

**CLACKAMAS COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**Sitting/Acting as** (if applicable)  
**Policy Session Worksheet**

**Presentation Date:** Wednesday, 2/2/2022   **Approx. Start Time:** 10:00 AM   **Approx. Length:** 45 – 60 minutes

**Presentation Title:** County Clerk Elections Ballot Security: Observers welcome

**Department:** Office of County Internal Audit

**Presenters:** Jodi Cochran, Chief Audit Executive; Sherry Hall, County Clerk

**Other Invitees:** Bill Cloran, Clerk Counsel; Beck Doll, Elections Manager

**WHAT ACTION ARE YOU REQUESTING FROM THE BOARD?**

**No action requested; Informational presentation provided at request of Board**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:**

The Office of County Internal Audit has completed an evaluation of the physical security and safeguarding controls supporting the processing of cast ballots. The report, Elections Ballot Security: Observers welcome – Chain of custody enhancements will further support a transparent ballot processing environment, is posted on the County Internal Audit web page. The engagement report provides Clackamas County residents and public officials with an independent assessment of the security and safeguarding controls supporting the processing of cast ballots. This County Internal Audit engagement is important because local surveys and recent public comments demonstrate an ongoing need to build confidence and trust in Oregon's election system. Public awareness and confidence in each step of an election process supports the integrity of the election.

Through assessment and evaluation, county residents, public officials and stakeholders receive objective assurance the county, by conducting fair and unbiased application, operation, and interpretation of election laws, is providing the public with complete and accurate elections information.

The scope of this engagement focused only on the physical custody and security of cast ballots processed for the May 18, 2021 Oregon Special District Election held in Clackamas County. This engagement did NOT assess any information technology or advanced electronic systems (hardware or software) used in County elections, including systems used in signature verification or tallying; recount or verify any election results for any race included in the May 18, 2021 Special District Election or any other election; or validate the voter registration or eligibility process.

With over 305,000 Clackamas County registered voters, a 27.94% voter turnout rate, and over 190 individual contests, the May 18, 2021 Special District Election demonstrated the elections services provided to Clackamas County voters and local governments. Through a continued commitment to the mission of the Clerk's Office and the purpose of the Elections program,

Clackamas County voters can participate in a secure, impartial and transparent electoral process.

Four recommendations were made to support the processing of cast ballots. These recommendations do not reflect issues of statutory non-compliance. Rather, actions are suggested to capitalize on opportunities for greater impact through physical security and chain of custody enhancements.

**Physical Security**

1. Require both ingress and egress door access scans.
2. Secure loading dock door.

**Chain of Custody**

3. Enhance receipt protocols for damaged or non-standard return envelopes.
4. Confirm Inspection Control Log batch reconciliations.

The Clerk originally agreed with recommendations numbers 1 and 2; disagreeing with recommendations numbers 3 and 4. Based on the Clerk's January 24, 2022 discussion with the Internal Audit Oversight Committee, the Clerk amended her response to agree with numbers 1, 2 and 3; disagreeing with number 4. Detailed observations, recommendations and original responses are included in the report.

No instance of deliberate unethical or fraudulent activity was noted.

While the Office of County Internal Audit is aware the County Clerk is preparing a white paper addressing elections questions raised by the Board of County Commissioners, this independent engagement was not influenced by or in response to such requests. The Office of County Internal Audit has not been involved in the development of an elections white paper. This presentation addresses only the County Internal Audit engagement process and results.

**FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS (current year and ongoing):**

**No County Internal Audit financial implications; County Clerk may provide additional information for future consideration**

Is this item in your current budget?  YES  NO

Is this a revenue-generating or revenue-neutral agreement? Yes  No

What is the cost? \$  One-time  Annual  Other

Identify all funding sources:

Are there any longer term financial impacts? Yes  No

If yes, explain:

**STRATEGIC PLAN ALIGNMENT:**

- How does this item align with your Department's Strategic Business Plan Results?

