

**Minutes**  
**Election Advisory Committee**  
**September 24, 2004**

1:30 p.m.

Office of the Citizens' Assembly on Electoral Reform

#2288 – 555 West Hastings Street, Vancouver, British Columbia

**Attending:**

Committee Members (alpha by Party):

Green Party: Pamela Munroe

Liberal Party of BC: Kelly Reichert, Cathy Young (attending for R. Hector MacKay-Dunn)

New Democratic Party of BC: Nicola Hill, Leslie Kerr (attending for Gerry Scott)

Elections BC:

Harry Neufeld, Chief Electoral Officer (Chair)

Linda Johnson, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer

Linda Shout, Executive Coordinator (Minutes)

**On-line Voter Registration**

Linda Johnson announced that Elections BC's new Online Voter Registration (OVR) system went live on Monday, September 20<sup>th</sup>. This online system, which allows eligible British Columbians to register as a voter, or confirm or update their voter record, is the first of its kind employed in a comparable jurisdiction anywhere in North America. OVR was made possible by changes to the *Election Act* that removed the signature requirement from a voter registration application. A related regulation requires individuals using the online system to provide either the last six digits of their Social Insurance Number or their driver's licence number. If individuals do not wish to disclose this information, they may register by mailing or faxing a downloadable registration form to Elections BC.

There has not yet been extensive advertising regarding OVR, and statistics on the use of the system since its implementation are not yet available. However, an [advertisement](#) has been placed in newspapers in the Surrey-Panorama Ridge electoral district in anticipation of the by-election.

The public will be gradually made aware of the availability of the online system. Starting this semester, university calendars will feature an ad promoting OVR. It is expected that an easily accessible, online registration system will be particularly attractive to younger voters. A high-profile campaign to promote OVR will be launched in January as part of Elections BC's targeted enumeration process leading up to the May 17<sup>th</sup> general election. This Fall, the system will be monitored and fine-tuned based on input received from various sources.

Linda Johnson noted that Elections BC would appreciate feedback from Election Advisory Committee members regarding the online voter registration system. Some

Committee members reported that they had visited the site already. One member noted that the final screen of a registration transaction seemed to imply that the user would be contacted regarding a confirmation of their new or changed registration. In fact, it is not possible to instantly confirm a voter's information, as some time is required to allow verification of the information provided. Elections BC will ensure the language regarding confirmation does not imply a response.

Election Advisory Committee members were encouraged to provide Elections BC with their comments, concerns, and suggestions regarding OVR, and to create a link on their parties' Web sites to the OVR system.

Election Advisory Committee members noted their general support for the introduction of the OVR system.

A question was raised regarding the lack of signature requirement, and the impact this will have on recall and initiative campaigns (the signatures provided on application forms have been used to verify the signatures on recall and initiative petitions). Linda Johnson noted that Elections BC advised government of this impact, and government was aware of this when the change to the *Election Act* was made. Elections BC's perspective is that the use of signatures is not the best way to verify petitions. Research has been conducted into validation methods used in other jurisdictions, and Elections BC will make a recommendation to government on the best way to proceed on this issue.

Regarding voter registration, one Committee member raised the issue of pre-registration of 16 – and 17-year olds so that they will automatically be registered when they turn 18. This idea will be re-considered by Elections BC in legislative recommendations developed with the Election Advisory Committee following the 2005 general election.

Finally, Linda Johnson noted that, as registration closes at the end of Day 7 of the election period, OVR will be unavailable after that point during the general election. Voters will be advised, if they try to access the system, of other options for registration in conjunction with voting. During the Surrey-Panorama Ridge by-election, OVR will not be shut off for all electoral districts, but a message will be provided warning Surrey-Panorama Ridge residents that if they attempt to register after Day 7, their registration will not be processed until after the by-election and they will be required to register at a voting opportunity.

### **Voters List Provided During Election – Printed, Electronic**

Harry Neufeld noted that the formats of printed lists provided to political parties were created in the early 1980's, and that these formats may no longer be appropriate for current usage. He noted that political party requests for voters lists, which may be made at any time, are usually for electronic rather than printed lists. A number of different formats may be produced, but during an election the legislation sets out rules for the format and numbers of copies of lists that must be produced and the timeframe for producing them.

[Examples of the printed list formats](#) used during an election were distributed. These lists were created with scrambled name and address information in consideration of privacy concerns.

