

May 23, 2007

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

SUBJECT: Disability Advisory Committee, Meeting Minutes, May 23, 2007

The Disability Advisory Committee met on May 23, 2007 at the Cowlitz County Administration Building General Meeting Room.

Attendees were:

Kristina Swanson, Cowlitz County Auditor  
Sunnie Smith, DisAbility Resources  
Audrey Jolley, DisAbility Resources  
Sharon Weinhold, Voter Outreach Coordinator

Absent were:

David Lord, Protection and Advocacy System  
Maurine Coon, LCOD/LCCB  
Mike Freeman, National Federation of the Blind  
Geri Rister, the ARC  
Mary Putka, League of Women Voters  
Judy Chamberlin, DisAbility Resources  
Karla Black, DisAbility Resources  
Carolyn Myers, Elections Deputy

The agenda used for the meeting follows:

- 1- Introductions
- 2- Renovated Elections Office
- 3- AutoMARK at Ryderwood
- 4- Curbside Ballot Boxes
- 5- Panel on Accessibility
- 6- Outreach Opportunities for Primary/General Election

**Elections Office.** The remodel of the Elections Office is complete. The office has a front office and a ballot processing center for use during elections. The Elections Office is now accessible to persons with disabilities. The office moved from the second floor to what was previously a conference room on the first floor. The number of handicapped parking spaces, which are located adjacent to the building entrance closest to the Elections Office, was increased. Automatic door openers, new flooring that is easy to navigate, wider doors, a larger lobby, better lighting, and lower counters that are wheelchair accessible were added. The AutoMARK is now visible year around for marketing purposes and in a location that allows for privacy when voting.

**AutoMARK at Ryderwood.** In addition to having the AutoMARK available at the Cowlitz County Elections Office in the County Administration Building, we took the AutoMARK to Ryderwood for the Special Election in March. While several voters brought ballots that had already been voted, we did not get any votes on the AutoMARK. The attendees agreed that taking the AutoMARK out for elections is a great idea, but it will take time to make people aware of the AutoMARK and to get them comfortable with using it. The attendees thought we should not give up but continue to give voters the opportunity to see and test the AutoMARK.

**Curbside Ballot Boxes.** The Elections Office reported on their initiative to install curbside ballot boxes in the county. The plan is to install six ballot boxes, one each in Kelso, Longview Civic Circle, Longview West Side, Kalama, Woodland, and Castle Rock. The ballot boxes would allow persons with disabilities that are drivers, senior citizens, and all other voters to place their ballots in the ballot boxes without postage and without having to leave their vehicle. The ballot boxes will be gray (to differentiate them from the blue U.S. Mail Boxes), have a red sign on top saying Ballot Drop Box (to be removed between elections), and have a Cowlitz County logo and U.S. flag on the side. The ballot boxes would be permanent, clearly marked as ballot boxes, available 20 days before each election, and would be locked between elections. The ballots would be picked up daily or as needed. As of the time of the meeting, approval had been received from the Longview City Council to place a curbside ballot box on the Longview Circle. The Elections Office was working with the other locations to gain their approval. One ballot box had been ordered. Once that box is inspected and found to meet our needs, five more boxes will be ordered. The goal is to have the ballot boxes installed in June so they are available for the Primary and all future elections.

**Panel on Assessability.**

As part of a Secretary of States training event on May 22, there was a panel on Accessibility. Participants on the panel included the Thurston County Auditor and two members of the Thurston Disability Advisory Committee (Denise Colley and Michael Rogers), David Lord from WAMPAS, Sunnie Smith, and Sharon Weinhold. Topics of discussion included: What was it like to vote for the first time? What are the biggest challenges to voting for the disability community? Are counties providing accessible office/poll sites/voting locations? What are some creative ideas to provide accessibility? How do you find members to serve on your Disability Advisory Committee? How can we make members of the disability community a part of the elections process?

Some counties are still struggling with forming their Disability Advisory Committee. A major challenge for most counties is marketing accessibility and accessible voting devices, targeting the right people, and getting them to use the voting devices. The Secretary of States Office provided statistics for Washington State on the percent of the total population of people age 21 – 64 with a disability per the 2000 census. The statistics showed that for Washington State, 18% of the population had a disability; for Cowlitz County, the percent was 21% - 24%. The census definition of “disability” is “sensory disability, physical disability, mental disability, and self-care disability”.

## **Outreach Opportunities for Primary/General Election.**

Senior Lunch Program. The Elections Office has been invited to visit the senior lunch meal sites, give a 10 minute presentation about voting, and demonstrate the AutoMARK to the seniors that participate in the lunch program. The lunch program, run by CAP, provides meals each week in Longview, Kalama, Ryderwood, Castle Rock, Kelso, Woodland, Rosburg, Lexington, and Cathlamet. The Elections Office is working to schedule those presentations in the near future and offer the seniors the opportunity to vote on the AutoMARK during elections.

Retirement Homes/Senior Centers. The Elections Office plans to contact area retirement homes/senior centers, give a short presentation about voting, and demonstrate the AutoMARK to interested seniors. The plan is to build “relationships” with “interested” persons at each home/center and work with them to determine the best way to market the AutoMARK. The Elections Office will return during elections and give the seniors an opportunity to vote on the AutoMARK.

Reading Program. The Elections Office is researching ways to convert the Local Voters’ Pamphlet to audio. Suggestions were to convert a text file to audio for people with computer access or to create audio CDs for distribution to interested voters.

County Fair. The Cowlitz County Fair is August 1-4. We are looking for volunteers that would be interested in talking about voting independently and demonstrating the AutoMARK at the fair.

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