



# Joint Committee on Elections (JCE) Report to the State Conservation Commission



Mark Craven, Chair - Joint Committee on Elections  
(WACD Past President and Snohomish CD Chair)  
SCC Business Meeting – September 16, 2021

# COMMISSION MOTION

Motion by Commissioner Dorner for the Commission to create a joint committee with WACD to develop a list of recommendations for action on election reform. The committee should be formed and begin meeting in January 2021 and submit updates to the Commission and WACD board for their regular meetings with a final report and recommendations to the Commission in September 2021. Seconded by Commissioner Cochran. Motion carries.

Passed December 3, 2020

# JCE IMPLEMENTATION: STEERING COMMITTEE

## Members

- SCC: Carol Smith, Bill Eller, Ron Shultz, Laura Meyer
- WACD: Tom Salzer, Jeanette Dorner, Ryan Baye
- Mark Craven (JCE Chair)

Purpose is to ensure SCC/WACD coordination and plan upcoming meetings of the full JCE.

Met every two weeks opposite JCE meetings.

# JCE MEMBERS

Chair: Mark Craven, WACD/Snohomish (supervisor)

NOTE: All members listed are voting members.

## **NE Region**

Mike Mumford, Pend Oreille (supervisor)  
Dave Hedrick, Ferry (staff)

## **SE Region**

Audrey Ahmann, Walla Walla (staff)  
Larry Cochran, Palouse (supervisor)

## **NC Region**

Craig Nelson, Okanogan (staff)

## **SC Region**

Cindy Reed, North Yakima (supervisor)  
Shirley St. John, South Yakima (staff)

## **NW Region**

Joy Garitone, Kitsap (staff)  
Kirstin Haugen, King (supervisor)

## **SW Region**

Sue Marshall, Clark (supervisor)  
Mike Nordin, Pacific/Grays Harbor (staff)

## **SCC**

Bill Eller Ron Shultz Laura Meyer  
Stephanie Crouch (admin support)

## **WACD**

Ryan Baye and Tom Salzer (staff)  
Jeanette Dorner (president)

# JCE IMPLEMENTATION: COMMITTEE MEETINGS

- Full committee met every two weeks beginning March 2021.
- Committee heard from other states on their election processes – Oregon and Michigan. (see summary in the report)
- Committee also heard from a panel of county auditors from across the state. (see summary in the report)

# JCE IMPLEMENTATION: COMMITTEE MEETINGS

- Initial JCE focus: Identify needs for CDs, voters, candidates, and stakeholders for any election option.
- Next, assessed election options: Starting with options previously suggested by conservation districts, and open to new ideas based on discussions.
- Each JCE member scored each election option based on the degree to which it met identified needs/avoided risk; Full group reviewed and discussed results.



# JCE IMPLEMENTATION: OPTIONS ASSESSMENT MATRIX

## Assessment of Potential CD Election Options - Round 2 (June 2021): Average

		Scale: To what degree does the option meet the need / avoid risk?							
		5-4.5: Best possible / No risk	4.4-3.5: Well / Low risk	3.4-2.5: Somewhat well / Low-med risk	2.4-1.5: Somewhat poorly / Medium risk	1.4-0.5: Poorly / Medium risk	0-0.4: Fails to meet / High risk		
Needs for:		A - Hybrid: 4 yr term held EOY/staggered + option of either 1) Current process/more outreach and host during Conservation Month <u>or</u> 2) Gen Election	B - Hybrid: 4 yr term held EOY/staggered + all CDs use current process/more outreach and host during Conservation Month	C1 - All positions appointed by Conservation Commission members	C2 - All positions appointed by county commissioners/ council	C3 - All positions appointed, some by SCC members and some by county commissioners/ council	D - Commission runs CD elections (close to current system but run by SCC instead of local CD)	E - If no one files for open supervisor position, then SCC makes appointment to fill it	F - Gen Election for All (NOT paid by CDs) + 4 yr term held EOY/staggered
CDs	Non partisan	3.5	4.1	3.4	1.2	2.0	4.0	3.8	2.5
	True to mission	3.7	3.9	2.4	1.5	2.0	3.2	2.5	2.9
	Affordable/manageable	3.5	4.2	3.6	3.2	3.3	3.5	3.7	3.5
	Flexible	4.2	3.2	1.2	1.3	1.3	2.7	2.5	2.0
CDs / Voters / Stakeholders / Legislators	Transparent	3.7	2.8	1.8	1.7	1.5	2.7	2.1	4.2
	Trustworthy / secure	3.7	3.2	2.6	1.8	2.2	3.5	2.8	4.3
	Accessible	4.0	2.8	1.7	1.4	1.6	3.0	2.3	4.5
	Equitable / inclusive	3.9	3.0	1.7	1.2	1.5	3.2	2.1	4.0
Increases turnout*		3.8	3.1	0.5	0.5	0.5	2.5	0.8	4.3
TOTAL		<b>34.0</b>	<b>30.4</b>	<b>18.9</b>	<b>13.6</b>	<b>15.8</b>	<b>28.2</b>	<b>22.7</b>	<b>32.3</b>
<i>3-color gradient scale for totals</i>		<i>Highest Value</i>			<i>Midpoint (50 percentile)</i>			<i>Lowest Value</i>	



