

Asotin County

2010 General Election

State of Washington



Conducted by:
The Office of the Secretary of State
Election Certification and Training Program

INTRODUCTION

The Washington State Legislature enacted legislation in 1992 mandating that the Office of the Secretary of State review county election procedures and practices. The Election Certification and Training Program was established within the Elections Division of the Office of the Secretary of State to conduct reviews and to provide for the certification of election administrators. In 2009, the Legislature altered the Election Certification and Training Program to require that each County Auditor's Office be reviewed at least once every five years. The Legislature also added a requirement that the Program conduct follow-up contact to verify that the County Auditor's Office has taken steps to correct the issues noted in the report.

The election review process is governed by RCW 29A.04.510 through 29A.04.590 and Chapter 434-260 of the Washington Administrative Code.

Pursuant to RCW 29A.04.570(1)(b), the Election Certification and Training Program conducted an election review in Asotin County during the 2010 General Election cycle. Kay Ramsay, Elections Program Specialist, represented the Election Certification and Training Program during the review. The Honorable, Elaine Johnston County Auditor participated on behalf of the - Asotin County Auditor's Office.

Both the reviewer and the Asotin County Elections Department approached the review in a spirit of cooperation. The department allowed the reviewer to thoroughly review and examine all aspects of the election processes. The staff provided documentation and materials during the review which greatly contributed to a successful examination process.

The purpose of this review report is to provide the Asotin County Elections Department with a useful evaluation of its election procedures and policies and to encourage procedural consistency in the administration of elections throughout the state. This review report includes a series of recommendations and/or suggestions that are intended to assist the Asotin County Elections Department in improving and enhancing its election processes.

The reviewer is statutorily prohibited from making any evaluation, finding, or recommendation regarding the validity of any primary or election, or of any canvass of the election returns. Consequently, this review report should not be interpreted as affecting the validity of the outcome of any election or of any canvass of election returns.

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OVERVIEW

Asotin County, created out of Garfield County on October 27, 1883, derives its name from a Nez Perce word meaning "Eel Creek.". It is part of the Palouse, a wide and rolling prairie-like region of the middle Columbia Basin. At 636 square miles, Asotin County is the sixth smallest county in the state. The county seat is located in the town of Asotin.

Asotin County has approximately 12,464 active registered voters, all of whom are part of the 9th Legislative District and the 5th Congressional District. The County Auditor is the acting Elections Supervisor and the only full-time person working elections. During an election cycle, a few seasonal, part-time helpers assist the County Auditor with ballot processing procedures.

The newly elected County Auditor, Darla McKay, took office January 2011. Formerly, her duties were primarily in payroll and accounting. Prior to assuming office, she had the opportunity to become somewhat familiar with the election process and attended some of the trainings offered by the Washington Secretary of State's Certification and Training Program.

Some of the same issues reported in the *2006 Primary Procedures Review of Asotin County* continue to be out of compliance with state law. Some issues noted in the review were acknowledged later in the Review Follow-up (2008) as corrected by the County Auditor's Office; however, the procedures are once again out of compliance.

The Asotin County Auditor's staff is dedicated and conscientious. The County Auditor uses personnel from other sections of the office, such as Licensing and Recording, to assist because of insufficient staffing in the elections department.

The Asotin County Auditor's Office has been under-staffed for many years. Limited staffing has made it extremely difficult for the County Auditor to devote the time necessary to develop a comprehensive, up-to-date Elections Procedures manual. Many of the election-related forms used by the Asotin County Auditor are out of date.

Lack of familiarity with the duties of County Auditor, poorly documented procedures, and a critically understaffed elections department make the in-coming Asotin County Auditor's job extremely challenging.

Some of the recommendations in this report require relatively minor changes in the county's procedures. The following recommendations and suggestions will improve and enhance the Asotin County's election procedures and policies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations identify areas in which the county is out of compliance with the Revised Code of Washington (RCW), the Washington Administrative Code (WAC), the Washington State Constitution, or Federal election law. The reviewer obtained information based on actual observation of a procedure, verbal explanation or written procedures. The reviewer provides a description of the county's procedure, a citation of the applicable law, and a recommendation based on the citation.

QUESTIONNAIRE TO CITIES, TOWNS AND DISTRICT

Procedure: The Asotin County Elections Department sends a questionnaire to all of the cities, towns, and districts in the county every year to obtain information necessary for candidate filing.

