



# CITY OF SANTA BARBARA

## COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

**AGENDA DATE:** March 10, 2009

**TO:** Mayor and Councilmembers

**FROM:** City Clerk's Office, Administrative Services Department

**SUBJECT:** Recommendation To Conduct Vote By Mail General Municipal Elections

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

That Council authorize the City Clerk to conduct the November 2009 General Municipal Election as a Vote By Mail Election.

### **BACKGROUND:**

On January 29, 2007, at a Council work session, staff presented a work plan describing the duties and responsibilities for conducting traditional poll and vote by mail elections. The City Council also received a presentation from Burbank City Clerk, Margarita Campos, regarding the vote by mail election process. Staff estimated the cost of a City-conducted election to be approximately \$300,000, substantially lower than a County-managed election estimated by the County to cost the City between \$550,000 and \$650,000.

The City's estimated \$300,000 cost included contracting for services and equipment (poll booths, ballot counters, printing and absentee voter scanning equipment) to conduct a traditional poll election, including retention of an election consultant during the election.

On April 24, 2007, staff returned to Council with requested information related to a vote by mail election and a proposed charter amendment to change the election year. The data revealed that a vote by mail election generally did not result in a negative impact on voter participation; in fact, in every recent instance, voter turnout increased.

Council responded by directing staff to conduct the November 2007 election as a traditional poll election for three Council seats and a Charter Amendment proposing to change the City's regular General Election from odd to even years. Additionally, the Council requested staff to return for further direction on the possibility of conducting future elections as vote-by-mail elections should the Charter amendment for even year elections fail.

**DISCUSSION:**

To conduct the November 6, 2007, election, the City contracted with Martin & Chapman Company, for equipment and election related services and an elections consultant, Donna M. Grindey, to assist with the day-to-day functions of the election process. Staff also worked closely with County Elections to determine precinct consolidations and polling locations to mirror the County's system and thereby reduce any potential voter confusion.

The City hired and trained more than 200 poll workers who served at the polls on Election Day. For 5 days, more than 25 City staff members and City Clerks from other jurisdictions served on the absentee voter board. On election night, 66 additional staff members served on various boards in the Central Counting Center where City TV provided live election coverage.

Overall, the entire election process went smoothly with the final precinct reporting completed at approximately 9:40 p.m. The City's final election costs totaled \$280,000. Below is specific voting data related to the November 6, 2007, General Municipal Election:

Registered Voters	44,165	
Ballots Cast	16,364	37.05%
Poll Ballots Cast	5,474	33.5 %
Mail Ballots Cast	10,890	66.5%

On November 20, 2007, the City Council received and certified the final canvass of the election results. The election results showed 66.5% of the City's electorate voting by mail. The charter amendment to change municipal elections from odd to even years was not approved by the City voters. Consequently, staff plans to continue to conduct the City's general municipal elections in November of odd years. In the unlikely event that the State or another local jurisdiction holds a special election in November of odd years, staff plans to participate in a consolidated County administered election in order to take advantage of cost-sharing opportunities. An example of this process occurred in November 2005, when the Governor called a special statewide election and the City was able to participate in a consolidated election with the County at a cost of \$92,000.

Attachment 1 is a graph, showing the percentage of City voters casting their votes by mail for the period of 1983 through 2007. The data shows that the number of voters participating by mail has steadily increased. In 2003, legislation was enacted giving voters the opportunity to permanently vote by mail. Prior to this legislation, voters were required to submit an application requesting a vote by mail ballot due to absence from the area. Since the change in legislation the data shows the number of voters participating by mail has steadily increased.

Per the Council's direction on April 24, 2007, below, is a summary of the two options available, a traditional poll election or vote by mail election, to conduct General Municipal Elections.

