

MEMORANDUM

TO: Mayor Morones and Town Councilors
Alex C. Brown, Town Manager

FROM: Ann L. Mackie, Town Clerk

RE: Designating a Voting Convenience Center for next Election

DATE: October 7, 2014

For the past several years I have been following the progress of the use of Voting Convenience Centers (VCCs) for municipal and county elections across the state. In 2010 the City of Rio Rancho was the first municipality to establish the use of VCCs rather than using multiple polling places for each of their Council Districts. Many municipalities have adopted the use of VCCs since that time, including: Alamogordo, Albuquerque, Artesia, Carlsbad, Clovis, Farmington, Gallup, Hobbs, Las Cruces, Las Vegas, Rio Rancho, and Roswell. Our local voters have been voting at VCCs since 2012 for the Grant County elections.

For the Town's 2015 Election I recommend designating one (1) Voting Convenience Center rather than the two (2) Council District polling places for Districts 1 and 3. The VCC would be staffed by 4 or 5 poll workers and would have two (2) Autovote systems to provide ballots to the voters. We would also have (1) Autovote system at City Hall during the absentee and early voting period from January 27 to March 3, 2015 Election Day. The Autovote system is on a laptop that is programmed with all of the registered voters for the election and the Council District in which they are registered. It replaces the paper signature roster so voters will sign an electronic signature pad rather than a paper signature roster. As each voter presents themselves to vote, the poll worker will print the appropriate ballot for each voter. After the polls are closed the presiding judge will print a report of all the voters.

The tabulation of the votes will not change. The voter will insert their ballot into a vote tabulator machine, and the actual votes on the paper ballots will still be counted by a vote tabulator machine. The presiding judge will print the tapes after the polls close.

Justification:

The State of New Mexico Municipal Election Code (Section 3-8-10) allows municipalities to consolidate precincts and thereby use Voting Convenience Centers (VCC). VCCs allow voters to go to any center to cast their vote which is a great convenience to the voters since they do not have to determine their correct polling place for their specific precinct or district.

The largest advantage is that voters can present themselves at the VCC on Election Day to cast their vote and will not have to worry about which Council District they reside in and where the correct polling location is. During past elections we have had numerous voters go to the wrong polling place and they must be redirected to their correct polling place. We do not know how many actually make it to their correct polling place. Having a VCC would eliminate the confusion and frustration and hopefully increase voter turnout.

Furthermore, Grant County has used VCCs since 2012 and one of their locations is the Silver City Woman's Club. By also using the Woman's Club as our VCC it would be more consistent for voters.

One of the great advantages of using a VCC is that it will reduce the number of poll workers that are needed on Election Day. In the past several years it has been increasingly difficult to recruit qualified poll workers

for each polling place, even after increasing their wages. Requiring fewer poll workers for only 1 polling place will certainly remedy that problem.

In using the Autovote system, we would not have to overestimate and over-order ballots. We would only print a ballot for each voter that presented themselves to vote. Therefore, there would be no waste and the poll workers will not have to take the time to destroy the unused ballots after the polls close.

Using the Autovote system should also streamline the procedures for closing the polling site, and may result in the returns being provided more quickly.

Recommended site for VCC:

The Silver City Woman's Club at 411 Silver Heights Boulevard. This site has been used for many years by the Town as the polling location for District 1, and in the past several years it has been used as a VCC by the Grant County Clerk in the conduct of their elections. It is centrally located in town, easily accessible to all voters in all 4 Council Districts, and there is adequate parking.

Estimated Costs:

The estimated cost would be around \$7,000 for the equipment rental to do the Autovote system for the entire election. There will also be some small savings from the reduced number of poll workers and the cost of preprinted ballots. The funds have already been allocated in the Fiscal Year 2015 Budget.

Potential Problems:

While the technology connections at the Woman's Club have been tested, there is always a chance that problems can occur. We are required by law to order emergency ballots when we use technology solutions for voting, so voting can continue until the technology is restored.

Poll workers will need to be sufficiently technology-savvy to be able to use the Autovote system. The vendor that would supply the Autovote system will train the poll workers on how to use the system, and they will have a technician available at the VCC on Election Day.

Recommendation:

I have discussed the VCCs with other municipal clerks across the state, and all of them highly recommend using them because it makes it so much more simpler for the voter since they can go to any VCC to vote. They reported few problems because the vendor trains the poll workers on how to use the laptops with the Autovote system and they also provide technical support at the VCC on Election Day. The clerks had high praises for the Autovote system because a report can be printed after the polls close and the poll workers did not have to spend time destroying the unused ballots. I have also discussed the VCC and the Autovote system with our County Clerk and staff. They have used it since 2012 and have the same high praises.

I recommend designating a Voting Convenience Center with the Autovote system at the Silver City Woman's Club for the March 3, 2015 Regular Municipal Election for Councilors in District 1 and District 3. The Election Resolution will be for your consideration and approval during a November Council Meeting. Thank you.