County Internal Audit strives to add organizational value and support our collaborative efforts to achieve the State of Oregon’s goals, the County Clerk’s mission, and the Board of County Commissioner’s strategic plan. As part of its Business Plan Results, the Office of County Internal Audit tracks the percentage completion of its annual, risk-based Audit Plan. This engagement was approved through the 2021 Audit Plan.

- How does this item align with the County’s Performance Clackamas Strategic Results?

County Internal Audit strives to add organizational value and support our collaborative efforts to achieve the State of Oregon’s goals, the County Clerk’s mission, and the Board of County Commissioner’s strategic plan. Building trust through good government is one of five County strategic priorities.

**LEGAL/POLICY REQUIREMENTS:** NA

**PUBLIC/GOVERNMENTAL PARTICIPATION:** NA

**OPTIONS:** NA

**RECOMMENDATION:** NA

**ATTACHMENTS:**

- 1 – Elections Ballot Security - Presentation
- 2 – Elections Ballot Security - Report

**SUBMITTED BY:**

Division Director/Head Approval \_\_\_\_\_



Department Director/Head Approval \_\_\_\_\_

County Administrator Approval \_\_\_\_\_

For information on this issue or copies of attachments, please contact Jodi Cochran, CAE\_@ 971-352-1644

# County Clerk Elections Ballot Security: Observers welcome

A report by the County Internal Auditor

# Why the audit is important

Local survey demonstrates an ongoing need to build confidence and trust in Oregon's election system; Public awareness and confidence in each step of an election process supports the integrity of the election



- ▶ In April 2020, Oregon was one of 5 states - Oregon, Colorado, Hawaii, Washington and Utah - which administered all elections entirely by mail.
- ▶ Reed College's nonpartisan Early Voting Information Center released results of its year-long voter study in April 2021, noting lack of trust in the election process.
- ▶ In May 2021, Clackamas County had over 305,000 registered voters, a 27.94% voter turnout rate and over 190 individual election contests.
- ▶ This audit was designed to assess the physical custody and security of cast paper ballots during receipt, processing and storage.

# What we found

The County's public observation lobby provides an excellent election viewing opportunity; Chain of custody and security enhancement opportunities exist



- ▶ Over an 8 day period, more than 40 observers witnessed the May 18, 2021 Special District Election ballot processing.
- ▶ Over 60 temporary workers were hired to process ballots; many retirees who routinely return each election to serve the county.
- ▶ Heavy reliance is placed on the experience and integrity of the highly valued and trusted temporary workers.
- ▶ Recommendations from two prior elections reviews continue to be relevant.

# What we did NOT address

Risks associated with the physical paper ballot were assessed. Information technology processes and risks were outside the engagement scope and objectives



- ▶ The engagement did NOT assess any information technology or advanced electronic systems (hardware or software) used in County elections, including systems used in signature verification or tallying.
- ▶ The engagement did NOT recount or verify any election results for any contest included in the May 18, 2021 Special District Election or any other election.
- ▶ The engagement did NOT validate the voter registration or eligibility process.

# What we recommend

Enhance chain of custody controls and processes; Enforce physical security protocols



## ▶ Physical Security

1. Require both ingress and egress door access scans.
2. Secure loading dock door.

## ▶ Chain of Custody

3. Enhance receipt protocols for damaged or non-standard return envelopes.
4. Confirm Inspection Control Log batch reconciliations.



# What is being done

The Clerk agreed with two of the four recommendations; Implementation efforts for enhancements are underway; Target completion date - May 2022



## ▶ Physical Security

1. Ingress and egress door scans into main Election processing area required as of the November 2021 election.
2. Clerk coordinating with County Facilities to address loading dock door access and security. Target completion date - May 2022.

## ▶ Chain of Custody

3. Clerk disagreed with value of recommended action. "Adding steps to the process would slow the process significantly ... adding more expense to the election in personnel."
4. Clerk disagrees with value of recommended action. "Adding a hand count of all batches at the opening boards would significantly slow the process and add unnecessary expense to the election."