



Legislation Text

File #: 17-0189, **Version:** 1

TO:

Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council

THROUGH:

Mark Danaj, City Manager

FROM:

Liza Tamura, City Clerk

George Gabriel, Management Analyst

SUBJECT:

Request by Mayor Pro Tem Howorth for a Debrief of the March 7, 2017 General Municipal Election (City Clerk Tamura).

RECEIVE AND FILE

RECOMMENDATION:

Receive and File the report which provides a debrief of the March 7, 2017 Manhattan Beach Consolidated General Municipal Election.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

On March 7, 2017 the City of Manhattan Beach held a regularly scheduled General Municipal Election. Contrary to previous standalone General Municipal Elections, this was a consolidated election administered, managed, and overseen by the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (RR/CC). In doing so, the City Clerk relinquished her role as the elections official and ceded her responsibilities to the RR/CC. At the March 8, 2017 City Council meeting, Mayor Pro Tem Howorth requested a debrief of the March 7, 2017 General Municipal Election. Staff has provided a report summarizing various factual aspects related to the election for informational purposes to the City Council.

FISCAL IMPLICATIONS:

No fiscal implications associated with the recommended action.

BACKGROUND:

On October 7, 2016, the County of Los Angeles notified the City Clerk of the potential for a Special Countywide Election to be held on March 7, 2017, which coincided with the City's General Municipal Election. In the letter received from Dean Logan, Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk, the County requested that Manhattan Beach consider an action to consolidate with the March 7, 2017 Special Countywide Election, and allow the Registrar-Recorder/ County Clerk to administer the election on behalf of the City. As a result, the City Council and City Treasurer candidates would then appear on the County's ballot. Mr. Logan's letter stated, "To minimize cost for the City and voter confusion associated with overlapping and/or concurrent elections, we are encouraging the City to

take action now to seek election services from the County.”

At the November 1, 2016 City Council meeting, the Manhattan Beach City Council adopted Resolution No. 16-0071, requesting the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors to consolidate the City’s General Municipal Election on March 7, 2017 if the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors decided to hold a Special Countywide Election.

On December 6, 2016 the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors approved and notified the City of Manhattan Beach that a special countywide election would occur. Therefore, the City Clerk proceeded with consolidating the General Municipal Election for three City Council seats and one City Treasurer seat.

On March 7, 2017 the City of Manhattan Beach held a regularly scheduled Consolidated General Municipal Election where three City Councilmembers and one City Treasurer were elected.

On June 29, 2017 City Clerk staff attended the “City Clerk’s Summit” provided by the RR/CC. The Summit provided the RR/CC an opportunity to discuss upcoming consolidated elections and solicit input from cities regarding the pros and cons of the March 7, 2017 election.

DISCUSSION:

As previously stated, the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (RR/CC) administered the March 7, 2017 General Municipal election. However, the City Clerk still took an active role in providing assistance to candidates, coordinating election information outreach efforts, and was as an intermediary to voters and the County.

Historically, the voters have been accustomed with the City administering all aspects of municipal elections. Knowing this, staff was proactive and initiated conference calls with the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk’s office. Topics of these calls included: public outreach, the “Weekend Early Voting” program, information in the County’s “Official Sample Ballot,” and content in the City’s “Voter Information Guide.”

For the purposes of this report, staff will focus on five key aspects of the election. These include: 1) Proactive outreach efforts the City made to educate voters, 2) Polling Location changes that took place, 3) Election Day observations, 4) Voter turnout and 5) Lessons learned from the consolidated election.

1. Proactive Outreach Efforts

The City strives to continually provide public outreach. For the March 7, 2017 Consolidated General Municipal Election outreach efforts began in November 2016 when the nomination filing period began. Outreach efforts continued throughout the election process and ended in April 2017 when the three newly elected City Councilmembers and one City Treasurer took the Oath of Office.

