



AGENDA ITEM SUMMARY

Election Code Committee

STAFF

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SUBJECT

Fort Collins Election History.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this item is to provide some history related to Fort Collins elections.

GENERAL DIRECTION SOUGHT AND SPECIFIC QUESTIONS TO BE ANSWERED

1. Does the Committee have any questions related to this information?

BACKGROUND / DISCUSSION

Attached is Ordinance No. 5, 1913 – Calling for a special election in March 1913 for the purpose of electing 21 delegates to constitute a Charter Convention which started efforts to form the City's first Charter.

Over time, there have been instances of City general or regular elections in both March and April; however, the first Tuesday after a Monday in April, on odd numbered years, are where most regular elections fell through 2021. Special elections have occurred at different times throughout the years depending on the topic and related timeframes set out in statutes, Charter or City code. Most have occurred in November and have been coordinated with Larimer County. Based on a Council referred item in 2022, regular City elections moved to the first Tuesday after a Monday in November, still on odd numbered years, and are coordinated with Larimer County.

Up to and including April of 2021, City staff conducted all aspects of regular elections and some special elections. This requires a comprehensive knowledge of related statute, Charter, and City code provisions, as well as the ability to manage a detailed and complex project that takes several months to plan, organize and complete. An election official, in this case the City Clerk, must manage and arrange for:

- Space:
 - Identification of polling places
 - Identification of a large enough space for a ballot processing center and tabulation area that can be secured and covered by cameras
- Vendors

- Identification and contracts for:
 - Ballot and envelope design
 - Ballot mailing
 - Ballot tracking system programming and on-site support
 - Likely will need to be replaced since vendor may no longer be active
 - Signature verification machine and on-site support
 - Tabulation machines and on-site support
- Internal Coordination
 - IT:
 - Set up for needed equipment and networks, including bar code scanners
 - Assistance with preparing voter data obtained from the County and migrating into ballot tracking system
 - Assistance with verifying districts and precincts and making adjustments as needed
 - Video configuration and retention for cameras
 - Coordination with vendors to assist with updates, installation and testing
 - Coordination of VPN access
 - Facilities:
 - Space identification and preparation
 - Camera installations
 - Ballot box installations
 - City Hall and other facility preparations
 - Communications:
 - Education and outreach
 - Developing outreach/education plan
 - Printed materials
 - Web site updates
 - Social media and other advertising
 - Traffic
 - Determination of appropriate traffic patterns for drive-up locations, obtain and place signage, cones and other items directing traffic
- Ballot Processing Center
 - Set up room with stations (intake, sorting, ballot opening, signature verification, ballot tracking, ballot content removal, and duplication)
 - Order related equipment, furniture and supplies
- Ballot Tabulation
 - Set up room
 - Work with vendor on equipment set up and logic and accuracy test and final tabulation

- Candidates/Committees
 - Candidate education/guidance
 - Nomination petitions
 - Committee registration
 - Campaign Finance
 - Oversight
- City Hall
 - Reserve space
 - Install banners and other signage
 - Identify and staff polling center space that enables people to vote, get replacement ballots, etc.
- Complaints
 - Tracking, processing and resolution of election complaints
- County
 - Obtain address/precinct information
 - Obtain voter registration information
 - Partner on ballot box signage/usage
 - Install tents/tables at drive-up locations on election day
 - Develop pick-up processes and schedules
 - Identify and train teams
 - Partner to have County employees on-site the week prior through election day to assist with new voters and address changes
- Education
 - Voter information
 - Staff information
 - Training guides for all areas
 - Tours of ballot processing center
 - Posters and other printed materials
- Election Workers
 - Hiring of 50-60 workers to assist in all areas
 - Develop guidelines and train all
 - Create work schedules and assignment lists
 - Oversee and assist them in their work
- Legal Notices
 - Notice of Charter Amendments
 - Notice of election
- Petitions

- Guide petition representatives with respect to related codes
- Approving the form of petitions
- Checking signatures to determine whether or not a petition is sufficient
- Forwarding to Council for referral to ballot if sufficient
- Appeal process oversight
- Nursing Homes
 - Develop plan to assist voters in nursing homes and provide related education and training for those assisting
- Post Office
 - Obtain PO boxes
 - Make arrangements for Business Reply Mail permits
 - Make arrangements related to ballot delivery and pick up
- Uniformed And Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)
 - Separate notification to these voters
 - Preparation of ballot packages and mailing

The above is a general list of items; however, each category has many more specific and detailed items that must be done to ensure a successful election.

Moving to coordinated elections brought significant benefits to the City Clerk's office, the City of Fort Collins, and voters. Voter turnout is generally better in November elections. As well, Larimer County has a full department dedicated to elections as their full-time jobs. This enables them to stay abreast of all related laws and regulations; they have dedicated space for all election activities and have experts doing the work. The City Clerk's office remains involved in many of the election items noted; however, once an item reaches the ballot stage, the County administers the remainder of the process.

Some milestones that have occurred in elections include:

- Mail Ballot Election Act (Title 1) was enacted by the state effective January 1, 1991. Fort Collins conducted its first mail ballot election in 1995. In 2006, a new article was added to City code related to this establishing local guidelines.
- Signature verification resulted from legislative changes in 2017/2018 that tightened requirements around mail ballot voting. HB16-1070 required mandatory signature verification for municipal mail ballot elections. Fort Collins put this into practice for the April 2019 regular City election.
- November regular elections became a reality in 2023 after voters approved a Council referred question during the November 2022 special election.
- Ranked Voting was also an item referred to the voters by Council at the 2022 special election. Fort Collins put this into practice for the first time during the November 2025 regular City election.

Costs can vary substantially between City-run and County coordinated elections. When the City runs its own election, all costs are borne solely by the City. With coordinated elections, costs are shared among all participating entities. If the state and/or county participate, this greatly reduces costs. In the most recent coordinated election, both the state and county participated. The state reimbursed the county for 45% of election costs which reduced the amount coordinating entities had to share. The remaining costs are then divided among participating entities (county, cities, school districts and others such as fire protection districts) based on number of households (for TABOR) and number of eligible electors. There can also be

unique costs attributed to one or more entities for things such as ranked voting. Here is a comparison of costs between the last five City-run and coordinated elections:

City Elections	Coordinated Elections
2013 - \$152K	2016 - \$129K
2015 - \$243K	2017 - \$69K
2017 - \$232K	2022 - \$317K
2019 - \$343K	2023 - \$167K
2021 - \$355K	2025 - \$176K

It is important, especially in a budget-constrained environment, to understand the implications of running our own special elections, especially in light of petition or other efforts that may create the need for the City to do so. It is worth noting that a special election held outside of November may result in the City paying for two elections in a given fiscal year.

For those interested, staff is working on a document that outlines all election Ordinances that have been approved by City Council. It will be provided to the Committee once it is fully developed.

ATTACHMENTS

1. Ordinance No. 5, 1913 (copy)
2. 2025 Election Costs
3. Presentation