

October 20, 2008

Pat McCarthy  
PO Box 111389  
Tacoma, WA 98411

Dear Ms. McCarthy:

In order to fully inform you about the conduct of the Ranked Choice Voting Election and how we will be reporting results, I thought it would be good to review some of this election's unique characteristics.

As you are aware, this new voting method was passed by the voters of Pierce County in 2006, was modified by Charter Amendments in 2007, and all equipment, software and firmware has been provisionally certified by the Secretary of State.

I am attaching the Pierce County Charter, the Pierce County Canvassing Board Policy Manual and the Elections Division Procedures Manual that outline the protocols established for carrying out this Ranked Choice Voting election for your reference. The following are some answers to questions that have been raised:

**Two Ballot Cards – Rank up to three choices**

The implementation of Ranked Choice Voting necessitated the use of a second ballot card solely devoted to Ranked Choice Voting offices. For this election, each voter will receive two ballot cards: A Traditional Ballot Card consisting of President, Congress, State offices and measures, judges and local issues; and a Ranked Choice Voting Ballot Card for Executive, Assessor – Treasurer, Sheriff and Council Districts 2, 3, 4, and 6. Voters will vote for one candidate on their traditional ballot and may rank up to three choices for each race on their Ranked Choice Voting ballot. See Pierce County Charter Section 4.10 (1).

**Vote-by-Mail Ballots – Return Postage Paid**

For this election only, voters will be able to return their absentee ballot postage free. Stamp(s) will not be required. The inclusion of a second ballot card made the return absentee envelope overweight and would have required the voter to place more than one first class stamp on the absentee envelope. By paying return postage, it is the Elections Division's goal to encourage voters to return both the Traditional Ballot and the Ranked Choice Voting Ballot.

### **RCV Voter Intent and Tabulation Rules**

We have done our best to educate Pierce County voters how to mark their ballot cards correctly. Having said that, it has been our past experience that some voters make mistakes when marking their ballot. Notwithstanding clear instructions on the ballot, then, voters may overvote (mark more than one candidate) in a single column; skip a ranking; and/or vote for the same candidate as their first, second and third choice. Pierce County Canvassing Board Manual Chapter X, Section II; and Chapter XI, Section II; and Appendix J – Ranked Choice Voting Advancement Table establish the protocol for the counting of such votes.

### **RCV Write-In Candidates**

To be included in the Ranked Choice Voting algorithm process, a write-in candidate must submit a declaration of candidacy no later than 31 days prior to the election; that deadline was Friday, October 3, 2008. No certified write-in declarations were received for this election. For additional information see Pierce County Canvassing Board Manual Chapter XI, Section I.

### **RCV Results Reporting and Running the Algorithm**

Election results containing the first choice vote totals for each Ranked Choice Voting race will be reported with each release as per the schedule below.

We have scheduled Friday, November 7, 2008 as the first scheduled interim unofficial algorithm report for Ranked Choice Voting races. This will be a snapshot in time. All results are unofficial until the election is certified (November 25, 2008). Additional interim algorithm reports will be released once per week through certification. To reiterate, each interim unofficial release of the algorithm report represents a snapshot of the candidates rankings based upon the ballots which have been counted. The results from release to release could change as additional ballots are being counted each day through certification. If a race is very close, the final results may not be determined until the election is certified.

By waiting until Friday, the majority of the absentee ballots for the election will have been processed making this a more complete snapshot of the initial RCV results for each race. Running the algorithm on a smaller pool of votes would unnecessarily increase the risk of the appearance of fluctuating results.

At certification of the Election on November 25, 2008, if a Ranked Choice Voting candidate receives a majority of first choices, that person will be declared the winner and the RCV algorithm will not be applied to that race. If no candidate receives a majority of first choice votes, the final algorithm will be applied and the candidate(s) with the fewest votes will be eliminated and votes will be redistributed to provide final results.

### **Schedule for Reporting Results**

On Election morning at 7:00 am, per state law, we will begin the process of running all “good to go” absentee ballots through the tabulators. We will stop running the ballots through the tabulators at approximately 7:30 pm, in order to be ready for the results reporting process. The first release of results is planned for approximately 8:30 pm. This release will consist of absentee ballots counted throughout day. I am qualifying these times somewhat to address any potential issues that may crop up and change the timelines, but this is our plan.

