committee

Elvi Gray-Jackson
Dick Traini
Ernie Hall

Assembly Ethics and Elections Committee

Pete Peterson, Chair
Eric Croft
Forrest Dunbar
Dick Traini

Municipal Clerk’s Office

Barbara A. Jones
Amanda Moser
Jacqueline Yeagle
Rose Foley

Project Manager

Dennis Wheeler, RDI
Faced with continuing low voter turnout in Anchorage, challenges associated with replacing retiring election workers, and the administrative costs of running poll-based elections, the Municipal Clerk’s Office began an effort to improve voter turnout and at the same time address the administrative issues it faced. That effort led to the conclusion that replacing traditional poll-based elections with voting by mail was a solution. In response, the Anchorage Assembly Ethics and Elections Committee authorized the Municipal Clerk’s Office to continue exploring a voting by mail option.

The Municipal Clerk’s Office formed a stakeholder group in the summer of 2015 to advance public discussion of the vote by mail option. About a dozen people representing a diverse group of Anchorage constituents attended the first meeting. Over time, the stakeholder group grew to its present size of close to 50 members!

After researching vote by mail elections in other jurisdictions and considering stakeholder and public input, the Anchorage Assembly determined that vote by mail elections could offer voters the best combination of accessibility and inclusivity.

On December 8, 2015, the Anchorage Assembly passed a resolution directing the Municipal Clerk’s Office to fully explore vote by mail elections in Anchorage. Further research into the feasibility of vote by mail elections in Anchorage was conducted.

On March 22, 2016, the Anchorage Assembly established voting by mail as the method of choice for municipal elections after June 1, 2016.

The Vote by Mail transition project began in earnest at that time, building on a foundation of community involvement and engagement.
On December 14, 2015, the Municipal Clerk’s Vote by Mail project team began to meet weekly. One of the first items of business was to itemize those significant tasks that would require considerable development and implementation. The project team called those tasks the “Big Rocks.”

**Community Engagement and Outreach**

**Stakeholder Group**

The Municipal Clerk’s Office held the first stakeholder group meeting on July 22, 2015. Stakeholders representing a wide range of constituents, along with a few technical experts, attended the meeting. The purpose of the first meeting was to provide attendees a review of current elections practices and to introduce the vote by mail option. At subsequent meetings, the Municipal Clerk’s Office and the project manager updated the stakeholders about the vote by mail exploration and transition process and asked for feedback on a variety of discussion points.

In addition to the full stakeholder group, the Municipal Clerk’s Office formed four sub-committees that focus on particular aspects of vote by mail elections. The Technology, Education/Outreach, and Procedures sub-committees were formed at the very beginning of stakeholder engagement. The Accessibility Subcommittee was formed in June 2016.

The number of individuals associated with the stakeholder group expanded to include other interested entities. As of September 2017, over 50 engaged stakeholders represent constituents from a number of community groups.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Access Alaska</th>
<th>Alaska State Legislature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage Economic Development Corporation</td>
<td>GCI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AEDC</td>
<td>The Foraker Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage School Board</td>
<td>AFACT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anchorage Election Commission</td>
<td>UAA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>League of Women Voters</td>
<td>MOA Office of Equal Opportunity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOA GIS</td>
<td>NAACP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Alaskans Institute</td>
<td>Anchorage Community Land Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOA DOE</td>
<td>Alaska Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coady Bowman</td>
<td>ACLU</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alaska Map Science</td>
<td>Mayor’s Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of the Governor</td>
<td>Anchorage Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. Post Office</td>
<td>Disability Law Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MOA Election Workers</td>
<td>And the public</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Municipal Clerk’s Office anticipates continued growth in the stakeholder group and that the stakeholder group will remain engaged throughout the transition and beyond.
Community Engagement and Outreach (continued)

Public Involvement

Forming a stakeholder group was the first step in engaging the public in the discussion about vote by mail but it was important to the Anchorage Assembly Ethics and Elections Committee to engage the rest of the community in the conversation as well. The Anchorage Assembly sought public comment at assembly meetings at each step of the decision-making process. The Municipal Clerk’s Office and supporters presented the vote by mail proposal at community organizations such as Rotary clubs, community councils, business groups, and other election officials. More presentations are planned through 2017 and the 2018 election season. Contact the Municipal Clerk’s Office if you are interested in scheduling a presentation at your organization or workplace.

