



Washington State Conservation Commission

CD Elections

WSCC - Regular Business Meeting
July 18, 2020

Bill Eller, WSCC Elections Officer

Ron Shultz, WSCC Policy Director

CD Elections Update

There are two approaches being taken to address elections:

The first approach - changes to the existing agency rules for the administration of district elections.

The second approach - interaction and dialogue with SCC staff, WACD leadership, and ultimately conservation district supervisors and staff to address issue arising from the 2020 legislative session discussion. These discussions will address topics requiring longer-term fixes or legislative resolution.

Proposed WAC Changes

December 5, 2019 the Conservation Commission approved moving forward on the proposed WAC changes.

The necessary forms were filed with the Code Reviser's Office, and public hearings set.

The due date for comments is 5:00 pm on September 1, 2020.

Two public hearings via webinar have been scheduled in August 2020.

Proposed WAC Changes

Public hearings via webinar:

Due to the on-going COVID-19 pandemic, and to continue protecting the health and safety of our staff and the public, the two public hearings set for August 6, 2020 and August 11, 2020 will be conducted via online webinar and teleconference only.

Public Hearing #1:

When: August 6, 2020 3:00 p.m. Pacific

Public Hearing #2:

When: August 11, 2020 3:00 p.m. Pacific

Proposed WAC Changes

After adoption by the Commission at the September 17, 2020 meeting, these proposed changes will be in effect for the upcoming conservation district elections in January – March 2021.

As a reminder, the highlights of the WAC changes are in the meeting memo.

Discussion of Election Changes

- During the 2020 legislative session there were several bills relating to conservation district elections and, in particular, accountability of conservation districts.
- The election bills didn't advance, however several key legislators expressed interest in continuing discussions through the interim to discuss possible changes to conservation district elections to address certain issues.
- The Commission had also committed to engaging with conservation districts, taking the position at the December 2019 Commission meeting that it wanted more time to engage with conservation districts to discuss possible changes to avoid unanticipated consequences.
- At that time, the Commission stated in their motion: "The SCC commits to engage in evaluating potential improvements to the election process."

Discussion of Election Changes

Some of the topics that come up during the legislative discussions included:

- Unfairness of an election where a single candidate is automatically elected.
- General election of all conservation district supervisors would be more consistent with other state elections.
- Need to increase voter knowledge of and engagement in conservation district elections.
- Conservation district elections need to be more equitable.
- Supervisors need to have a level of accountability and transparency. General elections require Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) filings to disclose financial interests. This is in the public interest for decision makers authorizing the expenditure of taxpayer dollars.
- Timing of conservation district elections and nature of how the election is conducted make it difficult for the public to follow and participate.

Discussion of Election Changes

- In order to identify and refine these issues and others that came up during the past legislative session, Commission staff will meet with WACD staff to discuss these issues.
- This group will also discuss the path forward for engagement with conservation districts.
- The goal is to bring suggested changes to the Commission by the December Commission meeting for consideration. These would include any potential legislation.

Elections Update

Questions:

Bill Eller, WSCC Elections Office

(509) 385-7512

beller@scc.wa.gov

Ron Shultz, WSCC Policy Director

(360) 790-5994

rshultz@scc.wa.gov