During an election, two lists are produced, in both written and electronic formats: the preliminary list, produced on Day 0 (Writ day) and the revised list, which reflects registrations completed until the close of registration on Day 7. Revised lists are pre-checked for duplicates, produced on Day 14, and delivered to District Electoral Officers on Day 15 or 16.

Samples of the printed lists were reviewed by Committee members:

1. [#1 - Preliminary “voting area geo alpha” list](#), containing all names within each voting area, sorted in geographic order. This list was formerly used by political parties for campaigning, but fewer and fewer candidates use it now. These lists are printed, but rarely claimed by the candidates. The *Election Act* states that two printed copies and an electronic copy of the preliminary list must be provided to candidates, and specifies that the list must be divided by voting area. The Act does not specify whether the list should be in geo-or alpha- order within voting area.
2. [#2 - Revised “voting area alpha” list](#) containing an alphabetical sorting of voters within each voting area. This list also contains a sequence number beside each voter’s name. The Act states that a sequence number must appear on the revised version of the list. This number is useful for scrutineers, as the number (as well as the voter’s name) is called out in the voting place, allowing scrutineers to check for the voter against their list of supporters. Harry Neufeld noted that this sequence number is only applied for one election, and does not remain with the voter for future electoral events.
3. [#3 - Several pages of the general “voting book”](#), used by voting officials on election day, in the same sort order as the “voting area alpha” list containing the voter sequence number. The voting book also contains instructions for voting officials. The book is signed by the voter in the space corresponding to their name before they may receive a ballot, and an X is placed in the box to the left of their name.
4. [#4a - Preliminary](#) and [revised \(#4b\)](#) “electoral district alpha” lists are versions of the voters list not required by legislation to be provided to candidates, but have been made available on request in past elections. These lists are preliminary and revised versions of an alphabetical listing of all voters within an entire electoral district. In the revised version, the voter sequence number appears on the far right. This number is not unique within this list – it corresponds to the voter’s sequence number on the revised “voting area alpha” and “voting book” list for their particular voting area.

A question was raised regarding the provision of sequence numbers on the preliminary list. Assigning this number on the preliminary list would not have value, as the list

changes between Day 0 and Day 7, when new registrants may be added. The sequence number is therefore only applied after the close of registration. This is different from what is done in other jurisdictions such as Ontario, where permanent sequence numbers are assigned to voters on the preliminary list, and registrants added after close of registration receive a different, unique sequence number (essentially producing different list sections).

Harry Neufeld asked Committee members to comment on whether list #1 (the preliminary “geo-alpha” list) is still useful, and if so whether the list should be sorted geo-alpha or simply alphabetically. The *Election Act* requires Elections BC to print two paper copies of this list by voting area (could be a geo/alpha or alpha sort) for each candidate, and must print up to eight more copies upon request. Committee members agreed that this geo-sorted preliminary list no longer sees wide usage, and agreed to work with Elections BC to ensure that a minimal number of lists need to be printed. Moreover, Committee members confirmed that revised lists are used more frequently, and agreed to avoid requesting printed lists and instead make better use of electronic lists. Electronic lists are of more value to candidates in any case, as the electronic format allows them to perform their own sorting of the data.

A question was raised regarding changing the legislation so that printed copies of the lists are not required. This matter will be revisited following the general election. However, for the upcoming general election, Elections BC will print and store the required two copies of the printed list at the district electoral office, who will supply them to candidates on request. The preliminary printed list will remain in geo-alpha sort format, by voting area. Committee members agreed that Elections BC could advise District Electoral Officers to encourage candidates to accept electronic versions of the list rather than paper copies.

#### [Changes to the electronic format of voters lists](#)

The Election Advisory Committee had been consulted regarding proposed changes to the electronic format of voters lists. This issue will be revisited following the 2005 general election, as the overall format also has not been changed for many years although significant administrative changes have been made. One such change is that Elections BC is no longer issuing voter registration cards containing a pre-printed number and applying that number to records in its computer system.

In addition, British Columbia is about to merge data from the federal voters list into the provincial list, resulting in the addition of 650 000 to 700 000 voters to the list. Elections BC will not have registration forms for these individuals. The federal Privacy Commissioner has determined that the “key” (the registration number in the federal computer system that corresponds to a particular voter) must be kept private. The provincial Privacy Commissioner, who Elections BC consulted regarding the provision of the voter card number on the voters lists provided to parties, was also adamant that it is not appropriate to make the numeric key available.