# JCE CONSENSUS

- The JCE reached consensus on a package of items.
- The JCE recommends these changes to the Commission.
- Important note: The current election process would stay the same, with the changes recommended here.
- The JCE felt the elements of this package addressed concerns while at the same time empowering CDs to retain local control over their election process.

# JCE CONSENSUS

- The package consists of four parts:
  - Part 1: Conduct elections every other year, rather than every year as done currently.
  - Part 2: Extend supervisor terms (for both appointed and elected) from the current three-year term to a four-year term.
  - Part 3: Conduct district elections during one Conservation Month.
  - Part 4: Allow conservation districts the option to go on the general election ballot.

# PART 1 : ELECTION EVERY OTHER YEAR

- Currently, all conservation districts conduct elections every year. This proposal would move elections to every other year.
- Why propose this change?
  - Saves costs associated with conducting an election.
  - Gives districts the option of choosing to run their election in either an odd or even year.

## PART 2: SUPERVISOR TERMS TO FOUR YEARS

- Change the current term from three years to four years.
- Two supervisor positions would be up for election during one election cycle, one supervisor position would be elected in the next cycle two years later.
- The two appointed supervisor positions would be appointed by the Commission in “off years” when no election is held.
- For current supervisors, there will be a process to modify the three-year term to a four-year term.

## PART 2: SUPERVISOR TERMS TO FOUR YEARS

- Why propose this change?
  - Reduces election costs.
  - Normalizes CD elections to match terms of several other elected positions.
  - Allows CDs to follow same schedules as other elections.

## PART 3: CONSERVATION MONTH

- Districts follow the current election process but with more emphasis on local election outreach.
- All districts would conduct their election during one “Conservation Month,” with the Commission determining the month with input from CDs.
- The SCC would coordinate broad statewide advertising/promotion of conservation districts and potential election opportunities throughout Conservation Month.

## PART 3: CONSERVATION MONTH

- The campaign will be developed in coordination with CDs, particularly with members of the Communications, Partnership, and Outreach group who have been building a foundation for this.
- Why propose this change?
  - Holding elections within one Conservation Month allows for broad communication/publicity about CDs, their work, and election opportunities to a statewide audience.
  - Goal would be to increase awareness of CDs and increase participation in CD elections.
  - Cost of “Conservation Month” publicity would be borne by the Commission.

## PART 4: GENERAL ELECTION OPTION

- By a vote of the board of supervisors, a CD could choose to go on the general election ballot, rather than conduct the election under the current process.
- CD supervisors would not be required to run in a primary election, and — similar to cemetery districts — supervisors would be exempt from Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) and personal financial filing requirements.



# PART 4: GENERAL ELECTION OPTION

- Why propose this change?
  - Empowers each CD to make a local determination about which election approach works best for their communities and their district, consistent with our core value of locally led conservation.
  - This option has the highest potential to increase voter turnout because it would be on the ballot with other entities.

# CONCLUSION

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- The JCE recommends these changes to the Commission.
- Important note: The current election process would stay the same, with the changes recommended here.
- The JCE felt the elements of this package addressed concerns while at the same time empowering CDs to retain local control over their election process.

# QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION

- The package consists of four parts:
  - Part 1: Conduct elections every other year, rather than every year as done currently.
  - Part 2: Extend supervisor terms (for both appointed and elected) from the current three-year term to a four-year term.
  - Part 3: Conduct district elections during one Conservation Month.
  - Part 4: Allow conservation districts the option to go on the general election ballot.



# Thank you!

## Members of the Joint Committee on Elections

And the SCC Team:

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Washington State  
**Conservation Commission**