To: Mayor Alan Webber, City Manager Brian Snyder, City Attorney Kelley Brennan, and the members of the Governing Body

From: Matt Ross, Public Information; Yolanda Vigil, City Clerk

Date: Friday, March 23, 2018

Subject: 2018 Municipal Election After Action Review

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Note: This After Action Review is an initial step in improving the election experience for all parties involved moving forward. It is the result of a conversation involving the City Clerk, City Manager, City Attorney and Assistant City Attorney, and Public Information Officer.

Background

The change to Ranked Choice Voting (RCV) was approved by voters in 2008, mandated by the courts in the fall of 2017, and finalized by the Governing Body on December 20, 2017. Voting started January 30, 2018, when absentee-in-person voting opened at City Hall. Early voting began February 14, 2018, and Election Day was March 6, 2018.

The City's partners in the implementation effort included the Secretary of State, who oversees certification of election technology and vendors; Santa Fe County, which maintains voting machines and provides technical assistance and support during Early Voting and on Election Day; Dominion, the contractor who provided the Ranked Choice Voting tabulation software; and AES, the contractor who provided the On-Demand Ballot Printing systems.

To successfully administer the election, the City launched a two-tiered effort: an implementation arm would be centered in the City Clerk's office, and a voter education arm would be run out of the City's Public Information Office.

In the run-up to the election the City Clerk's office and the City Attorney's Office:

- Developed policy and supported the Governing Body through passage of ordinances for handling the various ballot iterations, design of a new RCV ballot, and adoption of 'rules of the road' for the conduct of the election,
- Worked with partners to learn the software system, certify voting machines, arrange training for city election staff, and manage their roles in the election process,
- Staffed two early voting sites, twelve Election Day voting convenience centers, and the absentee ballot board,
- Recruited and trained 113 poll workers; prepared dual-language scripts to answer the most common RCV questions,
- Tripled the number of voting machines and nearly doubled the number of on-demand ballot printing systems at each site,

- Initiated a process for dealing with an anticipated increase in spoiled ballots, and
- Contacted every voter in Santa Fe, including absentee voters, with information about Ranked Choice Voting, voting timelines, and instructions.

The Public Information Campaign:

- Developed branding and messaging for the citywide campaign,
- Produced a free-standing web resource and two video resources,
- Produced 54 creative pieces, including flyers, direct mail, infographics, posters, banners and other resources used by the city and partners,
- Hosted over a dozen public trainings and events, spread across all four City Council districts,
- Reached a Facebook audience of 127,000+,
- Reached 100,000+ impressions via Twitter,
- Generated more than 34 separate news stories on Ranked Choice Voting that topped out at over 2 million impressions,
- Built relationships with partners who conducted dozens of independent events, managed canvasses, and contributed heavily to public information efforts.

Community partners in the education effort deserve credit for working side-by-side with the city and adding additional value through tools that exceeded the City's capacity. FairVote, the Thornburg Foundation, Chainbreakers, the League of Women Voters, the Santa Fe Green Chamber of Commerce, the Santa Fe Chamber of Commerce, the Neighborhood Network, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, the Santa Fe New Mexican, KSFR, Santa Fe Trails, Santa Fe Senior Services, the individual campaigns themselves, and many, many others, all participated successfully in the outreach effort, making the education campaign a true community-collaborative effort.

In particular, FairVote's "Rank Your Brew" and other training events, and Chainbreakers' efforts to knock on 17,000 doors, having 5,000 conversations, stand out.

After Action Review

The review asked the following questions: What went well? And what needs work?

What went well?

Turnout was the highest it has been in recent years, with 38% of registered voters casting a ballot, compared to 27.4% in 2014.

An exit survey of approximately 1300 voters, conducted by FairVote in cooperation with the Thornburg Foundation and the University of New Mexico, found that:

- 81% of voters were very satisfied with the voting experience
- 70.65% support using RCV in future elections

Out of more than 20,000, only 52 ballots had a critical overvote error in the first round, so more than 99% of ballots were valid in that round. Less than 4% of ballots had become exhausted by the final round.

These are strong indicators that Santa Fe voters understood Ranked Choice Voting and were not deterred from participating by the change in systems.

