



ELECTIONS COMMITTEE MTG.
Wed., March 7, 2012; 9:30 a.m.
Item #1: 2011 Elections Activity Report
Action: Receive & File

March 7, 2012

To: Cam Gordon, Chair, Elections Committee
Members of the Elections Committee

From: Casey Joe Carl, City Clerk

Subject: 2011 Election Activity Report

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The past year was a busy period for the City's Elections Division, a unit within the Office of City Clerk. The following report highlights some of the more prominent activities which transpired and provides a synopsis of the work performed by the Elections Division.

Assessment of City's Elections Division

Early in 2011, the City Council undertook a comprehensive assessment of the City's Elections Division with assistance from an outside consultant with expertise in elections (see consultant's report submitted to Elections Committee on Wed., June 15, 2011). The assessment included a review of the three-tiered structure established by state law which included the complementary roles of the state, county, and city; the legal requirements governing the administration of elections; the scope of services provided by the City; as well as an analysis of its operation.

The assessment verified that there was no duplication of services provided between Hennepin County and the City of Minneapolis: the County is responsible for voter registration and the City is responsible for administering elections and providing direct service to voters. During election periods, the two agencies work in tandem to check and double-check ballots, program memory cards, and perform voting equipment logic and accuracy testing.

Based on that assessment, the City Council voted unanimously to retain the existing operating model and directed staff to strengthen partnerships with Hennepin County and the State of Minnesota.

2011: The Year of Special Elections

Almost immediately after concluding the professional assessment of the Elections Division, a series of unplanned special elections for Senate Districts 59 and 61 and for House District 61B. Because 2011 was the "off-year" in the four-year programmed election cycle, no funds were budgeted to cover election activities; consequently, staff requested and the City Council authorized the use of up to \$325,000 in contingency funds to cover the six unplanned, unfunded election events (three primaries and three general elections). A detailed chart of actual expenditures is provided on the next page for each of the three special elections.

Expense	Primary SD 61 9/13/2011	General SD 61 10/18/2011	Primary 59 & 61B 12/6/2011	General 59 & 61B 1/10/2012	Totals
Election Judges	17,618.19	18,700.07	30,567.32	32,149.66	99,035.24
Seasonal Staff	7,554.22	7,985.08	8,989.39	10,464.11	34,992.80
Staff Overtime	2,682.56	2,341.95	2,589.63	2,417.54	10,031.68
PA Test Publishing	24.10	23.33	24.10	24.10	95.63
AB return postage	38.25	39.55	69.75	86.65	234.20
Postage	288.08	66.61	490.15	307.50	1,152.34
Cell Phone use	230.00	230.00	370.00	370.00	1,200.00
Drayage (transp.)	1,575.00	1,575.00	2,394.00	2,394.00	7,938.00
Printing	798.31	154.08	415.48	124.28	1,492.15
Polling Place Rental	720.00	720.00	1,040.00	1,040.00	3,520.00
LWV Minneapolis	-	-	-	90.00	90.00
Misc.	153.52	152.34	192.51	149.18	647.55
Radio/Swift Reach	406.96	406.96	706.08	706.08	2,226.08
School Overtime	122.50	140.00	148.75	323.75	735.00
Supplies	140.84	83.57	68.95	64.05	357.41
Totals	\$32,352.53	\$32,618.54	\$48,066.11	\$50,710.90	\$163,748.08

Another way to express these expenditures in a high-level summary is as follows:

Issue	Funds Requested	Funds Authorized	Funding Used	Funds Remaining
SD 61 (Prim. & Gen.)	\$200,000	\$200,000	\$64,971.07	\$135,028.93
SD 59 & HD 61B (Prim. & Gen.)	\$125,000	\$125,000	\$98,777.01	\$26,222.99
Totals	\$325,000	\$325,000	\$163,748.08	\$161,251.92

As these charts show, the consolidation of election activities for Senate District 59 and House District 61B on the same dates in December 2011 and January 2012 resulted in significant cost-savings that were unanticipated at the time the funding request was made. As a consequence, we were successful at bringing all three special elections in for about 50 percent less than originally calculated.