Below is a listing of the various communications mediums that the City Clerk’s Office prepared and disseminated to the public throughout the election.

Mailed Information

Upon City Council authorization to conduct a consolidated election with Los Angeles County,

there were two documents created to assist voters.

The first document was the County's "Official Sample Ballot" (Attachment #1) issued by the RR/CC. The second document was a "Voter Information Guide" (Attachment #2) issued by the City. The County's "Official Sample Ballot" included the listing of those candidates running for elected office. The City's "Voter Information Guide" also included the listing of those candidates running for elected office along with their candidate statement. The County's "Official Sample Ballot" did not include the candidate statements due to higher costs that were imposed on the candidates.

In totality, both mailings served as informative materials for voters to enhance their understanding of the election by providing polling place locations, voting instructions, important dates, candidate statements, ballot measure analysis, online election information, early voting opportunities, and other miscellaneous information.

Printed Information

Staff produced a combination of flyers, public notices (published in the Beach Reporter), and election banners to further disseminate election information in physical form. "Register, Learn, Vote" (Attachment #3) and "Every Vote Counts!" (Attachment #4) directed voters to the City's website for election related information. Additional flyers were created to educate voters of polling locations (Attachment #5), Election Day mobility options utilizing Dial-a-Ride and Downtowner (Attachment #6), and the newly created "City's Elections Hotline" (Attachment #7). Colored hard copies of the flyers were made available at all City facilities and community events leading up to the election (in addition to being posted on the City's website).

Per California Election Code Section § 12112, a "Notice of Election" and "Notice of Nominees" is required to be published once in the City's adjudicated newspaper (The Beach Reporter). To ensure that the public was kept fully informed, the City published multiple ads and notices in the Beach Reporter:

- "Notice of Election" under Legal Notices on November 3, 2016 (Attachment #8)
- "Notice of Election" as a quarter page ad on November 10, 2016 and December 1, 2016 (Attachment #9)
- "Notice of Nominees" under Legal Notices on January 19, 2017 (Attachment #10) and February 23, 2017 (Attachment #11).

Consistent with precedent for previous municipal elections, banners were hung at two intersections: 1) Sepulveda Boulevard and Marine Avenue; 2) Highland Avenue and 36th Street. Both banners were visible for three weeks prior to the election. The banners identified the election date and encouraged residents to vote.

In addition, the following documents were available at all City facilities: voter registration forms, vote-by-mail applications and "Weekend Early Voting" flyers (Attachment #12).

Digital Information

The City's website, www.citymb.info, was a digital public information portal for all information related to City elections (past and present). The homepage slideshow functioned as an evolving forum of content and was consistently updated as information became available (Attachment

#13).

Staff created an elections dedicated webpage, www.citymb.info/elections, and a one-click redirect to the elections page from the City's homepage. Information and features made available from the City's elections page (Attachment #14) included:

- Background information on the City's decision to consolidate the municipal election with Los Angeles County (SB 415)
- List of Candidates that pulled nomination papers
- Link to the County's website to register to vote online
- Link to the County's website to register as a "Vote-by-Mail" voter
- City's "Voter Information Guide"
- County's "Official Sample Ballot"
- List of Candidate Forums
- Link to the Candidate Forum video held at City Hall
- Polling Locations Interactive Map
- Link to the County's website for "Weekend Early Voting"
- List of Election Notices

The City also sent four email notifications (known as "e-notifications") to subscribers of the emails listserv. The four subjects e-notified included:

1. Nomination period opening for City Council and City Treasurer Candidates
2. Vote-by-Mail ballot drop-off location available at City Hall
3. Updated list of Polling Locations
4. Invitation to residents to watch election night results at City Hall.

In addition, Mira Costa High School's PTA sent an email via the "Mustang's Newsletter" to subscribers on March 6, 2017. The email informed recipients that the polling locations at Pacific Elementary School and Manhattan Beach Middle School had been relocated.

