



# Conservation District Elections



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# CD Elections

In December 2019, the Commission passed a motion stating outreach to conservation districts would be done to gather input on possible changes to the conservation district supervisor election process.

Over the course of the past year Commission staff, working with input from WACD, have engaged in outreach with conservation districts on the question of possible changes to conservation district elections.

This presentation includes the results of these discussions for Commission review and possible decisions on various options.

# CD Elections

December 2019 Conservation Commission motion:

*Motion by Dorner that the SCC acknowledges the importance of the questions related to conservation district election processes. The SCC is concerned with the current legislative proposals and recommends more discussion with our constituents to avoid unintended consequences. The SCC commits to engage in evaluating potential improvements to the election process. Seconded by Longrie. Motion carried.*

# CD Elections

To fulfill the Commission's desire to "*engage in evaluating potential improvements to the election process*", Commission and WACD staff held a series of meetings and discussions with conservation district supervisors and managers regarding possible changes to district supervisor elections.

Started with discussions among WSCC and WACD staff to develop the process for outreach to districts.

# CD Elections

The first meeting with districts - an open video conference for all districts on Saturday, September 26.

During this meeting, participants:

- were briefed on the status of legislative concerns regarding district elections,
- discussed various criteria for evaluating election options, and
- discussed a series of options for possible election changes.

# CD Elections

During this discussion, districts identified a rubric of items for consideration when reviewing election options.

What we heard from the district participants was that district elections must be:

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|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Affordable / Manageable</li><li>• Non-partisan</li><li>• Flexible (not one-size-fits-all)</li><li>• Inclusive / Equitable</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Transparent</li><li>• Accessible</li><li>• Trustworthy</li><li>• True-to-mission</li></ul> |
|---|--|

# CD Elections

The districts then discussed several options for changes to elections:

## Option 1:

- Allow option for CDs to go on general election ballot.

## Option 2:

- Elections “one week” pilot project.

## Option 3:

- Increase outreach in current election process.
  - Pursue technology changes
  - Continue with WAC changes

# CD Elections

New Option 4 developed by the districts includes:

Option 4: Make elections more affordable.

- Extend board supervisor terms of office to four years. (statutory change)
- Conduct elections every other year. (statutory change)
- Allow conservation districts to set the election date at a point during the year. (statutory change)
- Explore policy and considerations for SCC to review/approve CD proposals for setting zones/precincts for elected supervisor positions. (administrative)

# CD Elections

Districts discussed possible election changes at the WACD Area Meetings during October.

A second all-district web meeting was held on November 21. There were 77 participants.

# CD Elections

Based on input from districts and the discussions held since the first web meeting, the elections options were modified and the following options were discussed at the November 21 meeting.

Districts were presented the “pro” and “con” perspectives for each option. These are reflected below under each option.

# Election Options

Option 1: Allow option for CDs to go on general election ballot.

Option 2: Host CD elections during one “Conservation Week.”

Option 3: Increase outreach in current election process.

Option 4: Make elections more affordable.

# Election Options - Discussion

Option 1: Allow option for CDs to go on general election ballot.

- Pros:
  - Accommodates those districts who wish to be on the general election ballot, while not impacting those who do not.
  - Will incorporate the largest number of voters of the other options.
- Cons:
  - Will require a statutory change.
  - Will increase election costs for those districts opting-in.
  - May raise questions as to why all districts don't go on the general election ballot.

# Election Options - Discussion

## Option 2: Host CD elections during one “Conservation Week.”

- Pros:
  - Although election timing is statutory, a pilot where a group of districts choose to hold their election during the same week could be done administratively.
  - Could increase awareness of CD work through a focused public outreach campaign prior to the election week.
- Cons:
  - May not include all CDs.
  - Might not increase voter turnout or engagement to expected numbers.

# Election Options - Discussion

## Option 3: Increase outreach in current election process.

- Pros:
  - Can be done administratively.
  - Addresses concerns from key stakeholders about the conduct of CD elections.
  - Can be targeted to address particular concerns.
- Cons:
  - Can be expensive for districts depending on approach.
  - Many districts already conducting outreach – not sure what more can be done.
  - May not increase voter participation or engagement in CD.

