

## Response to Questions on the FY 2014 Budget

**Request By:** Supervisor Gross

**Question:** Provide an initial high-level summary of the potential fiscal impacts of the Report of the Bi-Partisan Election Improvement Commission.

**Response:** In late November 2012, the Board of Supervisors established the Bi-Partisan Election Process Improvement Commission to review operations during the 2012 Presidential election and to identify improvements and efficiencies to ensure access and convenience for voters in future elections. On March 19, 2013, the Commission forwarded its report to the Board of Supervisors. Included in the report are numerous recommend improvements that will require additional funding to implement in FY 2014 and/or future years.

In anticipation of the Commission's report, one-time funding of \$720,000 which was provided as part of the FY 2013 Adopted Budget Plan for staffing and operating costs associated with the 2012 Presidential election was left in the agency's FY 2014 baseline Advertised budget. This funding has not yet been earmarked for a specific purpose within the Office of Elections in FY 2014 and is available to be used for any of the following recommendations the Board of Supervisors wishes to implement.

In addition, as part of the multi-year budget, an amount of \$6.0 million has been identified for FY 2015 to begin the process of replacing voting machine equipment. Additional details on this are included below. Further, it should be noted that in the FY 2015 multi-year proposal, an amount of \$575,000 and 7/ 7.0 FTE positions, including 2 election officer recruiters, an absentee voting position, a language coordinator, a supervisor, a technical position, and an administrative position are included as a placeholder pending recommendations from the Election Commission. None of these specific position increases were included in the Commission report and the determination of whether positions will be added to the Office of Elections will be considered as part of the FY 2015 budget development process.

### **Commission Recommendations with Estimated Fiscal Impact Range:**

- *Purchase of Additional Electronic Pollbooks (EPBs):* Currently, the County owns approximately 620 EPBs. In order to meet the Commission's recommendation of 3 per precinct with a reasonable cache of spares, an additional 280 pollbooks are recommended, at an individual unit cost of \$400-\$600 apiece. Thus the high end hardware cost for securing pollbooks similar to what is currently in use is approximately **\$168,000**. Currently, pollbook software licenses are covered by a State Board of Elections contract. This contract is due to expire this summer. While it is hoped that this cost will not be passed down to localities, in light of state budget challenges, this could add an additional \$100-\$200 per machine. In addition, given the Commission's recommendation for improved software, if alternative pollbooks are required, this would require significant additional funding. In future years, there will need to be planned equipment replacement (likely in the \$100-\$150K range annually) on an approximately four to five year cycle to replace pollbooks as they age.

- Scanning Voter Registration Applications and Absentee Applications:* There is already \$225,000 in the baseline FY 2014 budget for the multi-year process to scan/image voter registration applications into an electronic retrieval system. This was initially funded in the FY 2013 Adopted Budget; however, because of the challenges of the just concluded Presidential election, the front end work on this project will be commencing late in FY 2013. The FY 2013 funds will allow for the equipment purchase, start-up, and training-related costs. It was always anticipated that the significant work of scanning/imaging both existing records as well as all new ones would begin in FY 2014 and the baseline funding level will allow this project to proceed; however, the Office of Elections requested an additional **\$100,000** on top of the baseline funding to expedite the process of scanning the approximately one million existing voter registration records. It should be noted that additional future-year funding would be required to expand this project to cover absentee applications as well (as recommended by the commission). There are several challenges that absentee applications present that would likely need to be worked through prior to commencing the scanning/imaging of absentee applications.
- Explore Increased Election Officer Compensation:* The commission recommended that this be considered after investigating whether increased compensation would have a significant impact on recruiting additional Election Officers. The Commission noted that a survey of former election officers might provide useful information. For a frame of reference, in their FY 2014 budget submission, the Office of Elections stated that to stay competitive with peer jurisdictions, an increase in the range of 25-50 percent is needed (base pay needs to increase from the current \$100 to \$125 - \$150, chiefs need to receive \$250-\$300 for the day, and assistant chiefs would go up accordingly. In addition, rover pay should also be increased, though they are paid on an hourly basis so there would not be such a dramatic percentage impact.) For primary and general elections annually, this would require funding of approximately **\$400,000**; special and other non-routine elections would increase this cost.
- Acquire Sufficient Privacy Booths for Voting:* Using an estimate of an additional 10 per precinct, roughly 2,400 would be required. The question here is whether to purchase more of the cardboard tabletops currently in use with a very short shelf life at roughly \$10/each, or a total first-year cost of **\$24,000**; more elaborate cardboard booths at roughly \$20/each, or a first-year total of \$48,000; or whether to purchase hard-case booths, which cost roughly \$200 each, or \$480,000 total. The latter option would likely not be recommended as the increased durability comes at a significantly higher cost. It should be noted that the cardboard tabletop (first) option does not allow for those who would prefer to stand while marking the ballot, as the tabletop cardboard privacy booths are placed on whatever tables are available within the precinct.
- Ballot-On-Demand Printing at Satellite Locations:* This recommendation would enable satellite in-person absentee voting locations to print ballots on site as needed. It is not yet clear what would be required to implement, since different vendors have very different approaches to the ballot-on-demand technology. Each satellite location would likely require a minimum of two specialized machines. Just using one vendor's example, a total of sixteen machines for the satellite locations, plus two backups, at a cost of roughly \$10,000 apiece, results in a cost estimate of