The City also utilized a free digital advertising opportunity offered by the "Downtownner." For a period of three weeks prior to the election, the "Downtownner" included the "Register, Learn, Vote" flyer (Attachment #3) in their slideshow of advertisements in the Downtownner vehicles.

As of July 2017, Fair Political Practice Commission campaign filings and conflict of interest filings are now available for public review on the City's website. Staff will continue to explore transparency opportunities and continue to make election documents readily available.

Social Media Information

The City of Manhattan Beach has a large following on social media and staff has made it a priority to use social media to communicate with the public regarding City business. Excluding the Manhattan Beach Police Department's social media accounts, the City had an approximate total of 13,000 social media followers at the time of the election.

From November 23, 2016 until March 7, 2017 (Election Day), the City posted a total of 29 election related posts on Facebook (Attachment #15), Twitter (Attachment #16), and NextDoor (Attachment #17).

Event Attendance

Prior to the March 7, 2017 election, staff was present at events and meetings within the City to further educate voters on resources available and to encourage voters to participate in the election:

- Farmers Market, January 31, 2017
- Manhattan Beach Residents Association Candidates Forum, February 2, 2017
- American Martyr's Church Candidates Forum, February 9, 2017
- Manhattan Beach Older Adults Candidates Forum, February 16, 2017
- Manhattan Beach PTA Candidates Forum, February 24, 2017

At these events, staff handed out flyers, the City's "Voter Information Guide," responded to election questions, and educated voters on the variety of resources available on www.citymb.info/elections.

2. Polling Place Changes

The Los Angeles County Registrar Recorder/County Clerk designated the polling places for the March 7, 2017 General Municipal Election. In doing so, the County was responsible for selecting locations, appointing poll workers, and ensuring compliance with state and federal laws.

For this past election, the County secured over 2,500 polling locations throughout Los Angeles County. Of the 2,500 polling places, six locations were secured for the City's seven precincts established by the Los Angeles County Registrar Recorder/County Clerk.

An issue raised during the March 7, 2017 General Municipal Election was the change in polling place locations for two precincts after the County's "Official Sample Ballot" and the City's "Voter Information Guide" were printed and mailed. Officials from the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk indicated that there were 69 polling location changes that took place throughout the election. In Manhattan Beach, there were two polling location changes made due to cancellations from the facilities referenced below:

- 1) **Precinct 4100017A** - Changed from Pacific Elementary School to a residence located at 817 North Dianthus, and
- 2) **Precinct 4100048A** - Changed from Manhattan Beach Middle School to Aviation Park (located at 1935 Manhattan Beach Blvd, Redondo Beach, CA 90278).

For the purposes of this report, below is a breakdown of the timing of events that led to the polling place changes, as provided by the Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (RR/CC).

Precinct 4100017A

- **02/08/17** - Pacific Elementary School contacted RR/CC and cancelled as a polling place citing security concerns.
 - RR/CC secured a new polling location at a residential property at 817 North Dianthus Street.
- **02/22/17** - RR/CC provided update to the City of Manhattan Beach City Clerk on this issue.

- **02/28/17** - RR/CC mailed postcards to all voters in the precinct notifying them of their updated polling location.
- **03/01/17** - RR/CC conducted “Robocalls” to all voters in the precinct informing them of the change.
- **03/07/17** - RR/CC posted signage at cancelled location directing voters to the new location.

Precinct 4100048A

- **02/24/17** - Manhattan Beach Middle School contacted RR/CC and cancelled as a polling place citing security concerns.
 - RR/CC secured a new polling location at Aviation Park in Redondo Beach, CA.
- **02/28/17** - RR/CC mailed postcards to all voters in the precinct notifying them of their updated polling location.
- **03/01/17** - RR/CC conducted “Robocalls” to all voters in the precinct informing them of the change.
- **03/05/17** - RR/CC provided update to the City of Manhattan Beach City Clerk on this issue.
- **03/07/17** - RR/CC posted signage at cancelled location directing voters to the new location.