### Traditional Poll Election

For the most part, a traditional poll election would be conducted very much like the City's 2007 election. Staff proposes to use the same precincts and polling locations designated by County Elections, to reduce any voter confusion. The County's consolidation of precincts could result in fewer poll locations in 2009. The City's plan includes hiring and training more than 200 poll workers to serve at the polls on Election Day. As with the 2007 election, staff proposes to contract with Martin & Chapman Company for services and equipment, and an elections consultant to assist with election day-to-day duties.

Staff also plans on the assistance of 25 City employees to serve on the vote by mail board the week preceding the election. On election morning, 14 City building inspectors would visit each polling location to ensure compliance. On election night, 52 additional staff members would serve on various boards in the Central Counting Center. City TV live election coverage is under consideration. As in the 2007 election, staff will request the assistance of the Sheriff's Department explorers' program to assist in directing election inspectors arriving at City Hall. Staff estimates the cost to conduct a traditional poll election to be approximately \$300,000.

Attachment #2 is a summary of staff's work plan and budget for conducting a traditional poll and vote by mail election. The right column of Attachment #2 summarizes staff's plan for a traditional poll election based on staff's experience in conducting the 2007 election.

### Vote By Mail Election

The City Charter allows vote by mail City elections. City Charter Section 1306, Elections to be Conducted by Mail Ballot, states: "The City Council may, by resolution, authorize the conduct of an election by mail. The procedure to be followed will be in accordance with provisions of the Elections Code of the State of California."

The vote by mail option includes establishing five designated polling centers. Proposed polling center locations include:

City Hall	735 Anacapa St.
Bethany Church	566 N. Hope Ave.
Pilgrim Terrace Homes	649 Pilgrim Terrace Dr.
Holy Cross Church	1740 Cliff Dr.
Franklin Community Center	1134 E. Montecito St.

The five recommended polling center sites are spread throughout the City, have been prior voting locations and meet the criteria to be polling locations.

Voters will be able to vote at City Hall, during regular business hours, beginning Monday, October 5, 2009, through Monday, November 2, 2009. Additionally, voters will be able to vote at City Hall on Election Day, Tuesday, November 3, 2009 from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

The other four polling centers will have one inspector and three clerks to manage the centers like traditional poll locations. All 5 centers, including City Hall, will be open on the Saturday preceding election day, October 31, 2009, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and on election day, Tuesday, November 3, 2009, from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. The City's vote by mail plan includes pre-paid postage for returned ballots.

Similar to a poll election, staff plans to contract with Martin & Chapman Company for election services and equipment, and with an elections consultant to assist with the day-to-day election duties.

Staff plans on the assistance of 35 City employees to serve on the vote by mail board the week preceding the election. On election morning, 4 City building inspectors will visit each polling location to ensure compliance. On election night, 52 additional staff members would serve on various boards in the Central Counting Center. City TV live election coverage is under consideration. Staff would also request the assistance from the members of the Sheriff's Department Explorers' program to direct election inspectors arriving at City Hall.

The cost of a vote by mail election is estimated at \$250,000.

With Council's direction to proceed with a vote by mail process, staff will return to Council in spring of 2009 for adoption of a resolution outlining the vote by mail election process.

With either option, staff will return to Council in late June 2009 requesting Council to adopt the necessary resolutions to schedule the City's general election:

- Calling for the election;
- Adopting regulations pertaining to candidates' statements;
- Directing the City Attorney to prepare an impartial analysis of any ballot measures or Charter Amendments; and
- Setting priorities for filing a written argument regarding ballot measures or Charter Amendments.

