



Moving to Vote By Mail

King County Elections

King County Council Briefing
May 15, 2006
Committee of the Whole

Vision Statement for Vote By Mail Planning

King County elections will be conducted in a transparent manner that fosters the highest level of public trust and confidence.

Changes in the administration of elections will be made in partnership with the electorate and other stakeholders.

Planning Objective

Adopt and implement a vote-by-mail election system to:

- simplify and streamline election administration;
- be a model jurisdiction for accountability, accuracy and transparency;
- increase voter participation; and enhance access to voting.

History of Vote By Mail in Washington

Historically, Washington State

Absentee Voting

Originally authorized for military, overseas and hospitalized voters; absentee voting was progressively expanded to allow any voter the option to request an absentee ballot. Senior citizens and disabled voters were permitted to request ongoing status to receive ballots by mail automatically.

1983, Washington State

Vote by Mail Elections

Special elections were allowed to be conducted by mail ballot.

1991, Washington State

Absentee Ballots

For the first time, any registered voter in Washington could apply, in writing, for status as an ongoing absentee voter. Using this option, ballots for every election are sent to the voter through the mail.

1990-2005, Washington State

Online Information

The surge of new technology at the end of the 20th Century allowed for even better access to election information with the Internet. During this time, the popularity of absentee ballots grew because of their convenience and the opportunity they afford voters to educate themselves on candidates and issues.

April 2005, Washington State

Vote by Mail Option became Law

Counties were given the option of conducting elections entirely by mail, resulting in more than two-thirds of the counties switching to this method of voting for the 2005 primary and General Election.