To supplement the RR/CC’s efforts, the City Clerk’s Office conducted additional outreach to inform voters. In both instances, the revised polling location map was distributed to City facilities, posted to the City’s website, e-notified, and social media messages were posted on Facebook, Twitter, and NextDoor.

Staff prepared “Notice of Polling Location Change” flyers and distributed copies to the administrative offices of Pacific Elementary School (Attachment #18) and Manhattan Beach Middle School (Attachment #19).

Staff also created and placed signs at Manhattan Beach Middle School (Attachment #20) informing voters of the polling location change to Aviation Park. Directional signage was then placed at Aviation Park directing voters from the street to the new polling location (Attachment #21). Efforts to provide additional directional signage was deemed necessary and important due to the new polling location being relocated outside of City limits.

3. Election Day

On Election Day, City Clerk staff arrived at City Hall at 6:00 AM to answer potential phone calls from voters prior to the polls opening at 7:00 AM. The City Clerk then visited the polling places and offered assistance.

Throughout the day, staff received approximately 35 calls at City Hall regarding election related questions, comments, and concerns. Of the 35 calls, staff grouped these calls into three categorical observations. Below is a breakdown of each observation and the applicable staff response.

Observation #1 - Polling Place for Precinct 4100048A was relocated to a location outside of city limits, at Aviation Park.

Staff Response - Prior to Election Day, staff updated the City’s website, posted on social media, sent an e-notification to subscribers. On Election Day, staff placed signage at Manhattan Beach Middle School, and placed directional signage leading to Aviation Park.

Observation #2 - Staff received reports from voters regarding Precinct 4100048A indicating they were being turned away due to poll workers stating the polling location was only for Redondo Beach voters and not Manhattan Beach voters.

Staff Response - Staff filed an observation report with the RR/CC at 9:30 AM informing them of what was being reported. The RR/CC escalated the observation to the RR/CC staff polling place manager and within the hour poll workers were informed that the polling place was intended for Manhattan Beach voters.

Observation #3 - Polling Place for Precinct 4100027A was difficult to locate due lack of signage being visible at entrance of the Manhattan Senior Villas.

Staff Response - Staff filed an observation report with the RR/CC at 8:45 AM. City Clerk and Public Works staff placed additional directional signage at the entrance of the Manhattan Senior Villas (Attachment # 22).

As an FYI, other calls included, 1) "Where do I vote?" 2) "Until what time are the polls opens?" and 3) "Where can I drop-off my Vote-by-Mail ballot?"

4. Voter Turnout

Voter turnout for the March 7, 2017 Consolidated General Municipal Election (Attachment #23) increased compared to the previous four general municipal elections. Voter turnout was 28.6%, up from 19.4% at the last general municipal election in 2015. Below is a list of the voter turnout percentages for all General Municipal Elections from 2009 to 2017.

- 2017 Manhattan Beach General Municipal Election - 28.6 % (Consolidated)
- 2015 Manhattan Beach General Municipal Election - 19.4 % (Standalone)
- 2013 Manhattan Beach General Municipal Election - 21.8 % (Standalone)
- 2011 Manhattan Beach General Municipal Election - 21.4 % (Standalone)
- 2009 Manhattan Beach General Municipal Election - 24.0 % (Standalone)

For the most recent election, staff has provided an additional list of voter turnout by precinct (Attachment #24).

