

REQUEST FOR COUNCIL ACTION

Date: March 9, 2009

Item No.: 10.a

Department Approval

City Manager Approval



Item Description: Hear a Presentation and Adopt a Resolution regarding
Early Voting and Vote by Mail

1 **BACKGROUND**

2 The current election system has not kept pace with changing demographics and changing
3 demands of a voter's time. The high turnout and follow up from the 2008 election demonstrate
4 several things that can discourage or prevent eligible voters from voting or having their votes
5 count. Numerous election reforms could help make elections easier to administer and make the
6 voting process easier for eligible citizens to exercise their right to vote.

7 Several legislative initiatives have been proposed this year by the Secretary of State and others to
8 make improvements to the election process. Among the proposals are Early Voting and Vote by
9 Mail options.

10 Using the early voting process, voters complete the ballot and feed it through the voting
11 machine, eliminating the need for envelopes and the possibility of human error that could
12 prevent their ballot from counting. Currently more than 30 states allow early voting.

13 Using the vote by mail option, ballots are mailed to every registered voter. It is up to the voter to
14 return the ballot by election day. Voters have a personal identification number, usually their
15 driver's license or passport number, which they include on the ballot envelope. Unregistered
16 voters use the absentee voting process, either in person or through the mail, to request a ballot.

17 Currently townships, cities and unorganized areas with fewer than 400 registered voters can use
18 the vote by mail in state elections. Approximately 275 precincts use the vote by mail process.
19 Additionally, a county, municipality or school district can conduct a special election by mail but
20 no more than two questions may be submitted and no office may be voted on.

21 Advocates for these types of election reform hope they pass in 2009, giving election
22 administrators adequate time to develop rules and procedures before the 2010 election. However,
23 there is concern that legislators may consider these changes too far-reaching without testing
24 them on a smaller scale. Advocates for election reform hope the Legislature is willing to make
25 these voting improvements, but recognize the need to make contingency plans.

26 Ramsey County Elections Coordinator Joe Mansky asked if any Ramsey County city was
27 interested in testing either of these election reforms. City Manager Bill Malinen had experience
28 in Vote by Mail elections in a previous job, so he saw numerous benefits. In addition, because of

29 Roseville's high voter turnout especially among absentee voters, Roseville would be an ideal site
30 for a pilot project.

31 If the Legislature agrees to test either of these election reforms, Ramsey County staff would
32 provide substantial support to ensure that it is done right.

33 **POLICY OBJECTIVE**

34 To facilitate error-free elections in which every eligible voter can vote easily and be assured that
35 his/her vote counts.

36 **FINANCIAL IMPACTS**

37 None

38 **STAFF RECOMMENDATION**

39 Pass resolution supporting Early Voting and Vote by Mail options and offering Roseville to
40 serve as a pilot project site for Early Voting and Vote by Mail.

41 Direct staff to work with Roseville's legislative delegation to pass legislation supporting election
42 reforms.

43 **REQUESTED COUNCIL ACTION**

44 Pass resolution supporting Early Voting and Vote by Mail options and offering Roseville to
45 serve as a pilot project site for Early Voting and Vote by Mail.

46 Direct staff to work with Roseville's legislative delegation to pass legislation supporting election
47 reforms.

48

Prepared by: Carolyn Curti, Elections Coordinator

Attachments: A: Proposed Resolution
B: Curti March 9, 2009 Memo

**EXTRACT OF MINUTES OF MEETING
OF THE
CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF ROSEVILLE**

* * * * *

Pursuant to due call and notice thereof, a regular meeting of the City Council of the City of Roseville, County of Ramsey, Minnesota was duly held on the ninth day of March, 2009, at 6:00 p.m.

The following members were present:

and the following were absent: .

Member introduced the following resolution and moved its adoption:

RESOLUTION No xxxx

Consider Early Voting and Vote by Mail Options

WHEREAS, The high turnout and follow up from the 2008 election demonstrate several things that can discourage or prevent eligible voters from voting or having their votes count; and

WHEREAS, The current election system has not kept pace with changing demographics and changing demands of voter's time; and

WHEREAS, Early Voting and Vote by Mail are two election reform options that would alleviate some of the challenges that makes voting difficult for some voters; and

WHEREAS, The Legislature is considering several election reforms in 2009, thereby giving election administrators adequate time to develop rules and procedures before the 2010 election; and

WHEREAS, Advocates for election reform hope the Legislature will pass legislation making these voting improvements, but recognize the need to make contingency plans; and

WHEREAS, Because of Roseville's demographics, the City would be an ideal location to serve as a pilot site to test the early voting and vote by mail options during a state election; and

WHEREAS, Roseville will work with the City's legislative delegation, Ramsey County, Secretary of State and other election reform advocates to serve as a pilot project for early voting and vote by mail.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the City of Roseville requests the Legislature to approve legislation allowing Roseville to serve at a pilot site to test early voting or vote by mail options in the 2010 election.

The motion for the adoption of the foregoing resolution was duly seconded by Member

, and upon a vote being taken thereon, the following voted in favor thereof:

and the following voted against the same: none.

WHEREUPON said resolution was declared duly passed and adopted.