Background

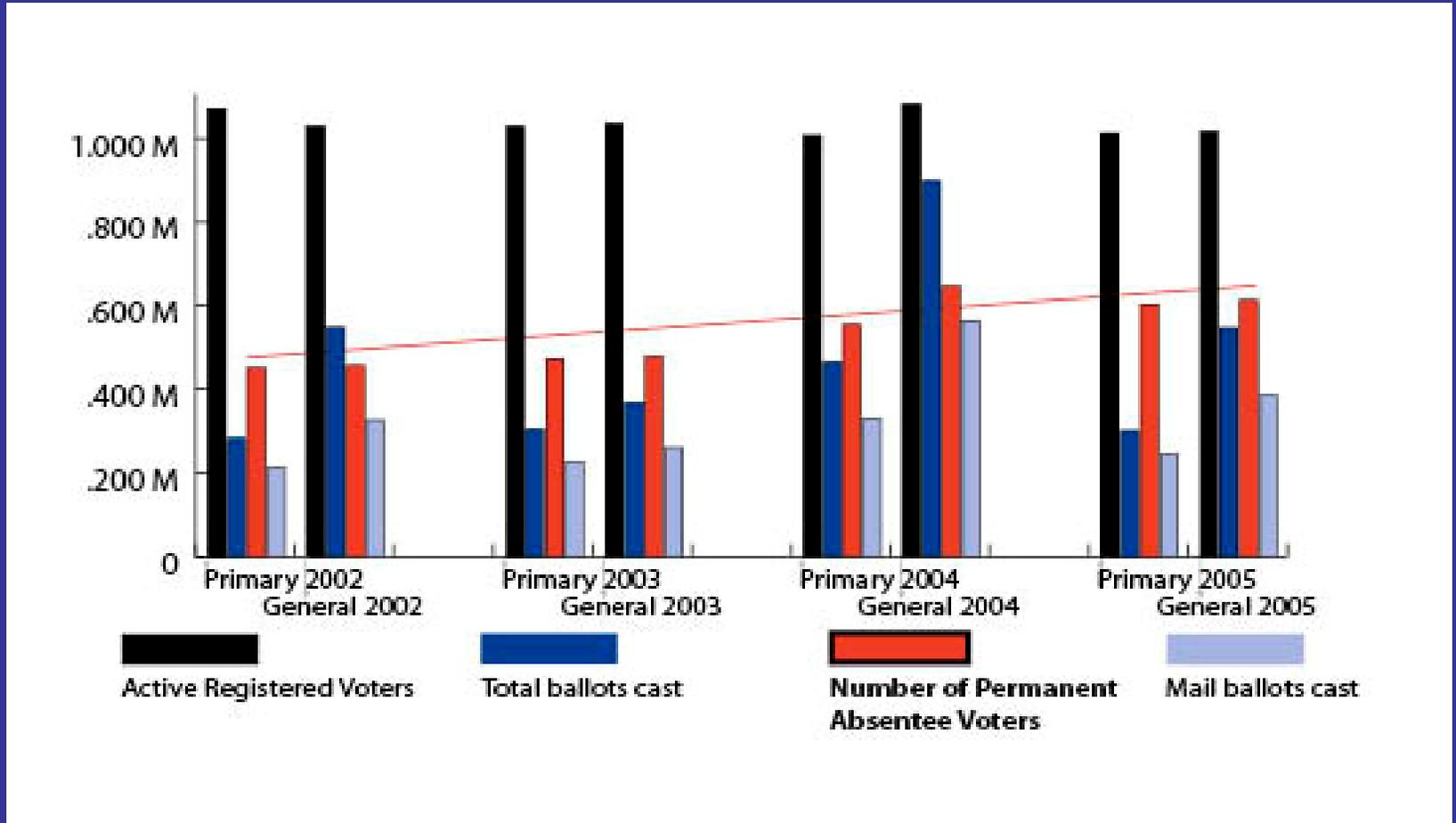
Current Environment

- Two separate voting systems – polls and absentee
- Poll site accessibility issues
- De-centralized vote counting system
- 520 + polling locations – countywide elections
- 4,000 + poll workers – countywide elections
- 60-80 percent of ballots are cast by mail in any given election
- Nearly 60 percent of voters are registered as permanent absentee voters