# Election Options

Option 4: Make elections more affordable.

- a) Extend board supervisor terms of office to four years.*
- b) Conduct elections every other year.*
- c) Allow conservation districts to set the election date at a point during the year.*
- d) Explore policy and considerations for SCC to review/approve CD proposals for setting zones/precincts for elected supervisor positions.*

# Election Options - Discussion

Option 4: Make elections more affordable.

*a) Extend board supervisor terms of office to four years.*

- Pros:
  - Will decrease workload for CD and Commission staff.
  - Allows CDs to focus more time, money and resources on natural resource conservation.
- Cons:
  - Will require a statutory change.
  - Might not increase voter turnout or engagement to expected numbers.
  - Likely increase need for election training for CD staff.
  - May decrease awareness of CDs.

# Election Options - Discussion

Option 4: Make elections more affordable.

*b) Conduct elections every other year.*

- Pros:
  - Will decrease workload for CD and Commission staff.
  - Allows CDs to focus more time, money and resources on natural resource conservation.
- Cons:
  - Will require a statutory change.
  - Might not increase voter turnout or engagement to expected numbers.
  - Likely increase need for election training for CD staff.
  - May decrease awareness of CDs.

# Election Options - Discussion

Option 4: Make elections more affordable.

*c) Allow conservation districts to set the election date at a point during the year.*

○ Pros:

- Allows CD election to be at the same time as the general election.
- Increases flexibility for CDs.

○ Cons:

- Will require a statutory change.
- Will increase the workload for Commission staff.
- May increase confusion over CD election tied to general election date.
- May decrease the ability of CDs to receive assistance from their local elections department.

# Election Options - Discussion

## Option 4: Make elections more affordable.

*d) Explore policy and considerations for SCC to review/approve CD proposals for setting zones/precincts for elected positions.*

### ○ Pros:

- Already allowed under statute.
- Would decrease costs to CDs as only part of the district would be involved in the election.

### ○ Cons:

- Workload increase for CD and Commission staff.
- A policy would need to be created by the Commission that would account for gerrymandering, diversity, equity/inclusion considerations, and updated on a regular basis.
- A CD wishing to pursue this option would need to submit a plan to the Commission, likely after a public hearing process to allow for public comment.
- Likely cause more confusion for the public in the district without more outreach.

# Election Options

After discussion, all participants were invited to participate in a poll on each option indicating whether they “support; could live with; do not support” the option.

The results of the poll are shown below next to each option, with the average vote total of approximately 43 participants out of 77.

# Election Options

Option 1: Allow option for CDs to go on general election ballot.

Support: 33%    Could live with: 33%    Do not support: 33%

Option 2: Host CD elections during one “Conservation Week.”

Support: 42%    Could live with: 35%    Do not support: 23%

# Election Options

Option 3: Increase outreach in current election process.

Support: 55%    Could live with: 34%    Do not support: 11%

Option 4: Make elections more affordable.

- Extend board supervisor terms of office to four years.  
(statutory change)

Support: 45%    Could live with: 30%    Do not support: 25%

# Election Options

Option 4: Make elections more affordable.

- Conduct elections every other year. (statutory change)

Support: 57%    Could live with: 20%    Do not support: 23%

- Allow conservation districts to set the election date at a point during the year. (statutory change)

Support: 21%    Could live with: 42%    Do not support: 37%

# Election Options

Option 4: Make elections more affordable.

Explore policy and considerations for SCC to review/approve CD proposals for setting zones/precincts for elected supervisor positions. (administrative)

Support: 29%    Could live with: 31%    Do not support: 40%

# CD Elections

The Commission received separate comments from:

- Clallam
- Clark
- Grays Harbor and Pacific
- Whatcom
- Palouse
- Friends of Toppenish Creek.



**Questions? Discussion?**



*Thank you for your time,  
your input, and  
your partnership!*



Washington State  
**Conservation  
Commission**