

October 25, 2007

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Disability Advisory Committee, Meeting Minutes, October 25, 2007

The Disability Advisory Committee met on October 25, 2007 at 1:00 pm at the Cowlitz County Administration Building Conference Room B.

Attendees were:

Kristina Swanson, Cowlitz County Auditor
Caroline Myers, Elections Supervisor
Sunnie Smith, DisAbility Resources
Audrey Jolley, DisAbility Resources
Maurine Coon, LCOD/LCCB
Judy Chamberlin, DisAbility Resources
Sharon Weinhold, Voter Outreach Coordinator

Absent were:

David Lord, Protection and Advocacy System
Mike Freeman, National Federation of the Blind
Geri Rister, the ARC
Mary Putka, League of Women Voters
Karla Black, DisAbility Resources

The agenda used for the meeting follows:

- 1- AutoMARK Voting
- 2- Curbside Ballot Boxes
- 3- Election Expo
- 4- Accessibility Meetings, Report Out by Sunnie
- 5- Disability Advisory Committee Plan to Improve Accessibility
- 6- Other Discussion

AutoMARK Voting.

The committee members were invited to bring their ballots to the meeting and test the AutoMARK. Several members marked their ballot on the AutoMARK in past elections; others had not. Maurine and Audrey marked their ballots on the AutoMARK and gave their impressions of it. Both agreed it was easy to use. Audrey had tested the HART system and said the AutoMARK is more user friendly than HART.

We discussed how we could encourage others to use the AutoMARK. Audrey said she would contact Amy Walden and encourage her to try the AutoMARK. Audrey also said LCC was focusing more on “challenged students”, and suggested we contact Student Support Services to see if we could demonstrate the AutoMARK.

Curbside Ballot Boxes.

A report was given on the status of the curbside ballot drop boxes. The purpose of the ballot boxes is to provide voters another convenient way to return their ballot, and to give persons with disabilities, especially those that are drivers, a way to return their ballot without leaving their vehicle.

The ballot boxes were used for the first time during the 2007 Primary. One-third of all ballots were returned using the drop boxes. Use has increased during the General Election, with 42% of the ballots returned using the drop boxes to date.

We plan to modify the Longview curbside ballot drop box to make it more accessible voters walking in the park. The plan is to lay cement from the sidewalk to the ballot box and to open the sidewalk side of the box. Sunnie suggested it would be easier for persons with disabilities to vote if they could place their ballot in the box without having to use their hands to open anything. Carolyn said she would contact the maintenance people to see if that could be done.

Election Expo. A flyer for the “Election Expo” was distributed to the members. The Election Expo will be held on October 30. While the Elections Office is always open to the public, the purpose of the Expo is to give legislators and the public an opportunity to tour the elections office and walk through the election process. Kris Swanson and members of the elections staff will be conducting the tours and discussing the election process. Advisory Committee members were invited to attend.

Accessibility Meetings.

Sunnie Smith reported on a meeting she attended at the Secretary of State’s Office in Olympia. She said they discussed the Accessible Voting Grant Program, which is funded at \$1.7M for accessibility improvements. There will be two grant cycles in 2008, with applications for the first cycle due by January 15, 2008. The priorities are for continued ADA access requirements and programs that will improve the administration of elections for voters with disabilities for the 2008 elections.

Kris Swanson asked if the committee members had any suggestions on possible grant submissions for Cowlitz County. Members discussed several potential areas that should be considered for grants. They included:

- Creating audio CDs of the Local Voter’s Pamphlets and distributing them to interested parties. Audrey suggested the School of the Blind in Seattle might be able to help us with the audio CDs.
- Buying media exposure (local TV, radio, print ads) to market accessibility initiatives and equipment.

Kris thought these were good areas to pursue. She asked members to submit any other ideas they have to the Elections Office.

Sunnie also mentioned the Secretary of State's Office and David Lord, PAS, were very complimentary on the work of the Cowlitz County Disability Advisory Committee. They said we are an active committee with a good membership mix.

Disability Advisory Committee Plan to Improve Accessibility.

The Disability Advisory Committee Plan (attached) was presented to the members. The Plan is a compilation of Committee discussions, recommendations, and agreements.

The area of the plan that had the most discussion was the Outreach to Voters with Disabilities or how better to reach the people that would benefit. Audrey suggested demonstrations in a non visual fashion. She said people with disabilities might relate better to this approach and she would volunteer to demonstrate the AutoMARK in this manner. Maurine suggested we consider approaching the Retired Teachers Association and ask retired school teachers to volunteer to demonstrate or teach people how to use the AutoMARK. The members thought retirement homes were a good place to test this.

The meeting adjourned at 2:30 pm.

Sharon Weinhold
Cowlitz County Elections