The questionnaire was not sent until March 8th, 2010. The questionnaire did not state when the response must be received.

Requirement: *WAC 434-215-005(1)states," Prior to March 1, the county auditor shall send a questionnaire to the administrative authority of each local jurisdiction for which the auditor is the candidate filing officer subject to the provisions of RCW 29A.04.321 and 29A.04.330. The questionnaire must be sent in the year the local jurisdiction is scheduled to elect officers. The purpose of the questionnaire shall be to confirm information which the auditor must use to properly conduct candidate filings for each office. The questionnaire should request, at a minimum, confirmation of offices to be filled at the general election that year, the name of the incumbent, and the annual salary for the position at the time of the filing period. Responses should be received prior to April 1 of that year so that the filing information can be compiled and disseminated to the public at least two weeks prior to the candidate filing period."*

Recommendation: The elections department must send the questionnaire by March 1 and request responses by April 1. It is not required that a questionnaire be sent on an annual basis to every jurisdiction; only to jurisdictions scheduled to have offices up for election in that year.

VERIFICATION NOTICE

Procedure: The Asotin County Auditor registers applicants to vote, even when a voter registration application is incomplete. A notice is then sent to the voter requesting the missing information. If, after 45 days, the voter has not returned the requested information, the voter's record is inactivated and purged from the database.

The notice used for this purpose does not provide a method for indicating missing U.S. citizenship information or include the applicant's declaration. It also fails to inform the applicant that the required information must be received by the elections office within 45 days.

Requirement: *RCW 29A.08.110 (1) states, "An application is considered complete only if it contains the information required by RCW 29A.08.010.*

(2) If an application is not complete, the auditor shall promptly mail a verification notice to the applicant. The verification notice shall require the applicant to provide the missing information. If the applicant provides the required information within forty-five days, the applicant shall be registered to vote as of the original date of application. The applicant shall not be placed on the official list of registered voters until the application is complete."

Recommendation: All required information must be received from an applicant *before* being placed on the voter registration rolls. The Asotin County Auditor must redesign the verification notice immediately to include: a place for the voter to confirm U.S. Citizenship if that is missing; include the applicant's affidavit; and inform the applicant that he or she must respond within 45 days in order to be registered to vote.

CONFIRMATION NOTICE

Procedure: When placing a voter on inactive status, Asotin County Elections Department sends the voter a confirmation notice postcard. The postcard requests that the voter fill in the necessary information and return it to the County Auditor.

The postcard states that if the voter does not return the card, verification of the voter's address may be required at the polls on Election Day.

The postcard does not inform the voter that if he or she fails to respond or vote in either of the next two federal elections, the voter's registration will be canceled.

The confirmation notice is not sent to all known addresses where a voter could possibly receive mail.

Requirement: *RCW 29A.08.635 states, "Confirmation notices must be on a form prescribed by, or approved by, the secretary of state and must request that the voter confirm that he or she continues to reside at the address of record and desires to continue to use that address for voting purposes. The notice must inform the voter that if the voter does not respond to the notice and does not vote in either of the next two federal elections, his or her voter registration will be canceled."*

29A.08.030 (4) states *"Confirmation notice' means a notice sent to a registered voter by first-class forwardable mail at the address indicated on the voter's permanent registration record and to any other address at which the county auditor or secretary of state could reasonably expect mail to be received by the voter in order to confirm the voter's residence address. The confirmation notice must be designed to include a postage prepaid, preaddressed return form by which the registrant may verify the address information."*

Recommendation: A statement must be added to the notice that states the voter's registration will be canceled if the voter fails to respond or vote "in either of the next two federal elections." References to "the polls" are confusing and must be removed.

Confirmation or verification of the inactive voter's address is not a prerequisite to voting and is not required by law. That statement must be removed from the notice.

The confirmation notice must be mailed to any known addresses where the voter could possibly receive mail.

The 2007 report noted the requirement of mailing notices to all known addresses and the need to up-to-date forms and notices.

IDENTIFICATION NOTICE

Procedure: When a voter registration application is missing a driver's license number or state identification number, staff correctly mails the applicant an identification notice. The application is put into a pending file and the applicant is not registered to vote. The notice sent informs the applicant that until the requested information is provided, the applicant will not be registered to vote.

The notice does not list the acceptable forms of identification.