In the Ranked Choice Voting races, what you will see in the first reporting will be the voters’ first choices. Results will be released to all observers, candidates, campaign representatives and citizens present. We will also post these results to our website, [www.piercecountywa.org/elections](http://www.piercecountywa.org/elections). You are welcome to come to our Election Center to view the ballot processing and to obtain results. We are located at 2501 South 35<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite C, in Tacoma.

We will continue to provide periodic reporting of results as we process all the poll site ballots throughout the night. State law requires the tabulation of polling place ballots to continue until complete. The following represents our tentative results release schedule (subject to change):

#### **Election Night:**

8:30 pm  
10:00 pm  
12:00 am  
3:00 am

#### **Wednesday, November 5, 2008:**

6:00 am  
9:00 am  
12:00 pm  
6:00 pm

#### **Each subsequent day (excluding weekends and holidays):**

Daily at 6:00 pm

We anticipate the counting of polling place ballots to be finished at approximately 12:00 pm on Wednesday, November 5, 2008. Due to the tremendous volume we will have in this election with every voter having two ballot cards to process and a projected 82% voter turnout, we will work 24 hour shifts throughout election week.

For additional information please refer to Pierce County Charter Section 4.10 (2) and Pierce County Canvassing Board Policies Chapter XI, Section III

### **Multiple Elimination**

In 2007, a charter amendment was passed by the voters to allow for multiple elimination of losing candidates in one pass. This simply means that if the votes for multiple losing candidates are less than the next lowest candidate, those losing candidates can be eliminated in one pass.

### **Resolving Ties in Ranked Choice Voting offices when applying the algorithm**

If, at the time of applying the Ranked Choice Voting algorithm, there are two or more losing candidates that are tied and can not be eliminated in one pass, the losing candidate will be determined by lot. See page 54 of the Canvassing Board Policy Manual for lot definition.

If a tie occurs during one of the interim unofficial snapshots, the tie will be resolved immediately witnessed by the official political party observers that are present.

If a tie occur during the Final Official Algorithm release at certification, all candidates for that office will be notified by phone and the tie will be resolved by the Canvassing Board at a designated date, time and location. At least three attempts will be made by phone to contact the candidates.

### **Recounts for Ranked Choice Voting Offices – Automatic and Requested**

At the time of certification, the final algorithm will be run in rounds for each office, as provided in Pierce County Charter 4.10(2), until a candidate receives a majority (over 50%) of the votes from the continuing ballots. If in that round the difference between the number of votes cast for that candidate and the number cast for the closest opponent is less than two thousand votes and also less than one-half of one percent of the total number of votes cast for both candidates in that round, an automatic machine recount will be conducted and will include a visual inspection of ballots and a logic and accuracy test.

Upon a request for a recount of a Ranked Choice Voting race, a machine recount will be conducted upon filing an application and paying a deposit. The deposit is \$0.15 per ballot. This is just a deposit. The requestor will be responsible for paying for the full cost of the recount as determined by the Canvassing Board.

In either case, there will be no manual (hand) recount conducted for Ranked Choice Voting offices. In an election involving hundreds of thousands of Ranked Choice Voting ballots with the elimination of losing candidates and transferring of votes, manual recounts are not feasible. Ranked Choice Voting requires the use of a computer programmed vote tabulation system to run the algorithm.

Pierce County Charter 4.10(1) and Pierce County Canvassing Board Policies Chapter XIII, Section V.

### **Central Count Protocol**

The Vote Tabulation System approved by the Office of the Secretary of State required Pierce County to use a central count method to count polling place optical scan ballots. The optical scan precinct counters were not approved for use in this Ranked Choice Voting Election. Pierce County has established procedures for the transport of ballots from the polls and the process to centrally count these ballots at the Pierce County Election Center. These procedures are detailed beginning on page 58 of the Pierce County Canvassing Board Procedures manual and in Exhibit A of the same document.

### **Glossary of Terms**

A glossary of terms related to Ranked Choice Voting is included in the Pierce County Canvassing Board Policy Manual on page 53.

I hope that this information is helpful. If you have any additional questions or concerns, don't hesitate to contact us.

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Sincerely,

Pat McCarthy  
Pierce County Auditor

Enclosures