- Precinct 4100012A (Manhattan Beach Library) - 29.6 %
- Precinct 4100017A (Residence - 817 N. Dianthus) - 30.7 %
- Precinct 4100025A (National Guard Armory - Orange Table) - 30.9 %
- Precinct 4100027A (Manhattan Senior Villas) - 31.6 %
- Precinct 4100034A (Residence - 1015 1st Street) - 28.3 %
- Precinct 4100048A (Aviation Park - Dance Room) - 26.0 %
- Precinct 4100050A (National Guard Armory - Green Table) - 22.9 %

5. Conclusion

The 2017 General Municipal Election was the City's first consolidated election with Los Angeles County since Senate Bill 415 passed the California State Legislature in 2015. Therefore, this election provided voters and staff the opportunity to understand how elections would function moving forward once the City transitions from March standalone elections of odd years to November consolidated elections of even years (starting in November of 2020).

The next scheduled elections will take place on March 5, 2019 (standalone for two City Councilmember seats), November 3, 2020 (consolidated for three City Councilmember seats and one City Treasurer seat), and November 8, 2022 (consolidated for two City Councilmember seats).

Moving forward, staff believes that communication with the RR/CC regarding polling places needs to be improved. As seen earlier in the report, there is room for improvement on notification from the RR/CC regarding the polling place changes that occurred. For Precinct 4100017A (817 N. Dianthus Street) the City Clerk was notified of the polling place change 14 days after the RR/CC received a cancellation notice and 14 days before Election Day. For Precinct 4100048A (Aviation Park), the City Clerk was notified of the polling place change 10 days after the RR/CC received a cancellation notice and 2 days before Election Day. Further complicating matters for Precinct 4100048A, the RR/CC chose a location outside of city limits without the City Clerk's input. If input was solicited, the City Clerk could have assisted in finding a new polling location within the City. Gaps in communication (from the RR/CC) need to be minimized to ensure voters are adequately noticed and the selection of polling places has the input of the City Clerk.

As a follow-up to a key discussion at the "City Clerk's Summit," hosted by the RR/CC, a potential solution suggested was to allow the City Clerk and the RR/CC to work together to select polling locations and poll workers. The RR/CC stated they would consider this matter but no decision has been made as of yet.

In summary, the RR/CC administered the March 7, 2017 General Municipal Election adequately and staff was generally satisfied with the service the RR/CC provided. It is also important to mention the County's efforts in designating two County liaisons. Both liaisons were very responsive to City staff throughout the election process. Staff believes the proactive outreach efforts and the general interest in the election from the community resulted in a higher voter turnout than previous elections. Regardless of whether the election will be consolidated with Los Angeles County in the future, staff will build upon these outreach efforts and will attempt to further enhance them to increase voter turnout.

PUBLIC OUTREACH/INTEREST:

After analysis, staff determined that public outreach was not required for this issue.

LEGAL REVIEW

The City Attorney has reviewed this report and determined that no additional legal analysis is necessary.

Attachments:

1. Los Angeles County's "Official Sample Ballot" Cover Page
2. City of Manhattan Beach "Voter Information Guide" Cover Page
3. "Register, Learn, Vote" Flyer
4. "Every Vote Counts" Flyer
5. Polling Locations Flyer
6. Election Day Mobility Options Flyer
7. Elections Hotline Flyer
8. Legal Notice of Election in Beach Reporter (November 3, 2016)
9. Quarter Page Ad in Beach Reporter (November 10, 2016 and December 1, 2016)

10. Legal Notice of Nominees in Beach Reporter (January 19, 2017)
11. Legal Notice of Nominees in Beach Reporter (February 25, 2017)
12. Weekend Early Voting Flyer
13. City of Manhattan Beach Website Homepage Screenshots
14. Elections Webpage Screenshot
15. Social Media Posts on FaceBook
16. Social Media Posts on Twitter
17. Social Media Post on NextDoor
18. Notice of Polling Location Change at Pacific Elementary School Flyer
19. Notice of Polling Location Change at Manhattan Beach Middle School Flyer
20. Pictures of Signage Placed at Manhattan Beach Middle School
21. Pictures of Directional Signage Placed at Aviation Park
22. Pictures of Signage Placed at Manhattan Senior Villas
23. Official Election Results Map
24. Voter Turnout Breakdown by Precinct