Requirement: *RCW 29A.08.107 (2) states, "If the driver's license number, state identification card number, or last four digits of the social security number provided by the applicant do not match the information maintained by the Washington department of licensing or the social security administration, or if the applicant does not provide a Washington driver's license, a Washington state identification card, or a social security number, the applicant must be provisionally registered to vote."*

WAC 434-324-045 (1) requires, "If the applicant is provisionally registered pursuant to WAC 434-324-040

(5), the county auditor must verify the applicant's identity before counting the applicant's ballot. The county auditor may use other government resources and public records to confirm the applicant's driver's license or state identification card number or the last four digits of the

applicant's Social Security number. The county auditor may also attempt to contact the applicant by phone, e-mail or other means to obtain identification information.

(2) If, after these attempts, the county auditor is still unable to verify the applicant's identity, the county auditor must send the applicant an identification notice that includes a postage prepaid, preaddressed form by which the applicant may verify or send information."

Recommendation: When an application is missing a driver's license number or state identification number, or identification information provided is not verifiable through appropriate state agencies, the applicant must be provisionally registered and the voter's record flagged as requiring verification of identity. An identification notice, which includes all required elements found in WAC 434-324-045, should be sent to the voter. The notice must be substantially the same as the notice in WAC 434-050-045.

REQUIRED NOTICES

Logic and Accuracy Test

Procedure: The Asotin County Auditor did not inform interested parties of the date, time and location of the logic and accuracy test.

Requirement: WAC 434-335-320 states; *"The county auditor must notify the parties, press, public, and candidates of the date and time of the test".*

Recommendation: A notice must be published of the date, time and location for all logic and accuracy tests. This may be accomplished by posting notice on the county website.

Canvassing Board Meeting Notice, Notice of Availability of Services, and Notice of Registration Deadlines.

Procedure: The Asotin County Auditor did not publish notice of the county canvassing board meetings.

The Asotin County Auditor failed to provide notice of availability of voter registration and voting assistance to the public.

Publication of the notice of deadlines for registering to vote in the upcoming election was after the 35-day deadline. The notice, was dated September 20, 2011, was published on October 22.

Requirement: ESSB 5124, Sec. 45 states *"Notice for any state, county, district, or municipal primary or election, whether special or general, must be given by the county auditor between five and fifteen days prior to the deadline for mail-in registrations. The notice must be published in one or more newspapers of general circulation and must contain, at a minimum, the last date to register online or through the mail, the last date to transfer or update an existing registration,*

the last date to register in person for first-time voters, information on where a person can register, the type of election, the date of the election, how a voter can obtain a ballot, a list of all jurisdictions involved in the election, including positions and short titles for ballot measures appearing on the ballot, and the times and dates of any public meetings associated with the election. The notice shall also include where additional information regarding the election may be obtained. This is the only notice required for a state, county, district, or municipal primary or special or general election. If the county or city chooses to mail a local voters' pamphlet as described in RCW 29A.32.210 to each residence, the notice required in this section need only include the last date to register online or through the mail, the last date to transfer or update an existing registration, the last date to register in person for first-time voters, information on where a person can register, and the times and dates of any public meetings associated with the election. (Effective July, 2011)

RCW 29A.04.220 states, "The county auditor shall provide public notice of the availability of registration and voting aids, assistance to elderly and disabled persons, and procedures for voting by absentee ballot calculated to reach elderly and disabled persons not later than public notice of the closing of registration for a primary or election."

RCW 29A.60.140 (5) states, "Meetings of the county canvassing board are public meetings under chapter 42.30 RCW."

Recommendation: The notice requirements were changed by ESSB 5124. Notice of Elections for future elections must include all the scheduled meeting of the county canvassing board and other required information five to fifteen days prior to the deadline for registering to vote by mail. The notice of availability of notice aids must also be published no later than 35 days before an election. This notice may be combined with the new Notice of Election.

NOTIFICATION TO MAJOR POLITICAL PARTIES

Procedure: The Asotin County Elections Department does not send a request for observers to the political parties. Prior to an election, the parties send the County Auditor an email, informing her of how many observers they will be sending to observe the process.

The County Auditor did not notify the major political parties of the date and locations for various election activities, including the processing of ballots, logic and accuracy testing of tabulation equipment, canvassing, and certification of the General Election.

Requirement: WAC 434-261-020 states, "Prior to the primary or election, the county auditor shall determine the number of observers required in order to observe all aspects of the counting center proceedings, and shall request, in writing, that each major political party appoint representatives to fill the requirements."

