

SNOHOMISH COUNTY COUNCIL
Snohomish County, Washington

MOTION NO. 05-606

AUTHORIZING MAIL-OUT BALLOT ELECTIONS
IN SNOHOMISH COUNTY

WHEREAS, The right to vote is one of the this nation's most fundamental rights of freedom;

WHEREAS, Snohomish County is duty and legally bound to preserve and protect the right to vote for all registered voters;

WHEREAS, A mail-out ballot election offers voters the individual freedom and liberty to choose the manner by which they cast their ballots including return mail and nearby ballot collection locations; and

WHEREAS, Chapter 241, Laws of 2005, codified at RCW 29A.48.010, authorizes the County Council to determine whether the county should conduct elections and primaries entirely by mail-out ballots; and

WHEREAS, Effective January 2006, a new state wide voter registration data base will enhance the accuracy of the number of votes cast by reducing significantly or eliminating all duplicative registrations in the state; and

WHEREAS, In a mail-out ballot election environment, the County Auditor would send ballots to all registered voters in the County for each primary and general election which will further enhance the accuracy of voter registration addresses in the voter registration file, as each election will provide the opportunity to update voter registration addresses through information provided by the Post Office on change of address information; and

WHEREAS, Moving the County to a mail-out ballot election environment would require that the County Auditor notify by mail all registered voters in the County at least 90 days before the first mail ballot election; and

WHEREAS, Mail-out ballot elections have increased voter participation in elections in those Washington counties that have already converted to an all mail ballot voting environment; and

WHEREAS, Snohomish County currently conducts polling place elections in conjunction with mailing ballots to voters registered to vote by mail; and

WHEREAS, Snohomish County, as of January 1, 2006 has 60% (213,849) of voters registered to vote by mail-out of 354,350 total active registered voters; and

WHEREAS, Snohomish County, by November 2008, is forecast to have approximately 78% (or 304,746) of voters registered to vote by mail out of 390,700 active registered voters; and

WHEREAS, With the passage of Chapter 241, Laws of 2005, 32 out of 39 counties have moved to mail-out ballot elections and of the remaining 7 counties, all but King and Pierce Counties are actively considering moving to mail ballot elections in 2006; and

WHEREAS, It is the duty of Snohomish County to be prudent and fiscally responsible in the discharge of all its responsibilities; and

WHEREAS, To continue as a polling place county, Snohomish County would be required by Chapters 29A.12, 29A.44, 29A.60 and 29A.84 RCW, to deploy voter verified paper audit trail components at its 139 polling places; and

WHEREAS, The cost of obtaining voter verified paper audit trail components is \$1,180 each and under current projections of the number of polling place voters, Snohomish County would have to obtain 875 voter verified paper audit trail components at a cost of \$1,032,500; and

WHEREAS, It would not be necessary to incur this cost if Snohomish County conducted its elections and primaries in a mail-out ballot election environment; and

WHEREAS, Moving Snohomish County to mail-out ballot elections would require that a minimal number of electronic voting devices be provided with voter verified paper audit trail components in order to accommodate voters with disabilities under the requirements of the Help America Vote Act passed by Congress in 2002, effective January 1, 2006; and

WHEREAS, The cost of meeting these Help America Vote Act requirements will be covered by a combination of Help America Vote Act grant money and the elections equipment cumulative reserve fund; and

WHEREAS, The ongoing cost of continuing to utilize a combination of polling place and permanent absentee voting is estimated at an additional \$653,800 per year. This cost includes renting a unified centralized election and voter registration facility to accommodate the electronic voting devices and the voter verified paper audit trail components and providing for the ongoing and increased staffing and maintenance costs to support this technology; and

WHEREAS, The County Auditor has committed to provide polling place elections for all special elections in 2006 (February, March, April and May); and

WHEREAS, If the County Council determines that the county should utilize mail-out ballot elections, under RCW 29A.48.010, the County Council must provide express authorization for such mail ballot elections to the County Auditor; and

WHEREAS, the County Council has determined that it is in the best public interest that Snohomish County should utilize mail ballot elections commencing with the September 2006 primary,

NOW, THEREFORE, ON MOTION:

The Snohomish County Council authorizes and directs the Snohomish County Auditor to conduct all general and special elections and primaries in Snohomish County by mail-out ballots in accordance with chapter RCW29A.48 commencing with the September 2006 primary. The Auditor shall provide written notice by mail to each affected registered voter as required by RCW 29A.48.010(3).

Dated this 4th day of January, 2006

SNOHOMISH COUNTY COUNCIL
Snohomish County, Washington

Chairperson

ATTEST:

Asst. Clerk of the Council

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