Olé
NAACP
Our Alaska
United Way Emerging Leaders
Alaska Conversation Voters
Alaska Young Democrats
Anchorage Women’s Commission
Federation of Community Councils
Anchorage Equal Rights Commission

Beginning in the fall of 2017, the Municipal Clerk’s Office will roll out a Vote by Mail public education campaign. Look for 30- and 60-second public service announcements on both local radio and television stations and for a series of press releases and other informational messages. Informational videos and educational materials will be posted on the Municipal Clerk’s Office Vote by Mail webpage at http://www.muni.org/Departments/Assembly/Clerk/Elections/Pages/VotebyMail.aspx.

News organizations are following the transition and keeping the community informed about the progress to vote by mail. Visit the Municipal Clerk’s Vote by Mail webpages at to catch up on how the transition unfolded. Check back often to stay current with all the news.

The Municipal Clerk’s Office also hosts a Facebook page. The Facebook page is a great place to learn about the Vote by Mail transition process and related community events. Visit often for up-to-the-minute news. You may also follow the Municipal Clerk’s Office on Twitter. And please share posts with both your friends and followers.

Municipal Clerk Barbara Jones conducts a tour of the Election Center for Mat-Su clerks

Stay up-to-date with news about the vote by mail transition!
Visit the Municipal Elections website at
http://www.muni.org/Departments/Assembly/Clerk/Elections/Pages/VotebyMail.aspx
Collaboration with State of Alaska Division of Elections

The State of Alaska Division of Elections maintains the voter registration database. The Municipality of Anchorage relies on state voter records from this database to confirm voter eligibility and to order the correct number of ballots needed in each election.

Vote by mail elections depend to an even larger degree on precise voter data because all eligible voters receive ballot materials at their mailing address of record two to three weeks before Election Day.

The Lt. Governor and the State of Alaska Division of Elections have been supportive of the Municipality of Anchorage’s efforts to implement vote by mail as demonstrated by the following:

- In March 2016, the MOA Vote by Mail project manager initiated discussions with State of Alaska Division of Elections IT about anticipated data needs.
- In October 2016, the Municipal Clerk’s Office and the State of Alaska Director of Elections teleconferenced with the Division of Elections about specific ways that both entities might collaborate to reduce costs and increase efficiencies.
- In February of 2017, the two agencies began defining the data sharing options for vote by mail and work started on delivering test data.
- In the summer and fall of 2017, the State of Alaska and the Municipality of Anchorage shared voter signatures, in a secure setting, to use in verifying the identity of voters that return voted ballots.

Further collaboration with the State of Alaska Division of Elections is anticipated both during the MOA transition to vote by mail elections and in future elections.

Technology and Equipment

Ballot Drop Boxes

Typically, in vote by mail elections, all eligible voters receive ballot materials at their mailing address of record two to three weeks before Election Day and they enjoy multiple options for returning their voted ballot materials. Those options include returning the ballots by mail or dropping them at ballot drop boxes or at accessible vote centers.

A number of jurisdictions nationwide use ballot drop boxes. The Municipal Clerk’s Office began in August 2015 to research the use and purchase of ballot drop boxes. A ballot drop box functions like a book return unit at a library but it is designed and built to include security features that resist tampering and vandalism.

The Municipal Clerk’s Office tested a ballot drop box at Fairview Recreation Center during the 2016 Regular
Municipal Election. The Municipal Clerk’s Office publicized the ballot drop box alternative to returning absentee ballots by mail by sending a letter to all registered voters in the Fairview area, presenting to the Fairview Community Council, posting information on social media platforms, and inserting a flyer about the ballot drop box in outgoing absentee by mail ballot packets.

The Fairview Recreation Center ballot drop box test was a success! By Election Day, April 5, 2016, 120 voters had opted to return their absentee by mail ballots via the ballot drop box.

In June 2016, the Municipal Clerk’s Office purchased additional Laserfab Vote Armor ballot drop boxes, bringing the total number of drop boxes planned throughout the municipality to twelve.

Four of the ballot drop boxes were put to use in the April 2017 Regular Municipal Election at Fairview Recreation Center, Clark Middle School, the Alaska Airlines Center at UAA, and Dimond High School. Over 300 voters returned their ballots via a ballot drop box. The Municipal Clerk’s Office – with advice from stakeholders and other engaged community members – followed a site selection process to identify locations with good lighting, government property ownership, excellent vehicular and pedestrian traffic flow, and, if possible, outdoor security cameras already in place.