approximately **\$180,000**. It should be noted that this is a *very* rough estimate. Another vendor's solution would result in a lower machine cost, but a higher number of machines needed. Many of these ballot-on-demand machines do not incorporate high speed printing, so print time may delay voters significantly if there are not sufficient machines. There may be some partial offsetting savings in ballot printing as enough ballots have to be printed and sent to each satellite location to account for whatever ballot may be needed depending on the address of the voter who shows up to vote absentee. Finally, the ballot-on-demand system would best be incorporated into the purchase of the one, integrated voting system, not only to ensure a system that will work well together, but also because it is more likely to result in a better price for the system as a whole than could be achieved by purchasing such a system separately.

It should be noted that the total cost of the five bullets above is \$872,000. Any portion of this amount can be supported with the \$720,000 which was originally provided as part of the FY 2013 budget for staffing and operating costs associated with the 2012 Presidential election which still remains in the agency's FY 2014 baseline budget.

#### **FY 2015/FY 2016: Replacement of Voting Machines:**

- Fairfax County currently uses a hybrid voting system consisting of an optical scan unit combined with two or more accessible direct recording electronic voting machines (DREs) for each precinct. The average lifecycle of DREs is 5-7 years. The DREs in use in Fairfax County were purchased 8 years ago, and additional units cannot be purchased as 2007 changes in Virginia law now require a voter verified paper audit trail. The existing DRE units were "grandfathered" but the law does not allow for the purchase of additional units. Moreover, the company is no longer in business, so even if state law changed, the County is unable to purchase enough additional units to meet voter demand.

The average lifecycle of optical scan equipment is 10-15 years. Some of the scanners in use in Fairfax were purchased new in 1996. The bulk of the scanners were purchased as used equipment in 2008 and the Office of Elections is uncertain how old these machines are. The optical scan system is able to last longer, but as long as the DRE system is being replaced it would be significantly preferable to buy one integrated system to be used throughout the County. Unlike the DREs, these scanners are likely to have quite a number of interested purchasers in a resale.

Whatever new system is procured by Fairfax County will be required by Federal law (Help America Vote Act of 2002) to contain an electronic solution that allows access for disabled voters, as well as those for whom English is not their primary language, to vote without assistance by another. It is anticipated that the new system should utilize electronically scanned ballots, and be an integrated system that is fully accessible to voters with disabilities. The Commission report recommended having the equipment purchased and in place in time for the November 2015 election, so that voters and Election Officers will gain experience using the new voting equipment before the next Presidential election in 2016.

In order to meet this timeline, funding would be needed in FY 2015/2016 to procure a new system. Until the bid process and negotiations are further along, it is difficult to give a specific cost total; however, the Office of Elections has estimated an initial

cost of \$10 - \$12 million, with some ongoing maintenance and contractual/licensing costs on top of that. Whatever amount for which the existing equipment can be sold will be used to partially offset these costs. As noted above, as part of the multi-year budget, an amount of \$6.0 million has been identified for FY 2015 to begin the process of replacing voting machine equipment. A similar amount will likely be required in FY 2016, depending on final specifications and negotiations.

**Other Commission Recommendations with Long Term Fiscal Implications:**

- *Voting Equipment Replacement Fund:* In order to mitigate the need for large one or two year totals to replace voting equipment, consideration should be given to establishing a Voting Equipment Replacement Fund, similar to those for vehicles. In order to calculate how much would be needed on an annual basis it would be necessary to know the anticipated life cycle of the equipment and the estimated cost of replacement at the end of that time period. For example if equipment had a ten year life cycle and the replacement cost at the end of that period was estimated at \$15 million, it would be necessary to put aside \$1.5 million per year for 10 years.
- *Increase Satellite Voting Times:* The main costs associated with this recommendation are staff costs and the main need is in Presidential election years; however there may be some minimal costs in FY 2014 if the decision is made to extend satellite voting hours in the fall 2013 elections.
- *Support Agency Costs:* Rapidly changing technology, legal requirements, space requirements, and communication needs in this field will likely require the support of the County's Department of Information Technology, County Attorney's Office, the Facilities Management Department, the Office of Public Affairs, and the Fairfax County Public Schools as well as other support agencies. Cost implications still need to be determined.