

## 2008 ISSUE PAPER #3

**Issue:** Sedgwick County Voter Coalition '08 Budget Request  
**Department:** Sedgwick County Election Department  
**Fund Center:** 66001-110  
**Fiscal Impact:** \$630,550  
**One Time/Ongoing:** One time

### **Issue:**

The Sedgwick County Voter Coalition is requesting \$630,550 in the 2008 Budget to support the re-opening of 20 polling sites along with 20 opti-scan machines for each site and associated operating costs at those sites. Funding would also support the purchase of an additional 150 touch screen voting machines.

### **Background:**

In 2006, the Election Commissioner closed 145 polling sites and opened 14 additional advance voting sites to bring it to the current level of 63 polling sites and 16 advance voting sites. In the same year, the Election Commissioner added, to each polling site, an opti-scan machine that tabulates paper ballots. The opti-scan machines served several functions including assisting in fluctuating times when waiting might seem too long to a voter, back-up should a touch screen machine have operating issues, and as added security to those voters that were hesitant on the validity of the touch screen machines.

On June 22, 2007, the County Manager received a 2008 budget request from the Sedgwick County Voter Coalition. The funding request of \$630,550 proposes allocating funding to support the re-opening of 20 polling sites, previously closed by the Election Commissioner, and includes costs for personnel, site leasing, and the purchase of 20 opti-scan machines at each site. The funding request also proposes the purchase of 150 touch screen voting machines which would bring the total number of touch screen voting machines to 715 and opti-scan machines to 83.

### **Discussion:**

The Election Commissioner is not supportive of this request. Mr. Gale's office is currently working on issues, as outlined below, and feels that additional funding is not needed to accomplish these goals.

- **Issue #1:** *Sedgwick County Voter Coalition is concerned registered voters will not vote because of the lengthened distance to their polling sites or won't make it to an advance voting site prior to election day, therefore they are proposing an additional 20 polling sites.*

Voters living in urban areas are within a 2 mile radius from their polling site and voters living outside of an urban area may have a longer distance than 2 miles. All cities in Sedgwick County with the exception of the city of Sedgwick, which is mostly in Harvey County, has either one or

more polling sites. Prior to the presidential election in 2008, the Election Commissioner plans to heavily promote advance voting through mailings to registered voters which would include information on advance voting sites, a pre-paid postcard to request advance voting by mail, and the voter's polling site on Election Day. In-person advance voters have 13 days prior to Election Day to vote and are not required to report to a specific site while mail-in advance ballots are sent out to voters 20 days prior to Election Day. The Election Commissioner reports a rise in advance voting as demonstrated below between the last two Gubernatorial Elections. The Election Commissioner has set a goal of increasing advance voting to 50% of total voters.

| DATE                     | APPROX.       |                | PERCENT ADVANCE | # OF ADVANCE     | ADVANCE VOTING LOCATIONS                |
|--------------------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------------------------------|
|                          | TOTAL TURNOUT | ADVANCE VOTERS |                 | VOTING LOCATIONS |                                         |
| 2002 - November Election | 124,000       | 17,467         | 14.09%          | 2                | Election Office, 1 Satellite Location   |
| 2006 - November Election | 118,000       | 31,550         | 26.74%          | 16               | Election Office, 15 Satellite Locations |

- **Issue #2:** *Sedgwick County Voter Coalition states the reduction in polling sites caused a dramatic rise in the number of registered voters assigned to each polling site. Their concern is voters will not vote because of long lines and lengthy delays due to those sites accommodating more voters than before at the voter's polling site.*

Currently, there are 565 touch screen voting machines and 63 opti-scan voting machines put in circulation for advance voting and Election Day voting. The Election Commissioner is in the process of acquiring larger spaces at polling sites to help with voter flow and, in some cases, hold more voting machines. Additionally, several factors will help facilitation at every election that includes board worker preparedness and voter experience with the new machines as well as board workers promoting the choice of touch screen or opti-scan voting when voters check-in and when voting lines seem lengthy. The Election Commissioner's goal for advance voting in the 2008 presidential election is 50%. The Election Commissioner feels strongly that the threshold wait time for voters during peak hours, primarily being the hours of before and after work shifts, would not be higher than one hour in the Presidential Election.

Although the Election Commissioner does not have available data on actual wait times during the previous election or voter turnout at different times of the day, the Budget Office was able to construct estimates of average wait times for voters during what are believed to be the peak voting hours by polling station for the 2008 Presidential election.

Voter wait time estimates were based on the following criteria:

- 77% turnout of current registered voters
- 73% of voters utilizing Election Day voting (27% advance voting)
- Number of voting machines assigned to each polling site
- 65% of voters to vote during peak hours
- Peak hours include 7:00am – 8:30am, 11:30am – 1:30pm, 4:30pm – 7:00pm

Assuming the voters during this peak time frame are evenly distributed, the minimum wait time of all 63 polling sites is estimated to take 4 minutes at polling site #56 (Viola Community Hall – Highway 49) while the maximum wait time is estimated to take 21 minutes and would occur at

polling site #21 (First Baptist Church – 315 N. Broadway). Overall the average wait time among all 63 polling sites is estimated at 13 minutes.

| Voter Wait Time during Peak Hours |                         |                         |                                |                             |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Polling Site                      | 76.9 % Election Turnout | 73% Election Day Voters | 65% Voting during 6 peak hours | Wait Time during peak hours |
| Site #56 - Minimum Time           | 244                     | 178                     | 116                            | <b>4 minutes</b>            |
| Site #21 - Maximum Time           | 2,548                   | 1,860                   | 1,209                          | <b>21 minutes</b>           |
| Average Time at all 63 sites      | 2,940                   | 2,146                   | 1,395                          | <b>13 minutes</b>           |

Within this estimate, we recognize that voters will not be evenly distributed within the 6 hour time frame. As a consequence, the Budget Office estimates the maximum wait times could be doubled or tripled during specific and limited time frames of the day. Such estimates would not be inconsistent from a report received from the Sedgwick County Voter Coalition on wait times during the last gubernatorial election. Wait times cited in that report include:

- **Evergreen Recreation Center:** At 5:45pm, 40 voters were waiting in line for a voting machine. The longest wait time measured for a voter to get to a voting machine was 35 minutes.
- **Glenn Park Christian Church:** At Noon, 26 voters were waiting in line for a voting machine. The longest wait time measured for a voter to get to a voting machine was 13 minutes.
- **Pleasantview Baptist Church, Derby:** The longest wait time measured for a voter to get a voting machine was 20 minutes. A poll worker indicated that there had been long lines consistently since 6:00am.

**Options:**

- 1) Approve full or partial funding of \$630,550 as requested by the Sedgwick County Voter Coalition.
- 2) Maintain the current inventory of 565 touch screen machines and 63 opti-scan machines for both 16 advance voting sites and 63 Election Day voting sites.

**Recommendation:**

Additional funding beyond the \$25,000 requested by the Election Commissioner for public education on advance voting is not recommended. Without the addition of new polling sites or additional voting machines, the largest variable contributing to wait times is the number of registered voters utilizing advanced voting. If the Election Commissioner is able to achieve his goal of increasing advance voting to 50% for the Presidential Election in 2008, it will have a substantial outcome in decreasing wait times. In addition, voters will continue to have the option of utilizing an opti-scan voting machine at each polling site if the wait times for a touch screen machine appear to long.