Lessons Learned

Although the special elections created an additional burden on the Elections Division, they did provide the team with an opportunity to re-evaluate our internal processes with an eye toward streamlining, consolidating, and improving our operations in advance of the planned 2012 Presidential Election. Some of the process and supply improvements that were made as a result of the special elections in 2011 include:

- Improved notification processes for governmental and public sector partners with respect to election night activities and state-prescribed restrictions;
- Improved procedures and documentation to issue, receive, accept, and process absentee ballots, including better training for seasonal staff;
- Improved training and related materials for election judges, in accordance with state law, about who is and is not allowed within a polling place, specific roles, and prohibited activities;
- Improved opening and closing checklists for polling places to expedite efficient set-up and take-down processes on Election Day; and

- Tightened procedures for return of election materials on Election Day and refined our internal processing of these materials to increase efficiency and decrease the time spent processing these materials.

We are anxious to apply these improvements and other “lessons learned” to the 2012 Presidential Election, which has been (and is anticipated to be) the most significant event within the planned four-year election cycle.

City Employees as Election Judges – Revised/Improved Procedures

During the special elections in 2011, some concerns were raised with respect to existing processes used to deploy City employees as election judges. Initial research showed inconsistent practices in prior years. As a result, the Clerk’s Office cooperated with the City Attorney’s Office and the Human Resources and Finance departments on a review of employment practices related to the use of City employees who serve as election judges for the City of Minneapolis. There are several federal and state laws which must be factored into a new policy and related procedures. The goal is to clarify the exact legal provisions that dictate how compensation for time worked as an election judge may be made and to update the relevant administrative procedures and forms that are used. We plan to have the new policy and procedures completed; fully vetted with department heads, supervisors and management, and represented labor groups; and implemented well in advance of the Presidential primary in August 2012.

Lease Agreement for Elections Warehouse

With assistance from Greg Goeke and his team in the Finance Department’s Property Services Division, we negotiated a new contract with Mid-City Plaza Partnership (Platinum Properties Group, Inc.) for continued warehousing space at property located at 724B Harding Street NE Minneapolis through April 30, 2017. Our partners in the Property Services Division were successful in negotiating a reduced base rental amount calculated by square footage, from \$5.70 to \$5.14. The Property Services Division assures us that a better, lower-cost alternative does not exist.

The existing warehouse—which will now be available to us through first quarter of 2017—meets all of the Elections Division’s operating needs, which includes storage space for:

- Elections equipment, such as ballot counters, AutoMARKs, ballot boxes, and voting booths;
- Polling place supplies;
- Space for the preparation and testing of voting equipment;
- A dedicated loading dock;
- An attached training room, which is used for election judge training;
- Storage of voted ballots and other election-related records that must be retained by state law; and
- Supplemental storage space for the City’s Records & Information Management Program, also a part of the Office of City Clerk.

Professional Services Agreement with Special School District No. 1

The Elections Division has drafted a new, four-year professional services agreement for the provision of election services by the City of Minneapolis for the Minneapolis Special School District No. 1 Board of Directors. That draft agreement would extend the long-standing contractual relationship between the City and the School Board whereby the City’s Elections Division serves as the “school district clerk” for the purposes of administering elections for the School Board. The draft agreement was submitted in November 2011, and will be presented to the School Board for formal action at the Board’s regular meeting on March 13, 2012.