#### **ADVANTAGES OF A VOTE BY MAIL ELECTION**

- A projected cost savings of approximately \$50,000 compared to a traditional poll election

- Includes five designated polling centers which allow individuals to vote at a poll if so desired
- Offers more time to vote
  - Voters will be able to vote at City Hall, during regular business hours, beginning Monday, October 5, 2009, through Monday, November 2, 2009.
  - All 5 centers, including City Hall, will be open on the Saturday preceding Election Day, October 31, 2009, from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. and on Election Day, Tuesday, November 3, 2009, from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.
- The City's vote by mail plan includes pre-paid postage for returned ballots
- Reduces poll worker recruitment problems
- Allows for an effective processing of ballots as they come in and potentially reduces the number of ballots that are received and processed on Election Day
- The City's voting data from the period of 1983 through 2007 shows that the number of voters participating by mail has steadily increased

#### **BUDGET/FINANCIAL INFORMATION:**

The cost of a vote by mail election is estimated at \$250,000. The cost of a traditional poll election is estimated at \$300,000. The Administrative Services Department Fiscal Year 2010 budget request includes \$300,000 from the General Fund for the 2009 General Municipal Election.

#### **SUSTAINABILITY:**

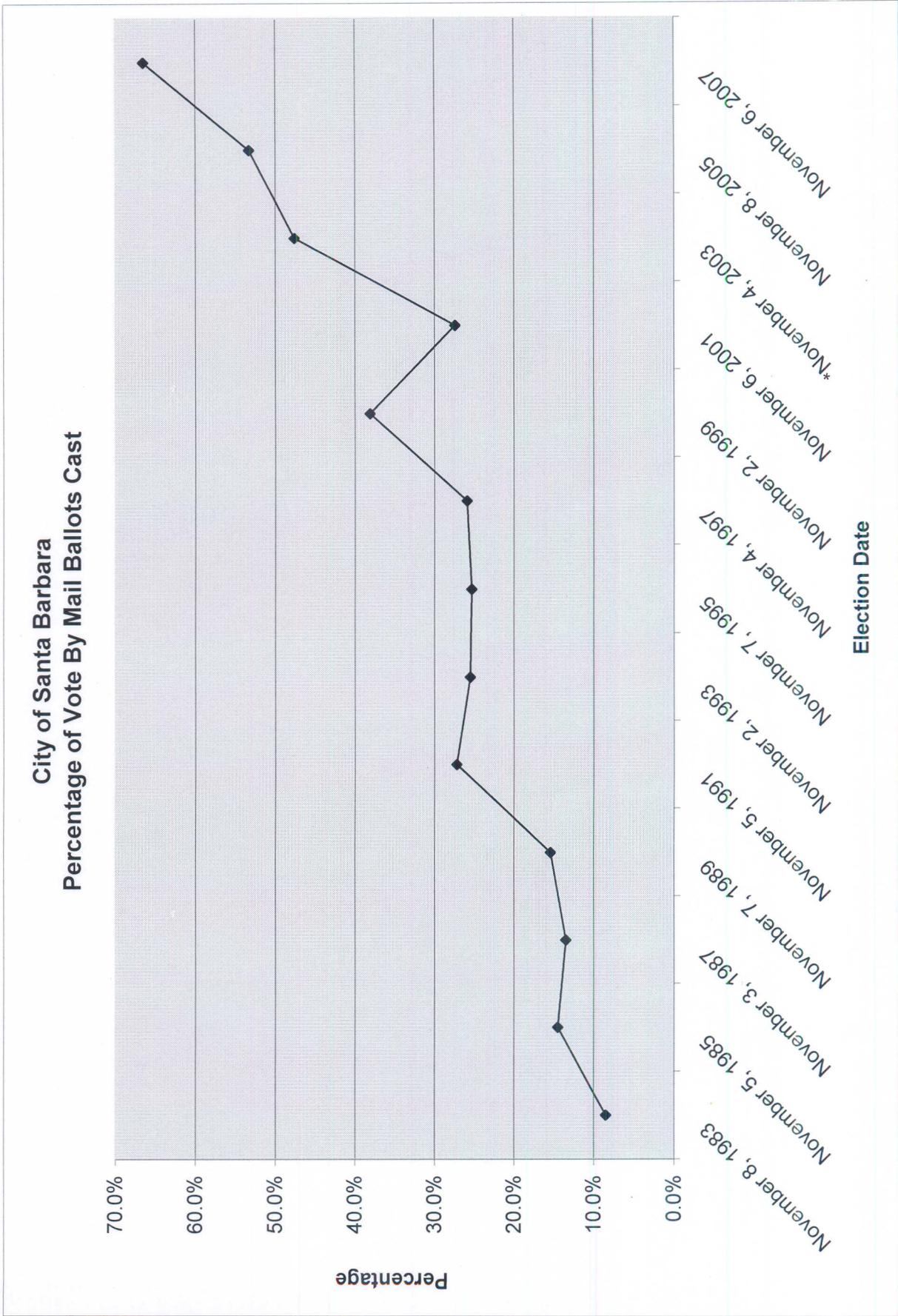
It is anticipated that a vote by mail election will reduce the number of potential vehicle trips made by voters and poll workers who would normally drive to the polls. This supports the City's sustainability goals to protect the environment.