Why Vote By Mail?

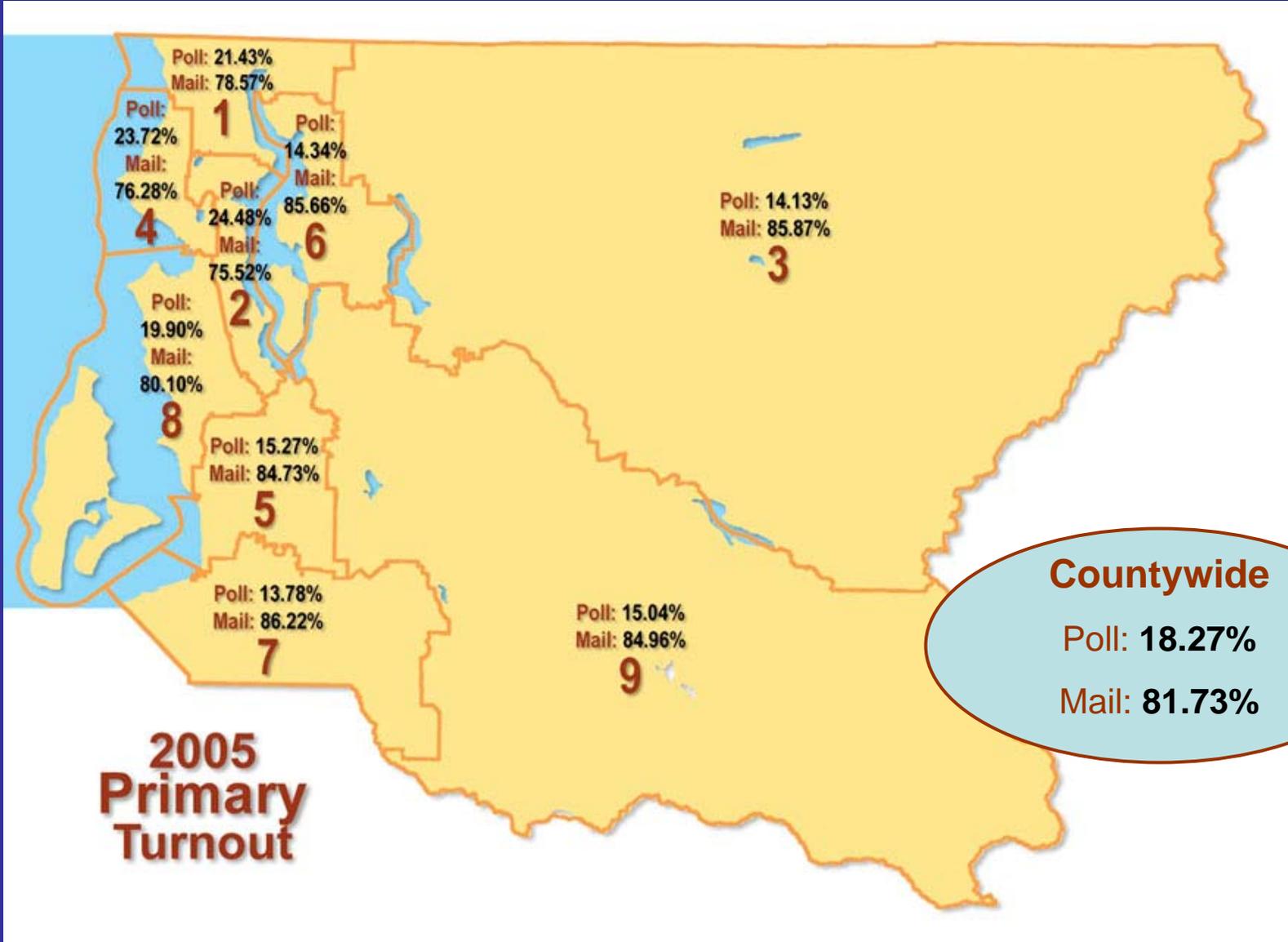
- Single, common voting system
- Reduced complexity in elections administration
- Reduction in the number of provisional ballots
- Increased accountability and transparency
- Facilitates increased voter participation
- Consistent with voting trends
- Recommended by third-party evaluators of King County Elections