RCW 29A.40.100 states, "County auditors must request that observers be appointed by the major political parties to be present during the processing of absentee ballots."

Recommendation: At least 28 days prior to each primary or election, the major political party chairs must be notified in writing by the County Auditor of the dates and locations for election related activities. Activities to be included in the notice include all dates for ballot processing and canvassing of the election. The number of observers needed to observe each activity must be included in the notice.

AUDITOR'S OFFICE AS A VOTING CENTER

Procedure: Asotin County operates the County Auditor's Office as a voting center. The elections department provided a Disability Access Unit, sample ballots, voter registration forms, cancellation cards, and provisional ballots.

However, the reviewer observed the following omissions:

- The Asotin County Courthouse did not have signs directing voters or indicating that it was a voting center on the outside of the building
- A HAVA information poster and the date of the election were not displayed

Requirement: WAC 434-250-100(2) requires, "voting centers to:

(c) Be marked with signage outside the building indicating the location as a place for voting

(l) Display a HAVA voter information poster

(m) Display the date of that election."

Recommendation: Because the County Auditor's Office is considered a voting center, all requirements in WAC 434-250-100 (2) must be followed beginning eighteen days before the day of the election and continuing until 8:00 p.m. on the day of the election. The HAVA poster, when displayed, has a place for the elections department to post the date of the election.

DELEGATION OF AUTHORITY

Procedure: Although the Asotin County Auditor and staff undertook various duties on behalf of the Canvassing Board, delegation by the Canvassing Board was not on file with the County Auditor.

Requirement: RCW 29A.60.140(2) states, "The county canvassing board may adopt rules that delegate in writing to the county auditor or the county auditor's staff the performance of any task assigned by law to the canvassing board."

WAC 434-262-015 states, "These duties shall be performed by the members of the board, or they may delegate in writing representatives to perform these duties. This written delegation of authority shall be filed with the county auditor prior to any person undertaking any action on behalf of the board."

Recommendation: The Asotin County Canvassing Board must provide a signed delegation of authority to the County Auditor for the Auditor’s staff to legally conduct election tasks on the board’s behalf. All election processes remain the responsibility of the County Canvassing Board without such a delegation. The Board may approve the delegation on an annual basis or on an election-by-election basis. This recommendation was also made in the 2007 report.

BALLOT DEPOSIT SITES

Procedure: The Asotin County Auditor’s Office accepts ballot deposits in the office until 8:00 pm Election Day . The 2010 General Election was a countywide election; however, the Asotin County Auditor did not provide voters with a second deposit site at a geographical location different from the County Auditor’s Office.

Requirement: *434-250-320 requires, “A county auditor conducting a county-wide election entirely by mail must provide at least two locations to deposit ballots. These locations may be either a ballot deposit site or a voting center, as defined in WAC 434-250-100. At least one location may be at the county auditor's office. All other deposit sites must be at geographical locations that are different from the county auditor's office.”*

Recommendation: The Asotin County Auditor must provide at least one additional location in the county where voters may deposit ballots. Because the greater population of Asotin County is in the town of Clarkston, the elections staff should consider placing a deposit site there. This recommendation first appeared in the county’s previous review report.

BALLOT PROCESSING

Signature Verification

Procedure: Staff verifying signatures did not take an oath. Not all persons verifying signatures received the mandatory training.

Requirements: *WAC 434-250-120 (3) requires, “All personnel assigned to the duty of signature verification shall subscribe to an oath administered by the county auditor regarding the discharge of his or her duties.”*

RCW 29A.48.050, mandates, “All personnel assigned to verify signatures on the return envelope must receive training on statewide standards for signature verification.”

Recommendation: All staff verifying signatures must attest to an oath prior to verifying voter signatures. The Asotin County Auditor could consider administering the oath to permanent staff at the beginning of the year. An oath must be administered to temporary employees prior to each election. Oaths are retained as a part of the election records.

All staff verifying signatures must receive training on the signature verification process prior to beginning the verification of voter signatures.

Resolution Log

Procedure: Asotin County Elections Department uses a digital scanning vote tabulation system. The tabulation system can identify and log ballots that are resolved in preparation for tally, but does not record the names of the two staff members involved in the resolution process. The department does not print and sign a copy of the log.

Because they are short staffed, resolving ballots was done by the Asotin County Auditor and one of the regular party observers.