The new, draft agreement –covering years 2012-2015—includes a 40 percent increase in payments from the School Board to the City of Minneapolis, based on the cost-sharing formula approved by the Minnesota Secretary of State. The School Board’s payments are based on a “go-forward” basis for costs incurred during the previous four-year term. Thus, the increased costs for the proposed 2012-2015 agreement are based on actual expenses incurred by the City during the four-year term of 2008-2011. There are several key factors that have driven cost increases during the last four years. The single greatest factor is the increase in ballot inches actually used. The School District went from an average of 8.5 inches (or approximately 7.45 percent of the ballot) in 2004 and 2006, to 26.75 inches (or approximately 14.68 percent of the ballot) in 2008 and 2010, or a little more than a 50 percent increase in total ballot inches actually used. That increased usage was driven largely by (1) the 2008 Strong Schools Referendum and (2) the 2008 Establishment of Election District Question. In 2010, an ongoing increase in ballot inches is the result of adding 6 district offices and increasing the total School Board members from seven to nine.

Based on that 40 percent increase, the new agreement—if approved—will see the School Board’s payments increase to a total of approximately \$104,481 per year, for a total of \$417,924 during the four-year period covering 2012-2015. While the School Board’s expenses have increased, it is important to note that the City’s Elections Division has worked diligently to minimize or contain costs whenever possible. This has included the following:

- Reduced personnel in the Elections Division of the Office of City Clerk, eliminating two positions since 2008;
- Implemented flexible staffing levels at polling places according to voter turnout and achieved a savings of \$10,000 per election by releasing election judges early from polling places within mandated staffing levels; and
- Promoted volunteer service by election judges, resulting in a savings of between \$20,000 to \$30,000 per election.

The Elections Division is also pursuing other cost containment efforts, including the consolidation of election precincts as approved in the department’s 2012 approved budget.

Improved Polling Place Accessibility

The Elections Division has continued to focus on improving polling place accessibility, using City funds and grant funding from the Secretary of State’s Election Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities (EAID) grant program. Through 2010, a total of four locations were improved using grant funds. In 2012, an additional eight polling places have already been approved for EAID funding. Using that grant funding, the Elections Division will wire and install automatic door openers at the eight identified polling places. Two additional locations will be improved using City-budgeted funds. Collectively, this work will improve the overall accessibility of a total of fourteen polling places across the city. The total grant funding that has been awarded and used over the past six years is shown in the following chart.

Year	Number of Improved Polling Place Locations	Total Amount Awarded	Actual Amount Received & Used
2007-08	1	\$6,000	\$1,455.25
2010	3	\$18,000	\$14,919.23
2012	8	\$32,000	TBD*

Contracts to complete these eight improvements will commence after the City Council has approved new polling places.

New Voting Equipment

Hennepin County is coordinating with all its cities on the purchase of new voting equipment, likely as part of the Fiscal Year 2013 budget process. The last equipment purchase was made in 2000, so the current equipment has been in use for just over a full decade. The need to purchase new equipment sparks a few key issues.

The first issue, of course, is financing. In 2000, Hennepin County financed the capital purchase of the voting equipment and the cities were responsible for equipment storage and annual maintenance costs. In December 2011, the Hennepin County Elections Office convened a workgroup with city clerks to develop recommendations regarding the proposed purchase of new voting equipment. While it is possible a similar arrangement could be reached comparable to the purchases made in 2000, it is also possible that the cities may need to finance the purchase of new voting equipment. Based on this scenario, some cities have submitted capital requests equal to \$5,000 per precinct in 2013. Given that the City of Minneapolis will be reducing its total precincts to 117, and including a small reserve of additional machines for contingency purposes, this would equate to roughly \$645,000—if the City were to proceed with the purchase of voting equipment on its own. Given the advantages of consolidating equipment purchasing through the County, the City of Minneapolis has supported following the split between the County and its cities in 2013, whereby the County would debt-finance the purchase and the cities would pay for storage and annual maintenance.