King County Vote By Mail Statistics

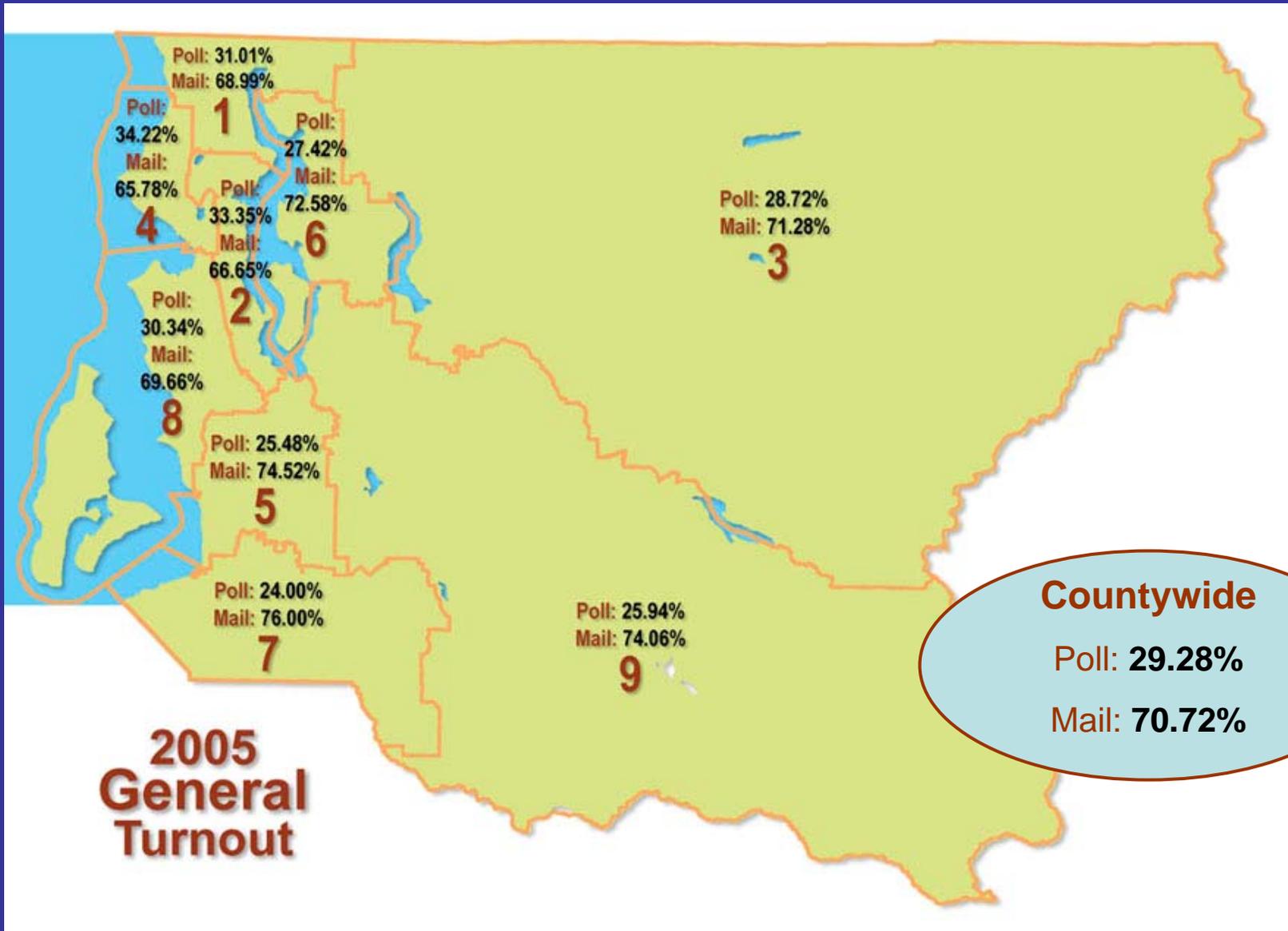


The momentum to vote by mail grows yearly. By the 2005 election cycle, more than two-thirds of voters participating in King County elections self-selected to vote by mail.

Mail & Poll Turnout by Council District – '05 Primary



Mail & Poll Turnout by Council District – '05 General



Every review of King County Elections recommended Vote By Mail

“The current dual voting system in King County is inefficient and expensive.”

The Election Center Operations Audit – October 25, 2005

“All-mail elections should result in: a streamlined elections process; a renewed focus on accuracy; fewer opportunities for fraudulent and inadvertently cast ballots by those not eligible to vote; and reduced opportunities for eligible voters to vote purposely or accidentally more than once”

*King County Citizens' Election Oversight Committee
March 2006*

“Vote-by-mail is already prevalent in King County, is already favored by voters, provides for significant cost savings and stimulates higher turnout among voters.”

*King County Independent Task Force on Elections
July 27, 2005*

What voters are thinking about Vote By Mail

In focus groups conducted this spring, voters told us:

Though they may prefer to vote in person, voting by mail would not deter one person from voting

Poll voters are among the most passionate about consistency in voting processes statewide

In order of priority, poll voters are much more receptive to voting by mail when they learn:

- one voting process – not two – increases accountability and transparency
- vote by mail helps increase the number of people who vote
- vote by mail reduces the number of provisional or challenged ballots

We are planning a voluntary vote-by-mail outreach program in 2006.

Changes in place to facilitate Vote By Mail

Improved accuracy of voter registration records

Consolidating elections facilities

Refining and improving reconciliation processes

- ✓ Implementation of statewide voter registration database
- ✓ Removal of deceased, felons and duplicates
- ✓ Voter Services Liaison program
- ✓ Temporary Elections Annex expansion
- ✓ RFP/SFO for consolidated facility
- ✓ Consolidation of tabulation functions
- ✓ Increased and enhanced security
- ✓ Quality Assurance Unit
- ✓ Adoption of production industry quality standards for measuring accuracy
- ✓ Demonstrated pattern of improvement

Legislative & Regulatory Changes – Update

Passed during 2006 Legislative Session:

- Authorization of automated signature verification
- Moving the date of the primary
- Modifying absentee and provisional ballot notification requirements
- Ensuring accessibility equipment for voters with visual impairments
- Technical changes to election laws

Legislative and Regulatory Changes

Risk H – Failure to adopt would put vote-by-mail implementation at a high risk.
 Risk M – Failure to adopt would put vote-by-mail implementation at a medium/mid-level risk.
 Risk L – Failure to adopt would put vote-by-mail implementation at a low risk.