Requirement: *WAC 434-261-102 requires, "In counties tabulating ballots on a digital scan vote tallying system, two staff designated by the auditor's office must resolve ballots identified as requiring resolution. A log of the resolutions must be printed and signed by the two staff."*

Recommendation: The resolution log must be printed and signed to document who resolved which ballots. This could be accomplished by having a single team of two resolve ballots on any given day and printing the log once the process is complete, or printing the log when the team of two changes.

Only trained Asotin County Elections staff should be processing ballots, including the resolution of ballots. During the 2010 General Election, the Asotin County Auditor was the only trained person in the office who knew how to scan and resolve the ballots using the current system. At a minimum, one or two of the seasonal staff, as well as permanent staff, should be trained on performing these tasks.

Manual Inspection of Ballots

Procedure: The "Statewide Standards on What is a Vote" manual was not available to staff while manually inspecting ballots.

Requirement: *WAC 434-261-070 (3) directs, "If the manual inspection process detects any physically damaged ballots, unreadable ballots which might not be correctly counted by the tabulating equipment, or marks that differ from those specified in the voting instructions, the county auditor shall refer such ballots to the county canvassing board to be counted according to the statewide standards on what is a vote."*

Recommendation: The "Statewide Standards on What is a Vote," manual must be used in the ballot processing area and be available to staff inspecting ballots.

Canvassing Board Manual

Procedure: The Asotin County Canvassing Board does not use, or have available, the “*Statewide Standards on What is a Vote*” manual for determining how a vote shall count. The current canvassing board manual gives “common hypothetical situations”, but makes no reference to the statewide standards on what is a vote.

Requirement: WAC 434-261-070 (3) directs, “*If the manual inspection process detects any physically damaged ballots, unreadable ballots which might not be correctly counted by the tabulating equipment, or marks that differ from those specified in the voting instructions, the county auditor shall refer such ballots to the county canvassing board to be counted according to the statewide standards on what is a vote.*”

Recommendation: The “*Statewide Standards on What is a Vote,*” manual must replace current references in the County Canvassing Board manual for determining how a vote shall count. The manual should be provided for use during every Board meeting.

PROVISIONAL BALLOTS

Procedure: The Asotin County Auditor does not provide written information to any provisional voter instructing how to ascertain whether his or her ballot counted.

Requirement: RCW 29A.44.207 states, “*The official shall then give the voter written information advising the voter how to ascertain whether the vote was counted and, if applicable, the reason why the vote was not counted.*”

Recommendation: The County Auditor must develop a free access system that includes written instructions on how a voter may learn if the provisional ballot was, or was not, counted. The system may be simply sending each provisional voter a letter describing the disposition of the voter’s ballot.

FAX AND EMAIL BALLOTS

Procedure: Staff sends a blank ballot by fax or email to any voter making such a request. Written instructions are not included with the ballot informing the voter of applicable conditions for the acceptance of the ballot.

Requirement: WAC 434-250-040 (1) contains all of the required elements that must be included with a ballot.

WAC 434-250-120 (1) mandates, “A ballot shall be counted only if:

(a) It is returned in the return envelope or a similar envelope if it contains the same information;

(b) The affidavit is signed with a valid signature in the place afforded for the signature on the envelope”

WAC 434-208-060 (1) directs, *“In addition to those documents specified by RCW 29A.04.255, the secretary of state or the county auditor shall accept and file in his or her office electronic transmissions of the following documents:*

(d) Voted ballots and signed affidavits received no later than 8:00 p.m. on election day, as long as hard copies are received prior to certification of the election. Consistent with WAC 434-250-080, it is the first ballot and affidavit received that may be processed and counted. Voted ballots received electronically no later than 8:00 p.m. on election day are timely even if the postmark on the return envelope is after election day.”

(4) “If the original document must be signed, acceptance of an electronic filing is conditional until receipt of the original document. Except for mail ballots, the original document must be received no later than seven calendar days after receipt of the electronic filing.”

Recommendation: Ballot packets issued to voters electronically must meet all the requirements applicable to any ballot packet. Instructions for marking and returning the ballot, including the need to send the original in support of an electronic delivery, must be included. HB 1000 now eliminates the requirement to return the original ballot for service and overseas voters. The instructions for those voters should reflect the change in state law.