The Municipal Clerk’s Office then sought and was granted permission to place the drop boxes for the 2018 vote by mail election at the following locations:

- **Loussac Library**, 3600 Denali Street
- **Anchorage School District Education Center**, 5530 East Northern Lights Blvd
- **Bartlett High School**, 1101 Golden Bear Drive
- **Clark Middle School**, 150 Bragaw Street
- **Dimond High School**, 2909 West 88th Avenue
- **Fairview Community Recreation Center**, 1121 East 10th Avenue
- **Service High School**, 5577 Abbott Road
- **South Anchorage High School**, 13400 Elmore Road
- **Spenard Community Recreation Center**, 2020 West 48th Avenue
- **UAA Alaska Airlines Center**, 3550 Providence Drive
- **Eagle River Town Center**, 12001 Business Blvd #123
- **Girdwood Community Center**, 250 Egloff Drive.
Anchorage Bowl Ballot Drop Box Locations
Vote by Mail Election Technology

The Municipal Clerk’s Office and the RDI Project Management team investigated the equipment and technology needed to begin processing vote by mail elections. As a result of the investigation, the RDI team developed three RFPs:

1. Inbound mail sorter and signature verification system,
2. Election management and ballot tabulation, and
3. Outbound mailing services.

The joint Municipal Clerk’s Office and RDI team immediately began focusing efforts on refining and issuing the first two RFPs. In September 2017, a printing and outbound mailing service was awarded the final contract.

Inbound mail sorter and signature verification system

The successful inbound mail and signature verification vendor was Bell & Howell. The equipment and services purchased through Bell and Howell include a Criterion Elevate high speed mail processing sorter and associated hardware, software and licenses; customizations; warranty, training, and support services; as well as project management.

A small crowd gathered for the sorter’s arrival at the MOA Election Center in August 2017. The sorter arrived in three large plywood boxes.

After uncrating the sorter, the Bell and Howell team got to work assembling the sorter.
When the sorter assembly was complete, the VBM team had the chance to take a closer look at the machine for the first time. The sorter has the capacity to sort 18,000 pieces of mail per hour!

**Election management and ballot tabulation**

Dominion Voting was selected to provide the election management and ballot scanning and tabulation systems.

In February 2017, Dominion Voting installed the Democracy Suite Election Management System and the ImageCast Central/ImageCast Adjudication mail ballot processing system, which can process up to 130 ballots per minute!

Trained election workers will place stacks of ballots into the scanner. The system automatically out-stacks ballots needing review to the ImageCast Adjudication workstation for resolution.

Schedule a tour of the Election Center for your organization. Call 907-343-4314 for more information.
In looking ahead to a future vote by mail election process, concerns arose about the adequacy of space in City Hall to accommodate the new technologies and equipment. Ultimately, it was decided a designated election processing space was necessary. After several site visits to other vote by mail jurisdictions, and scoping its own needs, the Municipal Clerk’s Office created a list of attributes desired and a search was undertaken for a suitable space, starting with checking the Municipality’s and the Anchorage School District’s property inventory.

Ultimately, the project turned to the private sector for space. The selected space, at 619 East Ship Creek Avenue, Suite 100, meets the current and future anticipated needs for election administration. There is 13,036 square feet of warehouse/office space, enough to house all of the MOA’s election functions. On November 15, 2016, the Anchorage Assembly approved a three-year lease. Negotiations with the building property manager were completed on December 20, 2016.

The selected space prior to improvements required some imagination!

The Election Center after a few coats of paint

Visitors will travel the “yellow brick road” through the Election Center

Thanks to Eagle Scout Candidate Ben Brandberry who managed the Yellow Brick Road project and other space improvements!
Election Center layout

The Election Center is designed with envelope and ballot security in mind. Ballots will travel in a logical fashion through the space.

1. All envelopes will remain on east side of the space (displayed in red) until verified.
2. Workers will move the verified envelopes to the ballot opening area (displayed in orange).
3. Workers will transport the ballots to the scanning and tabulation area (displayed in green).
4. Finally, workers will move scanned ballots to the secure storage area on the north side of the space immediately after the ballots are scanned.
• Internal procedure development is underway, looking at best practices in other vote by mail jurisdictions as well as using existing MOA election procedures.
• Accessible ramp to the public door is under construction.
• Staffing and election worker hiring plan is under development.
• A signature drive will amp up in October 2017.
• Signature review training for election workers will take place in the fall of 2017.
• Final site acceptance test on the Bell and Howell equipment is planned for October 2017. At the same time, Bell and Howell will train election workers to operate the equipment.
• A mock election, designed to test the processes and equipment, is planned for December 5, 2017.
• A broad-based education and outreach campaign to introduce voters to the vote by mail system is in progress and will continue through the April 3, 2018 Regular Municipal Election.
• Final tenant improvements to the space are in the works.
• Stakeholders will continue and expand on their engagement with the Vote by Mail project.

For more information about vote by mail elections, please visit the Anchorage Vote by Mail web page at http://www.muni.org/elections. You may also email elections@muni.org or call 907-243-VOTE (8683).