ITEM	SOURCE	RISK LEVEL	STATUS
Allowing final processing of ballots prior to Election Day	Washington Administrative Code	'06 critical/Risk H '07 critical/Risk M	Under consideration – Secretary of State
Authorization of automated signature verification	Revised Code of Washington	'06 not critical/Risk M '07 not critical/Risk M	Legislation pending. (HB 2479)
Moving the date of the primary	Revised Code of Washington	'06 critical/Risk H '07 critical/Risk M	Legislation pending. Secretary of State, WACO and King County legislative priority (SB 6236)
Modifying the size of voting precincts	King County Code	'06 critical/Risk H '07 critical/Risk M	Needs action. Referenced in Election Center Audit
Adopting vote-by-mail (local option)	King County Ordinance	'06 critical/Risk H '07 critical/Risk M	Proposal will be formulated and submitted by the Executive
Modifying absentee and provisional ballot notice requirements	Revised Code of Washington	'06 critical/Risk M '07 critical/Risk M	Legislation pending (SB 6423, HB 2695)
Modifying election recount provisions	Revised Code of Washington	'06 critical/Risk H '07 critical/Risk H	Legislation pending (SB 6422, HB 2696)
Ensuring equipment accessibility for voters with visual impairments	Revised Code of Washington	'06 critical/Risk H '07 critical/Risk M	Legislation pending (SB 6242, HB 2479)
Making technical changes to election laws	Revised Code of Washington	'06 not critical/Risk L '07 not critical/Risk L	Legislation pending (SB 6235, HB 2477)
Dates of Special Elections	Revised Code of Washington	'06 not critical/Risk L '07 not critical/Risk L	No current action pending
Requirements for return date/time of mail ballots	Revised Code of Washington	'06 not critical/Risk L '07 not critical/Risk L	No current action pending
Placement of Precinct Committee Officers on ballots	Revised Code of Washington	'06 not critical/Risk MH '07 not critical/Risk L	No current action pending

Vote By Mail Implementation Plan

The implementation plan will be administered as a project using commonly accepted principles of project management with key deliverables, timelines, and measurements. Changes and developments will be phased in throughout the implementation to allow for troubleshooting, evaluation and adjustment – with final integration at the point of least risk and disruption.

- Fully staffed project team
- Encourage voting and build community trust
- Public and stakeholder engagement, evaluation and education
- Evaluation and upgrade of voting system and tabulation equipment
- Apply quality assurance standards to test processes and procedures
- Initial implementation in lower profile election cycle
- Opportunity for further legislative changes
- Implementation of automated mail processing systems

Funding Proposal

Appropriations Request:

- Project Team – management, communications, technical support
- 2006 Voter Outreach and Education Program to encourage participation and highlight improvements
- Facility Infrastructure – tenant improvement planning for temporary facility
- Organizational Consulting – team facilitation, organizational effectiveness, leadership development

Help America Vote Act – Grant Requests:

- High Speed Ballot Tabulation Equipment
- Automated Mail Processing Systems
- Election Planning, Calendaring and Training Software
- 2007 Voter Outreach and Education Program on Vote By Mail

Grants are pending final approval of the Secretary of State.

The Local Government Grant Advisory Committee has recommended funding.

Next Steps

Our recommendation is to take the momentum achieved through process and organizational improvements demonstrated during the 2005 election cycle and apply them to an implementation plan that establishes an all-mail voting system in King County by the primary of 2007. Implementation should begin immediately.

- Passage of enabling legislation – proposed ordinance
- Passage of appropriations request – funding proposal
- Establish project team
- Initiate 2006 voter outreach and education efforts
- Provide adequate opportunity for voter and stakeholder input and review
- Procure and implement automated mail processing systems
- Plan for Spring '07 special election implementation for vote by mail

Moving to Vote By Mail

“ Our success in overcoming the challenges of the past and those ahead lies in seizing the opportunity that comes from the intense scrutiny and analysis that we endured in 2004. Recognizing what must be done, and staying on a steady course of improvement and accountability will result in a process and system that is trusted and respected.”

2004 Elections Report to King County Executive Ron Sims
February 2005



Records, Elections and
Licensing Services Division
Department of Executive Services