MISSING OR MISMATCHED SIGNATURE

Procedure: If the signature is missing on a ballot declaration, or does not match the voter registration record, the elections department sends the voter a letter. The letter for missing or mismatched signatures does not list all options available to the voter for curing a signature.

Requirement: WAC 434-261-050 (2) instructs, *“ If the voter neglects to sign the oath on an absentee or provisional ballot envelope, or signs the oath with a mark and fails to have two witnesses attest to the signature, the voter must either:*

(a) Appear in person and sign the affidavit no later than the day before certification of the primary or election; or

(b) Sign a copy of the affidavit provided by the auditor, or mark the affidavit in front of two witnesses, and return it to the auditor no later than the day before certification of the primary or election

(3) If the signature on the oath of an absentee or provisional ballot envelope does not match the signature on the voter registration record, the voter must either:

(a) Appear in person and sign a new registration form...

(b) Sign a copy of the affidavit provided by the auditor, and provide a photocopy of a valid government or tribal identification that includes the voter's current signature. The signature on the affidavit must match the signature on the identification, and both of those signatures must match the signature on the ballot envelope.

Recommendation: The letter must be revised to include all options available to the voter for curing either a missing or a mismatched signature.

SUGGESTIONS

The following are suggestions for increasing efficiency and improving operations within the County Auditor's Office. Although these suggestions do not address issues involving compliance with state laws or administrative rules, the reviewer identified the tasks as areas of election administration in which the County Auditor might improve the efficiency and operation of the office.

PERMANENT STAFFING OF ELECTION DEPARTMENT

Procedure: Asotin County Auditor directly manages 12,464 active registered voters without the assistance of any permanent election staff. By comparison, another county in the state currently serves 12,612 active registered voters with a staff of two full-time and one half-time election administrators.

Suggestion: Many of the recommendations in this report could be corrected with sufficient staff. It is the opinion of the reviewer that Asotin County needs to staff the elections department with one or more full-time election administrator before the 2012 Primary Election. It would be preferred to hire staff in the spring, so they can train the staff prior to that.

PROCESSING BALLOTS

Procedure: Upon receipt of ballots in the Auditor's Office, the first steps taken are to remove the masking over the signature, verify the signatures of voters and document the ballot in the election management system. At no point are the ballots manually accounted for in the initial processing. WAC 434-262-010 states "The reconciliation of absentee and vote by mail ballots must include documentation that the number of ballots counted plus the number of ballots rejected is equal to the number of ballots received." Errors may occur in the processing of ballots and, as a result, the number of ballots checked in the election management system may be inaccurate. It is the opinion of the reviewer that a manual count of the ballots is necessary to have an accurate count of the number of ballots received.

Suggestion: Daily reconciliation of mail ballots is essential. Manually accounting for the ballots received each day should be the first step. After documenting ballots in the election management system, staff should compare the manual count to electronic count to ensure that all ballots are recorded.

PROCEDURES MANUAL

Procedure: The Asotin County Elections Department does not have a functional written procedures manual. It is not current regarding office procedures and election laws.

Suggestion: A current procedures manual is an invaluable tool for election administration. The Secretary of State’s office recommends written procedures include clearly defined timelines, detailed instructions on performing tasks, and task assignment. As with any county conducting elections, having up-to-date written procedures can be a lifesaver. Written procedures document compliance with law, and assist in training new staff. Although it is difficult to find enough time to maintain written procedures, especially in an understaffed office, it is essential with so many changes to election laws.

The following suggestions will improve the elections procedures manual:

- Include all aspects of election and voter registration administration, including disability access units.
- Use as a base a procedures manual from a county of similar size and with the same elections equipment. Doing so will accelerate the goal of updating the manual. While there is nothing wrong with borrowing another county’s procedures, it is essential to make changes whenever necessary to fit the actual practice of your county.
- Procedures need to reflect current law. One of the most difficult tasks is keeping written procedures up to date with changes in law and rule. The reviewer suggests an annual review of all written procedures to ensure they are kept current.

ELECTIONS CALENDAR

Procedure: The Elections Department depends solely on the State Elections Calendar to schedule the year’s tasks and events.

Suggestion: A best practice, used by other counties, is to create a calendar specifically for Asotin County elections, focusing on specific county tasks with beginning and ending dates.

A tickler could be added to the office’s election calendar to ensure that voters with unique ballot requirements, such as participants of the address confidentiality program or service voters are mailed ballots for each election at the appropriate time.

