

**Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee Meeting**  
Minutes, December 10, 2008

**In Attendance:** Kim Wyman (Auditor), Ken Raske (Deputy Auditor), Sandy Baxter (Voter Outreach Specialist), Kellee Keegan (VAAC Coordinator), Berl Colley (Member), Denise Colley (Member), Patty McDonald (Member), and Steve Peck (Member).

Meeting began at 5:45 pm.

Kim began by introducing Sandy Baxter as the New Election Outreach Specialist. She proceeded to thank the members for their involvement in the VAAC and commitment to making voting more accessible in Thurston County. She presented them with certificates of appreciation on behalf of herself and the Elections Division. A special appreciation certificate and bouquet was presented to Kellee Keegan who has acted as Coordinator for the VAAC committee since it began two years ago.

Kellee discussed the usage of the AutoMARKs in the 2008 Primary and General Election. Twelve voters used the machines in the Primary Election while 43 used them in the General Election. Capital City Council of the Blind, thanks to the Colley's, had the most Automark usage in the General Election with 11 voters.

The committee proceeded to discuss other ways to get voters to learn about the machine and utilize it to vote during an election. Some suggested ideas were:

1. Provide VAAC Committee members with dates commercials with ASL are running so the members could spread the word to citizens with disabilities in Thurston County.
2. Make the pamphlet and the VAAC committee more prominent on the web site.
3. Distribute information to the local political parties for dissemination to their membership.
4. Make extra pamphlets available to VAAC board members
5. Share DVD with ASL Voter Pamphlet available for Steve Peck and various deaf and hard of hearing citizens. (Kim noted that with the acquisition of the camera and close captioning equipment the Auditor's office is now able to produce such CD's/DVD's)
6. Use of Olympia Lions Low Vision Health Fairs as a place where information about Voting and Accessibility needs can be distributed. Berl thought there may be an event in January. The Olympia Host Lions club will also be opening a Low Vision Resource Center off of Martin Way. He suggested contacting them and establishing a relationship there in which the Elections office could offer voting materials and information on the Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee.
7. Denise Colley suggested a mailing be done by the Department of Service for the Blind and the Braille library.

Sandy began to discuss the current HAVA grant monies and another grant cycle which will be submitted in May. Thurston County Elections, in accordance with the 2008 HAVA Grant, is looking forward to producing Braille business cards. They will be ordered within the next few months. At the next committee meeting in March the committee will discuss what the community may need in the upcoming year(s) as far as voting accessibility so they may request for a HAVA grant. The meeting is tentatively set for the second week of March.

The next grant cycle will be May 29, 2009 (verified by Sandy) and it was suggested that the Elections Department and the VAAC committee think of various items that could be funded using the HAVA monies.

*[Additional information for the VAAC committee from Sandy on the HAVA grant follows]*

\*grants larger than \$50K would require a 50% matching funds

Priorities for the HAVA grant cycle are:

Education and outreach

Priority will be awarded to counties that partner with advocacy or community group.

Past HAVA funded projects in Washington State included (Thurston County Projects have an astrix):

1. Accessible door hardware
2. Accessible path of travel improvements and parking
3. Accessible voting headphones
4. Education to deaf and hard of hearing community\*
5. Accessible ballot drop boxes
6. Mobile Voting Program\*
7. Create Braille communication\*
8. Outreach to increase voter registration\*
9. Outreach to the deaf and hard of hearing community\*
10. Staffing to assist with making elections more accessible
11. Voter education and training for election officials
12. Brochures promoting accessible voting equipment
13. Accessible signage
14. Accessibility voter education programs
15. Consultants to evaluate current accessibility needs

\*These are items already done by Thurston County Auditor's office

A tentative date for the next VAAC meeting was scheduled for March 9, 10 or 11.

Kim mentioned that 2009 will be a challenge for the office as there will be between 100 and 200 offices up for reelection in Thurston County. This number will undoubtedly strain Thurston County Elections' HAVA resources and services. Ken reiterated that new ideas for the HAVA grant proposal will be accepted at any time.

The Thurston County Elections division is also looking for new members to participate in their Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee.

Some recruiting suggestions were:

- Recruiting before a critical election; utilize their motivation to participate in the election and in improving voting accessibility.
- Doing a presentation at the citizens Advisory Committee for Intercity Transit as well as distributing some literature there
- Putting together an advertisement and/or news release. Patty said that she could send out a management bulletin through DSHS that could target adults with disabilities. Berl Colley could contact the Department of Services for the Blind to include Thurston County Elections information in the packets they distribute to new county residents. Denise could also ask the Talking Book and Braille library to do a mailing to their members in Thurston County.

Patty asked the Thurston County Elections staff if they knew what other counties are doing as far as their committee goes and voting accessibility. Kim said that all should have committees such as this one, although some have decided to do joint committees (with other counties) because of their county's size.

Kim would like to share what Thurston County has been doing in terms of Voting Accessibility at the next conference of the Washington State Association of County Auditors. If some time is given, she hoped that a member of the Thurston County committee would like to come and share their experience at the conference. She will also be submitting the ASL Voters Pamphlet for National Awards.

Patty asked if there were any projects by other committees, nation wide, that the Thurston County could use to borrow and incorporate into their Plan. Sandy Baxter said she was committed to researching projects for the committee and will try to present that to the group at the next meeting.

Denise Colley took a moment to sincerely thank Kim for her continued commitment, support and enthusiasm towards making voting as accessible as possible.

The floor was opened for questions. Patty asked if there was a way to discover what disabilities were prevalent in the Thurston County community so they may be able to provide accessible voting options for them. Other committee members suggested looking into the 2000 census information. The committee discussed reaching out to deaf/blind voters. Suggested were two organizations in Seattle that may be of use to reach those voters; the Deaf/Blind Service center in uptown Seattle and the Helen Keller Center. Berl also suggested contacting Kirk Adams with the Seattle Lighthouse for the Blind. David Lord was suggested as another person who may be able to help.

*Sandy did research on the 2000 census in Washington State. In 2000 Washington State had approximately 17.9% of the population between 21-64 had disabilities. In Thurston County this percentage was 18.1-20.8% of the population. It should be noted the percentage of persons with disabilities increases after age 64.*

Denise Colley asked what the committee could do to reach disabled veterans and Berl suggested that the Blinded Veterans Organization may be a good place to start. It would also be beneficial to the committee to reach out to organizations serving those with mental health issues. Berl requested that there be a way to compare the counties of Washington State in terms of voting accessibility.

Patty suggested that Elections do as much as possible to make sure that the elderly are keeping their voter registration current, especially in regard to assisted living centers and retirement homes. Kim mentioned that this next year the Elections office will continue the "Are You Ready to Vote?" campaign which emphasizes keeping voter registrations current.

Meeting adjourned at 7:00 pm

*If anyone from the committee or Thurston County community is interested in participating in the Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee please contact Sandy Baxter at 360.754-3355 ext 6232. Please let her know what days and/or times work for you to attend a meeting. Thank you*