The voter *sequence* number has, however, been added to the electronic list in field #3 (on the revised electronic list version only; the field will remain blank on the preliminary list version as the sequence number is not created until the revised list is produced).

Committee members agreed to the changed format of the electronic lists.

### Update - Voting Area Redistribution

Election Advisory Committee members were advised at a previous meeting that a review of voting area boundaries across the province was underway. The *Election Act* requires voting areas to contain no more than 400 voters (unless the Chief Electoral Officer directs otherwise). Changes to voting area boundaries should be completed, gazetted, and posted to the Elections BC Web site by the end of October. Voting area boundaries for the Surrey-Panorama Ridge electoral district have been completed, and voting area maps, street indexes and a conversion table (comparing 2001 and 2004 voting areas) are currently available on the Elections BC Web site.

Committee members were given a [spreadsheet](#) comparing provincial voting areas from the last provincial election with projected voting areas for the 2005 election. There will be 309 more voting areas at the end of redistribution than during the 2001 election. However, there are some voting areas that may have more than 500 or even 750 voters where an “alpha split” could be applied. This denotes a situation where the voters list is split within a voting area into two voting books, divided at a logical place alphabetically based on the names on the list. Although this would mean two sets of voting officials and two ballot boxes in the same voting location, there would be one total of voting results for that voting area reported in the Statement of Votes. Adopting the alpha split approach is simpler and more cost-effective than creating a new voting area boundary in some cases. There are 350 voting areas where the anticipated population of more than 500 voters may require two or even three alpha splits.

It was noted that “alpha splits” refers to an administrative process, while “redistribution” refers to the process, required by legislation, of reviewing and changing voting area boundaries.

The maps created by Elections BC are the only graphic depictions of voting area boundaries. A question was raised regarding the provision of electronic “base map” information to political parties. The base map layers components such as physical geography, political boundaries, and other major features. Additional layers, such as roads and address ranges, are applied and maintained. Information for these layers is proprietary, as the information comes from data sources outside of government. For this reason, Elections BC’s base map information may not be provided to parties due to the proprietary nature of some of the information components. Base map information used by Elections BC may be available for licensed use from a commercial source, and Elections BC will investigate this further for Election Advisory Committee members.

Committee members were notified that while the new voting area boundaries will be changed and gazetted, and maps made available for download and printing from the Elections BC Web site by the end of October, updates of new address and street information will not yet be on the map as this information is still in the process of being collected and applied. Maps available for download on the Elections BC Web site will be flagged as “interim”, and this flag will be removed when the updated map is available. The full set of up-to-date maps, including all the new streets and subdivisions Elections BC has information on, will be available in January 2005. These maps, in printed form, will be included in Candidate Kits prepared for each electoral district.

Committee members were advised that Elections BC will begin charging for map orders. Budget restrictions limit Elections BC’s ability to provide maps for free, except for inclusion in Candidate Kits. Committee members were given a [draft pricing schedule](#), and were reminded that maps may be downloaded from the Elections BC Web site and printed by a local print shop at potentially lower cost.

### **Voting Place Selection Review**

Following voting area boundary redistribution, the assignment of voting areas to voting places must be reviewed. District Electoral Officers (DEOs) will be asked this Fall to analyze the new voting area configuration and link voting areas with voting places, and will be scouting potential new sites as well as evaluating those used in the past. Committee members were provided with a [draft letter](#) that will be sent to all MLAs and political party contacts to solicit their comments regarding voting place assignments and locations. Feedback is to be provided to the Chief Electoral Officer by October 31<sup>st</sup>. Information will be collated centrally and provided to the appropriate DEOs to consider as they select voting places.

Election Advisory Committee members supported this approach. A question was raised regarding a mechanism for consultation once a DEO has confirmed a voting place location. Voting place locations are not made public until during the election period, and it is important that DEOs decisions regarding voting place location be made in a clearly independent manner. However, when choosing voting place locations DEOs consider factors such as proximity to public transportation, good parking facilities, and accessibility for physically challenged voters. If political parties are aware of good potential voting places that have not been used before, or of places used that have been unsatisfactory, they are encouraged to provide this information to the Chief Electoral Officer.