The results when they came in were clear and perceived as legitimate and accurate. There was immediate data available providing transparency in each round. Raw data on the results was available about a week after the election.

Election Day ran smoothly, with fast-moving lines, little-to-no congestion and limited technical issues that were quickly handled. Poll workers were well-prepared and worked tirelessly to answer questions and engage in good customer service.

100% of the education campaign and Election Day materials were available in both English and Spanish, setting a new standard for language accessibility.

What needs work?

Challenge: The obvious disappointment on Election Night was the long delay before results were available. Winners were not announced until approximately 11:45pm.

Identified solution: Under Ranked Choice voting, results are determined by running votes through tabulation software on a server at City Hall. Votes are transferred from voting centers to City Hall on memory cards, where they are uploaded to the server. All the memory cards must be back at City Hall before the results can be run.

Staff identified laws that very strictly govern the chain of custody of the cards. The same person tasked with getting the cards back to City Hall must first complete the full process of

closing down their voting center. They reconcile the number of ballots cast to the number of ballots issued, the number of permits printed, and the number of spoiled ballots; print and verify the paper tapes from each machine; and fill out reports to formally document turnout and results. In some voting centers this takes longer than others, but the speed of the results is necessarily dictated by the pace at the slowest center.

Because of these requirements, and because it takes longer to close some voting centers than others, the final results could only be tabulated when the last card was delivered to City Hall. Once all the cards were in, the actual computation of results was completed in a matter of minutes.

With an ordinance change, a state election law change, or a Secretary of State rule change, the presiding judge at each location would be able to more quickly get their data into the hands of "deputized" officials, who could bring it back to City Hall while the presiding judge continues shutdown procedures. This change has the potential to shave hours off the time needed to deliver results to the waiting public.

Challenge: A large number of voters were concentrated at relatively few sites. This was one of a number of factors contributing to the delay of results.

Identified solution: More Early Voting Centers, paired with an aggressive push for Santa Feans to vote early. More early voters could lead to less crowding on Election Day. That would improve the voting experience and speed up the return of results.

Challenge: Nine voters' ballots were marked correctly but for various reasons could not be read by the machines. Neither city nor state election code lay out procedures for handling such ballots in a ranked choice election. Based on conversations with Dominion, city officials believed they would be able to hand-enter these small number of ballots into the software at the appropriate time. This turned out not to be the case. On Election Day, the Secretary of State identified and city election staff implemented a process of re-marking these ballots, under observation and on film, so they could be counted on a voting machine with a data card. The process took time and resources away from other priorities and, in one instance, delayed the close-out of an absentee voting machine past 7:00 pm.

Identified solution: There are three possible processes to address the issue. The State Legislature could update election laws to account for the differences between RCV and traditional elections; the Secretary of State could use her rule-making ability to address the gaps; or the City could introduce an ordinance that governs this process and ensure City staff members are prepared to implement it.

Conclusions

City staff should approach every election with the mindset that there is always a way to improve, and we have identified efficiencies and challenges that came up at each stage. That process of evaluation and improvement is only beginning with this review; it is not ending. Above all, we recognize the need to improve the speed with which we report results, and we will continue to identify and implement solutions.

When the Governing Body made the change to Ranked Choice Voting official on December 20th, concern was high that the abbreviated time frame could create problems large and small, from long lines at polling places and failures in untested equipment to the disenfranchisement of confused or frustrated voters. Many of those concerns were shared by staff and policy makers at the City, contributing to a desire from some to delay implementation of the new system until the 2020 election cycle.

But those fears proved largely unfounded. In a little more than two months, City elections and information staff planned and implemented a Ranked Choice Voting election and education effort—a first not only in Santa Fe, but in New Mexico—that resulted in clear and transparent outcomes, markedly high turnout, and little-to-no issues across two early voting centers and twelve Election Day sites.

Our top priority in every election, but particularly in this historic vote, is to ensure the accuracy and transparency of the outcomes. Acting quickly and decisively, our dedicated city staff, talented local marketing experts, and passionate community partners came together—in an effort that was truly community-wide—to ensure that the City of Santa Fe's first Ranked Choice Voting election was successful and error-free. It is a coalition of stakeholders we will continue to rely on as we take action on the lessons we learned and continue to deliver elections worthy of the trust of Santa Fe's voters.