

W. G. E.

September 2, 2003

Dear Congressman DeFazio,

This letter is in response to your letter of August 15, 2003 with regard to the Oregonian article of August 4, 2003 addressing Washington County's pending purchase of an optical scan ballot tabulation system and their change from punch cards at the end of this calendar year. The article further indicated that Lane County was further behind in their purchase process.

Lane County is further along than indicated. There are several concurrent efforts, two of which are pertinent to this issue, which the County is involved in. The first is the Request for Proposal (RFP) process for obtaining an optical scan ballot tabulation system. The second is negotiations for a new site for the Elections Division. These efforts are somewhat interdependent as will be explained below.

Lane County Elections is in the process of implementing a Request for Proposal (RFP) for an optical scan ballot tabulation system. The RFP was prepared and sent out at the end of August. Proposals are due at the end of September. The timing of this effort is contingent on the ability to obtain sufficient space for the County to implement the new system in an efficient manner. The current RFP would allow the County to implement the new system in either December 2003 or in 2005 after next year's elections. Certainly Lane County would prefer the December 2003 date.

The effort to obtain a new location for Elections has been in process since last spring. After the failure of a measure in the fall 2002 election to obtain funding to totally replace the Annex, David Suchart, who is responsible for County facility planning began an effort to break up the project into smaller pieces so as to make possible funding efforts easier. The Capital Improvement Program for FY2004, as adopted by the Board of Commissioners, authorized an allocation that would allow for financing a new Elections location. During the summer, Mr. Suchart along with Annette Newingham began researching possible locations that would meet the County's requirements for space. At this point a location has been found and negotiations are in process.

What ties the two efforts together is that the Annex does not contain sufficient space for efficiently implementing and processing an election where optical scanning is the methodology. Very simply the optical scan ballots take up more space than the current card punch ballots. The current space, as you have probably observed, is inefficient and tight to start with. New vote counting equipment as well as storage and the space needed to process optical scan ballots in the current environment is unacceptable for operating the new system in a manner which the voters have an expectation of.

With regard to the dates for implementation, Ms. Newingham and Mr. Suchart believe that obtaining the new location in the next month or so (this would allow for required

remodeling with relocation in July 2004) will allow for time to implement the new system in December 2003. The space required for the new system to operate during the February and May primary would be tight in the current location, but workable. It is imperative that the proper amount of space be obtained for the 2004 General Election. If for some reason the current negotiations fall through and we do not have proper space to operate the optical scan system efficiently, Ms. Newingham and Mr. Suchart would recommend delaying implementation until after the General Election.

Clackamas County Elections is in a similar timeline as Lane County. They have yet to submit a Request for Proposal to change from punch cards. They are considering purchasing against Washington or Lane Counties' contracts after receiving a full evaluation of their space concerns and options. They also expect to make their change in the timeline Lane County is considering, should their space issues be resolved early in 2004, and prepared to wait until 2005 if such a change is not timely.

Lane County is committed to meeting the requirements of the Help America Vote Act (HAVA), which includes the replacement of the punch card system. Lane County Elections has been actively working to meet this goal timely, as well as ensuring that such changes are implemented in such a manner to ensure the accurate and successful conduct of elections in Lane County. It is our commitment to work at overcoming what obstacles remain to enable us to implement a new optical scan tabulation system in 2004.

Should you have questions you may call Annette Newingham at 541-682-4328 or David Suchart at 541-682-3699 who can provide details regarding the real estate transaction or the RFP process. In addition, Ms. Newingham is a member of the Secretary of State's HAVA implementation committee for the new State-wide voter registration system and can provide information on that process. Both Ms. Newingham and Mr. Suchart are available to meet with you or your staff to brief you on any of these matters.

We also want to thank you for your hard work and support of the federal requirements within HAVA. Your commitment is very helpful to Oregon's cities and counties, Lane County in particular.

Sincerely,

Peter Sorenson
Chair Lane County Board of Commissioners