### **Standing Nomination Process**

Committee members received a copy of a [draft letter](#) that will be sent to all political parties encouraging the use of the standing nomination process for the upcoming general election. There are significant advantages for political parties to use this process: it facilitates the confirmation of party candidates, ensures candidate names are spelled correctly, and provides more time for a thorough review and confirmation by Elections

BC that all necessary documentation has been received and reviewed. A sample nomination kit will be enclosed with the letter, which will be copied to party leaders.

Elections BC intends to post standing nominations on its Web site as of mid-January 2005 so the public may view them for each political party.

Committee members were reminded that the Solemn Declaration of Qualification and Statement of Disclosure forms still need to be submitted between Day 0 and Day 5 under the standing nomination process. All other paperwork may be completed before Day 0.

The required nomination forms are available on the Elections BC Web site, but in their physical version some are multi-part forms that allow for retention of copies. The nomination booklet has been recently updated and improved. The new booklet is in a standard, 8.5"x11" format, with perforated pages and more detailed instructions. The Nomination Guide and Guide for Candidates have also been updated to reflect changes to legislation. Committee members were advised to inform their parties to destroy any old nomination kits they have in stock, as new kits will soon be available.

A question was raised regarding the availability of the candidate endorsement form – a form signed by two principal officers of a political party that authorizes a candidate to use the party name on the ballot. This form is not currently available online, but is typically sent out pre-Writ to each party.

### **Innovations for the Surrey-Panorama Ridge By-election**

Linda Johnson updated Committee members on a number of legislative, technological and procedural innovations in place for the Surrey-Panorama Ridge by-election. The online voter registration system has been launched and promoted in the electoral district. "Where to Vote" (WTV) cards will be sent to "empty" addresses where there are not currently any registered voters, advising those residents of voter qualifications and where to vote. Traditionally, WTV cards have only been sent to registered voters once the revised list is produced. However, non-registered potential voters were not being contacted. It is hoped that this innovation will provide effective communication with unregistered voters, motivating them to participate in the election.

Another innovation is the use of email in the District Electoral Officer's office. This should improve the speed and effectiveness of internal communications. In addition, most advertising will now be placed by the Chief Electoral Office rather than the DEO. DEO office locations, financial agent information and so on will be published in ads developed by Elections BC. Furthermore, recent legislative changes allow DEOs to also be appointed as District Registrars of Voters. This facilitates a "one-stop shopping" approach to voter registration and candidate services.

Legislative changes now permit Elections BC to merge information from the federal voters list (National Register of Electors) with the provincial voters list, resulting in a more complete and up to date voters list. The data merge will improve the provincial

voters list dramatically and, combined with Elections BC's targeted enumeration campaign, eliminate the need for registration centers. However, this merge will not be completed in time for the by-election. Therefore, the Surrey-Panorama Ridge by-election will be the last election to feature registration centers. In addition, enumeration will be undertaken in two Special Voting Areas (locations such as long-term care facilities) in that electoral district to ensure mobility-challenged voters are well-served.

Finally, the new *Election Act* rules will apply to this by-election, so a signature will no longer be required for voter registration, and expanded residency rules will apply for those voters without permanent housing.

By-elections present an excellent opportunity to see how new legislation rules apply and make refinements in service delivery. They also pose a training opportunity for staff and election officials. Linda Johnson noted that, as there was a vacancy in the DEO role for Surrey-Panorama Ridge, the DEO in a neighbouring district was assigned (Hank Pulles of Surrey-Green Timbers, a very seasoned and experienced DEO).

## **Other Business**

### Provision of shape files for voting areas

In the past, some political parties have been provided with the "shape files" for voting areas (digital files depicting voting area boundaries). However, as a result of budget constraints, Elections BC has discontinued providing the shape files. The voting area maps produced by Elections BC are the only legal definitions of the boundaries. This is different from electoral district boundaries, which are defined by metes and bounds set out in legislation. The digital files of boundaries Elections BC produces may be problematic for political parties if they are using a different projection from the base map Elections BC uses (e.g. boundaries may overlap into adjoining voting areas). Elections BC does not have the resources to technically support political parties and candidates making use of the shape files in Geographic Information Systems.

Committee members suggested the files could be made available once voting area boundary mapping is completed, with the proviso that Elections BC will not provide support for parties' use of the files. Harry Neufeld agreed to discuss this with the Elections BC's Director of Geographic and Voter Data Services and report back to Committee members at the next meeting.

### **Next Meeting:**

One more Election Advisory Committee meeting will take place before the general election – likely in January. A review of the Surrey-Panorama Ridge by-election will be on the agenda.