



## County to introduce new voting system

Voters to enter their choices onto digital tablet

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AT THE POLLS—Eighteen-month-old Montgomery Roy watches his father, Richard, vote at the Moorpark Community Center last year. MICHAEL COONS/Acorn Newspapers

By the 2020 primary election, it will be a lot easier and faster for Ventura County residents to cast their ballots at the voting booth, officials predict.

At its Dec. 11 meeting, the Ventura County Board of Supervisors decided to purchase a \$4-million voting system from Dominion Voting Systems Inc., a Colorado-based election tabulation service company.

The new system, called the Democracy Suite, is expected to bring enhanced security and faster results to county residents, according to Clerk-Recorder Mark Lunn. It will replace a 13-year old system that has “outlived its useful and operational life,” according to the staff report.

The benefits of the new system will be especially helpful during the primary and general 2020 elections when the county expects its nearly 450,000 registered voters to cast in-person or mail-in ballots.

During the 2018 election, voter registration in the county reached record numbers as an additional 15,000 residents registered to vote. Voter turnout also increased to reach 70 percent, the highest for a mid-term election since the 1982 Gubernatorial Election, according to the Clerk-Recorder’s Office.

County officials expect turnout and registration to continue into the 2020 presidential election and primary as more Ventura County residents register and cast ballots. The new voting system, according to Lunn, will help manage the additional ballots for years to come.

“We’ve experienced record registration numbers in the county . . . that we’re very proud of,” Lunn told the Board of Supervisors. “We’re preparing for a lot more of folks coming to the polls (in 2020), which is a good thing. That’s how democracy speaks.”

Under the new system, voters will use an Americans With Disabilities Act-compliant tablet to electronically select their candidates before printing a paper ballot with their choices and dropping it off with poll workers. People will still cast their ballots at their local polling places, or through mail-in ballots from the comfort of their own homes.

Voters who “don’t like technology” will still have the option to fill out their paper ballot with a pen, Supervisor Kelly Long said.

The number of ballots cast will no longer be tallied at polling places. Instead they will be counted back at the Ventura County Clerk-Recorder’s office, where they

then will be scanned and tabulated by the office's new high-speed scanners, which are part of the Democracy Suite System.

"The bottom line is to turn around that vote count as fast as we possibly can," Lunn said. "Because we have this technology, we won't have to work the long hours to do it."

With the new high-speed scanners, the Clerk Recorder's Office will be able to tabulate 9,000 to 10,000 ballots per hour. In its current system, the county can only process 3,000 to 3,500 ballots per hour.

The whole process will use fewer machines, according to Lunn, as the clerk's office moves toward a "paper-based system." With the new voting system, people have the chance to review their ballots on paper and confirm their votes before dropping it into a ballot box.

"We're going to a paper-based system where a voter comes into the polling places, marks their ballot and puts their ballot into a slot," Lunn said. "That ballot is hand-carried back to the elections division for it to be scanned, tallied and counted. It is the safest we can possibly be in Ventura County."

The election system's format earned it the highest certification from the California Secretary of State's Office, which measures voting systems based on their functionality, accessibility and security. Currently, 19 counties have implemented the new Democracy Suite Voting System.

Once the new equipment arrives, the county plans to hold staff trainings, conduct mock election testing of the system and educate voters about the changes during 2019.

"We have a primary election in March 2020. We would take delivery in early 2019 (and) that would give us nine months to do testing and mock elections and do outreach to the community," Lunn said. "By the time we start election activities in September 2019, we'll be ready to go with the system."

The \$4 million is expected to be paid for using \$650,000 from the county's general fund. The rest of the equipment will be purchased using federal and state grants.

Once in place, the equipment is expected to save the county \$321,000 every year in labor costs and ongoing services.

“We’ve leveraged our tax dollars. We’ve waited, we’ve researched,” Lunn said.  
“This has been a multi-year process.”