August 22, 2011

Re: Asotin County 2010 General Election Procedures Review

Kay Ramsay
Elections Program Specialist
Office of the Secretary of State
PO Box 40229
Olympia, WA 98504-0229

Dear Kay,

This letter is in response to the 2010 General Election Procedures Review. The following are the steps that the Auditor's office is taking to address the recommendations that were included in the report.

The first recommendation addressed the *Questionnaire to Cities, Towns, and District*, I have added to my election that in February I will need to prepare and send my letter to the districts that have offices up for election in that current year.

The next recommendation addresses the *Verification Notice*, I requested a copy of Spokane Counties Verification Notice, and have modified it for use by our county.

The third recommendation involves *Confirmation Notice*, we are in the process of re-writing our confirmation notice at this time, and will have it ready by the time you receive this letter.

The next recommendation addresses the *Identification Notice*; we have combined the identification notice with the verification notice.

As per the required notices, I published the *Logic and Accuracy testing* on our website plus I e-mailed the parties of the date and time of testing.

County Canvassing meetings will be posted on our county website, and in the future we will include those with our tribune publications.

Voter Registration and Voting Assistance information are now included in our tribune publications that are published before the elections. Our deadlines are now published within the correct dates.

As to the notification to major political parties, for the General Election I have already placed on the calendar the date that I need to notify the political parties as to what dates our office will be conducting election activities. One of the parties did show up for our *Logic and Accuracy Testing* for the Primary.

Our office has purchased *signage* that indicates there is an election and to Vote Here. We have 3 signs that indicate to vote here. We have one of each of the signs on each entrance to the courthouse, and one outside of our office. Our *HAVA Poster* is posted in our office with a sample ballot provided on it. We also have sample ballots available in the hall near our office, as well as on our website. The date of the election is on the sample ballot on the *HAVA poster*.

I have had the *canvassing board* delegate the authority to the County Auditor to conduct elections and have it on the calendar to do so for next year also.

As for *ballot drop sites*, we have purchased one for our office. I have applied for a grant that was granted to me, but unfortunately I can't sign the grant because our county does not comply with all the requirements that are required to get the grant, and I am unwilling to sign my name to something that we knowingly do not comply with. I will purchase another ballot drop box for Clarkston, either from the election budget or from help from the Commissioner's.

We will train our employees and administer the oath to permanent staff and temporary employees, and retain in their personnel records.

The Auditor's Office has the statewide standards on what is a vote available in the ballot processing room. These standards were also provided at our canvassing board meeting after the February election.

We can easily implement a free access system that would require us to send each provisional voter a letter to know whether or not their vote counted.

At this time the Asotin County Auditor's office has not received any requests for fax or e-mail ballots.

Currently we are using the no match and missing signature forms that have been provided from the Office of the Secretary of State, as well as a letter from our office, and of course including a self addressed stamped envelope.

The Asotin County Auditor's Office is dedicated to correcting the recommendations that have been provided by the 2010 Elections Procedures Review.

Sincerely,

Darla McKay 8/22/11

Darla McKay
Asotin County Auditor

BN

8-22-11

Ben Nichols, WSBA# 27006
Asotin County Prosecuting Attorney

Don Brown

8-22-11

Don Brown
Chairman of the Board
Asotin County Commissioner / District 2



CONCLUSION

The Asotin County Auditor and her staff work very hard administering election processes. Office procedures and documents need updating to comply with statute. Using old or inaccurate information to aid staff and the public can have unwanted results.

Additional staffing would provide the County Auditor the time necessary to address many of the issues in this report. The need for additional support will be intensified with the coming 2012 Presidential election and redistricting of jurisdictions. Previous Presidential election years have demonstrated there are large increases in the number of demands on staff time by the public through increased phone calls, additional voter registration applications and ultimately more ballots to process.

Adding one or more deposit sites will help to make elections more accessible for voter's in Asotin County and possibly increase participation in future elections.

With an increase in the number of ballots, accountability becomes even more important. Good accounting procedures will increase voter confidence as well as increase the confidence of staff in the Asotin County Elections Department.

During this review, the Asotin County Auditor and entire staff were professional and cooperative. Addressing the recommendations in this report will help keep procedures in compliance with statute and rule. Many require only minor changes in forms, notices, or procedures. However, because elections are so complicated, even minor changes can have a major impact on the election process.

Report Prepared by Kay Ramsay, Elections Program Specialist, Election Certification and Training Program