Resolution Consider Early Voting or Vote by Mail Options

STATE OF MINNESOTA)
) ss
COUNTY OF RAMSEY)

I, the undersigned, being the duly qualified City Manager of the City of Roseville, County of Ramsey, State of Minnesota, do hereby certify that I have carefully compared the attached and foregoing extract of minutes of a regular meeting of said City Council held on the day of , 20 with the original thereof on file in my office.

WITNESS MY HAND officially as such Manager this day of , 20 .

William J. Malinen, City Manager

(Seal)



To: Mayor and City Council
Fr: Carolyn Curti, Elections Coordinator
RE: Vote by Mail and Early Voting Discussion
Date: March 9, 2009

Vote by Mail Election - Conversation with Oregon officials

How is it administered?

Counties administer the elections.

A voter pamphlet is mailed to every household in the state about three weeks before election day. It includes a sample ballot, voter registration information, absentee voting process information and calendar of voting dates.

Ballots are mailed one to four days after voter pamphlet is mailed.

Counties generally contract with a printing services company to coordinate mailing to every registered voter.

Secretary of State maintains a voter registration database where voters can check registration status.

A ballot is mailed to every registered voter at his/her home address. Ballots cannot be forwarded for any reason. If a person is temporarily at a different address, he/she must use the absentee ballot process to get a ballot. (this is explained in the voter pamphlet.)

Voters may either drop the ballot at designated drop site or mail it (voter pays postage).

How does it save money?

Cost savings come in a substantially reduced number of hours that we would need election judges. Election judges would help process ballots once they are returned to City Hall, but there would not be a need for the roughly 200 election judges who work from 8 to 18 hours on election day.

Counties in Oregon hire a printing services company to coordinate the assembly of ballots and bulk rate mailing so staffing costs are limited.

Voters could either drop the ballot at a designated drop box or pay postage to return ballots. Roseville would likely see a reduction in mailing costs.

It would also substantially decrease the supplies budget for everything from ballot pens, I Voted stickers and masking tape to voting booths and ballot counters. Roseville spent approximately \$70,000 for ballot counters in 2002. Machines generally are replaced every 10 years.

Will it allow same day voter registration?

Oregon does not allow same day voter registration. However, nothing in the vote by mail process would prevent an unregistered voter from registering and voting in any given election. Unregistered voters would use the absentee ballot process (either in person or by mail) and receive a ballot.

What about disabled, seniors or others who may have difficulty completing a ballot?

Oregon voters can call their county if they need assistance completing ballots. Election judges go to their homes to assist with completing the ballots. This is not used very often. They also send election judges to nursing homes.

Other information

According to the Oregon Secretary of State, vote by mail:

- Increases voter participation
- Removes barriers that can keep people from getting to the polls
- Allows more time for people to study issues and candidates before marking the ballot
- Has built-in safeguards that increase the integrity of the elections process
- Saves taxpayer dollars

According to analysis by University of Oregon Professor Priscilla L. Southwell, Ph.D., more than 80% of Oregonians preferred voting by mail. Voters 65 years and older or 25 years or younger preferred it by more than 86%.

Southwell also reported that 66.6% of voters said they were as likely to vote by mail as in the polling place while 29.3% said they were more likely to vote by mail.

According to one report, voting by mail reduced Oregon's elections cost from \$4.33 per vote to \$1.24 per vote.

www.oregonvotes.org/vbm/

Early Voting

If the Legislature is not ready to move to vote by mail for statewide elections, the City of Roseville advocates an early voting system. Currently more than 30 states allow early voting.

It is time to acknowledge that people are using the absentee ballot as a method to vote early and create a system to handle the volume of voters who choose this option. In 2006, 9% of voters in Roseville using the absentee ballot. In 2008 the number nearly doubled to 17.3%. Elections officials statewide report a similar increase in absentee voting.

Under the current system, voters must have a valid reason to vote using the absentee process – illness or disability, absence from precinct, serving as an election judge in another precinct, religious observation that prevents voter from going to the polls or an eligible emergency declared by the state or federal government.

In the past election, hundreds of voters who came to City Hall did not select one of those options. When told it was required they responded that none of the reasons applied. We told them they could not vote by absentee unless they had a reason. Not once did a voter leave City Hall. They decided either they had an illness or were going to be out of town on election day. Since no one checks the validity of their reason for being gone, we issued absentee ballots.

Under the early voting system, registered and unregistered voters come to a designated polling place (City Hall) in the weeks before election day. They would not have to give a reason for requesting a ballot. They sign the voter registration book if registered, receive a ballot, vote and feed the ballot into the machine. No envelopes or witnesses needed. If not registered, the voter completes a voter registration application and shows identification. The voter then votes and feeds the ballot through the machine. We know immediately whether he/she has over-voted or whether there was a problem with the ballot.

The City would maintain its absentee voting system for voters who are out of state or homebound. The City would continue to go to nursing homes to assist voters, but the regular voter who does not want to go to the polling place could come to City Hall.

Advantages of early voting

- Takes pressure off election judges on election day
- Person can vote at a time that is more convenient to their schedule
- Less paperwork than the traditional absentee voting process
- Reduces chance of human error compared to absentee voting
- Voter can come to City Hall and avoid going to the wrong precinct on election day
- Voter will know if there is a problem with his/her ballot or registration. Problem can be fixed and vote will count

Disadvantages of early voting

- Once a person has voted, cannot retract their ballot – in the case of a candidate dying or withdrawing from consideration
- Eliminates the voting day experience