The second issue for Minneapolis is the need to acquire and deploy voting equipment that meets our unique operating needs for Ranked Choice Voting (RCV). During 2011, the City Clerk and members of the Elections Division, along with our partners in the Hennepin County Elections Office, attended and participated in a number of vendor demonstrations. While no vendor currently has a system which has attained the required federal certification that meets the needs of Minneapolis, we are continuing to collaborate closely with Hennepin County to identify workable solutions. Meantime, as we continue working with the vendor community on solutions, the Elections Division will be reviewing its successful hand-count methodology, which was deployed in 2009, in order to be prepared for a similar process in 2013, should equipment not be available before then.

2012 Redistricting: Wards, Districts, and Precincts

The entire Clerk's Office has been actively engaged in the 2012 redistricting process. However, due to its responsibility for administering elections, the Elections Division has had additional and special burdens in providing professional support to this effort. On February 21, the special redistricting panel appointed by the Minnesota Supreme Court published its plan for new congressional and state legislative boundaries, which will impact local redistricting efforts. The Charter Commission/Redistricting Group has completed two of its required four public hearings on its proposed redrawn ward and park district boundaries. The proposed ward and park district boundaries have been posted to the City's website for broader public accessibility, and a number of additional communications strategies have been undertaken by the Charter Commission/Redistricting Group to increase broad community awareness and participation in this important effort.

Under state law, local boundaries must be established within sixty days of the state's redistricting plan, or by no later than Tuesday, April 3, 2012, which is nineteen weeks prior to the scheduled date of the August Primary. Thus, the Charter Commission/Redistricting Group is targeting the completion of its work by Monday, March 26, which gives the City Council only a few days to complete its work to draw new precinct boundaries. The Council must adopt the new precinct boundaries by April 3rd; we are targeting that formal action to occur as part of the Council's regular meeting on Friday, March 30, 2012.

Assistant City Clerk – Director of Elections & Information Management

With assistance from the Human Resources Department, the vacant Assistant City Clerk position was restructured to include broader management responsibilities as well as direct accountability for three operating units within the Clerk's Office: elections administration, records and information management, and the document solutions center. The position is a direct report to the City Clerk, and is a part of the three-person management team for the entire legislative department, which includes the City Council and the Office of City Clerk.

The City received a number of qualified candidates, but narrowed that list to eight candidates who were selected for a first round of interviews with a panel that included: Assistant City Clerk Tina Sanz; Velma Korbel, Director, Department of Civil Rights; Peter Ginder, Deputy City Attorney; and Virginia Gelms, Deputy Director, Hennepin County Elections Office. Based on the results of that first round of interviews, three individuals were selected for a second interview, which was conducted by a panel that included: Council Member Cam Gordon, Chair, Elections Committee; Susan Segal, City Attorney; and Rachel Smith, Director, Hennepin County Elections Office. In addition, each of the top three candidates was interviewed by the City Clerk.

It is expected that an offer will be extended later this week, which will be communicated separately to the City Council. Pursuant to the City Charter, the appointment of an Assistant City Clerk is subject to the confirmation of the City Council, and the City Clerk will be submitting a formal request for action through the proper committee in the next cycle.

Recognition of Elections Division Staff

The City of Minneapolis and her residents have been well-served by the team in the City's Elections Division. Dani Connors-Smith, Carol Strong, and Judy Schwartau have demonstrated a strong commitment to protecting the integrity of the election process and to ensuring free and fair elections for all residents. Their passion and dedication are readily apparent.

Slightly less obvious is the depth of experience and education that these professionals bring to the team. Ms. Connors-Smith and Ms. Schwartau have attained their professional designations as Certified Election & Registration Administrators (CERA) by the National Association of Elections Officials, and Ms. Strong is pursuing that certification now. Additionally, Ms. Connors-Smith is a Minnesota Certified Municipal Clerk. Collectively, these three employees hold a total of four bachelor's degrees. Given their extraordinary work on behalf of the City, I wanted to offer my own sincere thanks to and appreciation for each of them. The work that was achieved in the past several years—but particularly in 2011—would not have been possible without them.