**ATTACHMENTS:** Attachment 1 – City of Santa Barbara Elections, Vote by Mail Graph  
Attachment 2 – November 3, 2009, Stand-Alone Election Options

**PREPARED BY:** Cynthia M. Rodriguez, City Clerk Services Manager

**SUBMITTED BY:** Marcelo A. López, Administrative Services Director

**APPROVED BY:** City Administrator's Office



\*State legislation changed to allow for permanent absentee voting.

**November 3, 2009  
City of Santa Barbara  
Stand-Alone Election Options**

Vote By Mail Election:	Traditional Poll Election:
Registered Voters: 48,531 Vote By Mail Voters: 24,387 (Registration as of 11/11/08)	Registered Voters: 48,531 Vote By Mail Voters: 24,387 (Registration as of 11/11/08)
Polling Centers: 5  Center Voting: Saturday, October 31, 2009, 10:00 a.m. – 2:00 p.m. Tuesday, November 3, 2009, 7:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.  Vote by mail voting period: 10/5/09 – 11/3/09	Polling Locations: 33 Mail Ballot Precincts: 5  Poll Voting: Tuesday, November 3, 2009, 7:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m.  Vote by mail voting period: 10/5/09 – 11/3/09
Poll Workers: 50 (20 bilingual) Inspectors: 10 Clerks: 40	Poll Workers: 201 (66 bilingual) • Inspectors: 35 • Clerks: 166
City Clerk's Office Staff: 9 • Permanent employees: 4 • Consultant: 1 • Hourly employees: 4	City Clerk's Office Staff: 9 • Permanent employees: 4 • Consultant: 1 • Hourly employees: 4
Vote By Mail Board: 35 10/28/09 – 11/3/09 (5 full days)  Election Day additional staff: 56 • Building Inspectors: 4 • Central Counting Center: 30 • Police, City TV, computer and PIO support: 22 Additional support: 4 Sheriff's explorers directing inspectors arriving with ballots	Vote By Mail Board: 25 10/28/09 – 11/3/09 (3 half and 2 full days)  Election Day additional staff: 66 • Building Inspectors: 14 • Central Counting Center: 30 • Police, City TV, computer and PIO support: 22 Additional support: 8 Sheriff's Department explorers directing inspectors arriving with ballots
Budget: • Election Consults/Equip/Supp: \$164,350 • Polling Center Workers' Salaries: 8,000 • Contingency: 20,000 • Postage: 36,000 • Hourly Employees: 12,500 • Publications, Translation, Rentals & Misc.: 9,150	Budget: • Election Consults/Equip/Supp.: \$ 208,350 • Poll Workers' Salaries: 23,250 • Contingency: 20,000 • Postage: 19,000 • Hourly Employees: 12,500 • Publications, Translation, Rentals & Misc.: 16,900
<b>Total Election Cost: \$ 250,000</b>	<b>Total Election Cost: \$300,000</b>