

# SANTA CRUZ COUNTY CLERK/ELECTIONS POLLING PLACE ACCESSIBILITY PLAN

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## **Introduction**

Santa Cruz County is situated at the northern tip of Monterey Bay, 65 miles south of San Francisco, 35 miles north of Monterey, and 35 miles southwest of the Silicon Valley. Its natural beauty is present in the pristine beaches, lush redwood forests, and rich farmland. It has an ideal Mediterranean climate with low humidity and sunshine 300 days a year.

There are four incorporated cities within Santa Cruz County. The largest is the City of Santa Cruz, with a population of 54,593. Watsonville has a population of 44,265; Scotts Valley has 11,385, and Capitola has 10,500.

## **Census Data**

Based on US Census, the 2003 estimated population of Santa Cruz County is 251,584. The U.S. Census notes that there are 37,895 persons in Santa Cruz County age 5 or more who have a disability.

Santa Cruz County is 445 square miles with 574.1 persons per square mile.

## **County Clerk/Elections Department**

The Santa Cruz County Clerk serves as the chief elections official for Santa Cruz County. In November 2004, of the 148,185 registered voters, 123,275 voted, or 83.2%. Of those who voted, 46,993 (38%) voted by mail and 76,282 (62%) voted at one of the 163 polling sites in the county. There were a total of 54,554 requests for vote-by-mail ballots of which 28,447 were signed up to be a permanent absentee voter who will vote by mail for all elections in which he or she is eligible to vote.

The County Clerk/Elections Department is under the direction of an elected County Clerk. There are 5 Program Coordinators in the areas of Absentee, Poll Workers/Polling Places, Voter Registration, Candidate Filing, Mapping & Computers. In addition, there is one Information Services Analyst, a Senior Account Clerk and two deputy clerks who manage the Special Services offered at the office including: marriage licenses, fictitious business, notary bond oaths, passports, etc.

## **Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee**

The County Clerk/Elections Department meets quarterly with its Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC). Members of the committee include Michael Bradshaw of the Independent Living Center; Michael Bush; Tracey Rosenthal, Program Coordinator for Poll Workers/Polling Places; Jaime Young, Program Coordinator for Voter Outreach; Gail L. Pellerin, County Clerk. Additional members are currently being recruited.

The Committee was established in accordance with the Guidelines for Compliance with the Voting Accessibility for the Elderly and Handicapped Act, Public Law 98-435, distributed by the Secretary of State's Office in 1985. Specifically, the functions of the committee are:

- Assist and advise county elections officials in outreach programs for disabled and elderly individuals and organizations;
- Advise county elections officials on the accessibility of registration and voting systems, barriers to participation by the elderly and disabled, and mechanisms to overcome and correct these barriers;
- Assist county elections officials in surveying polling place accessibility in compliance with the guidelines;
- Evaluate an inaccessible polling place or polling places. Upon completion of this evaluation, the VAAC may:
  1. Determine that an inaccessible polling place is usable by elderly and disabled voters
  2. Determine that the polling place is not usable and cannot be made accessible
- Assist and advise county elections officials in training precinct workers relative to accessibility and recruitment of elderly or disabled precinct officials;
- Assist in the recruitment of elderly or disabled precinct officials;
- Undertake other activities relative to accessibility of the voting process.

## **Phase 1: April 2004 through December 2004**

Santa Cruz County has been taking steps to evaluate and aggressively seek improvements in polling site accessibility. Significantly, the state has proposed several survey tools that have applied varying access standards. In the absence of a final survey tool in the spring and early summer of 2004, Santa Cruz County Clerk/Elections staff utilized survey information obtained from the March 2, 2004 Attorney General's Office survey, information obtained from Rovers and Inspectors in the March 2004 Election, and information obtained from the county's Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee to make the following changes:

### Part 1: Relocate non-compliant facilities that cannot be mitigated.

Of the 140 polling sites used in November 2004 election, we relocated 17 sites that contained high priority architectural barriers to sites that were more accessible.

### Part 2: Improve Polling Place Access for the November 2004 Election

Applied for and received an award of \$85,000 Help America Vote Act Grant, to among other things, provide funds to hire an Access Compliance Specialist; purchased supplies to improve polling site access; and expanded the number of Roving Inspectors on Election Day.

Funds were used to:

- a. Hire an Access Compliance Specialist who:
  - Trained our Roving Inspectors on how to survey polling sites in an Election Day environment;
  - Trained staff on how to survey potential and existing polling sites;
  - Evaluated elections officials guidebook on Services to Voters with Specific Needs;
  - Advised county elections officials regarding the various survey tools used to evaluate polling sites;
  - Assisted county elections officials with categorizing polling sites into one of three categories: compliant; compliant with specified mitigation measures; non-compliant and unable to mitigate without significant structural remodeling.
  - Assisted county elections officials with surveying non-compliant voting precincts in an effort to identify a compliant site.
- b. Purchase the following items to temporarily mitigate barriers at polling sites:
  - Threshold ramps for 12 sites;
  - 500 large orange cones with reflectors to designate accessible parking and to direct voters away from protruding objects in the accessible path of travel;
  - Signage to label the accessible parking, accessible path of travel, and accessible entrance;
  - Door stops to hold doors open (that would be otherwise inaccessible due to barriers such as inaccessible hardware).

- c. Purchase items to remove barriers at polling sites:
  - Retrofit all accessible voting booths with leg extenders to allow for kneespace compliance;
  - Develop a picture guide on “How to Assemble” the accessible voting booth;
  - Color-code the extenders to reduce confusion on which extenders were to add depth (black) or width (red).
- d. Expand the number of Roving Inspectors from 12 to 23 to provide extensive coverage on Election Day so all sites were visited at least twice to ensure proper mitigation measures were in place and to survey those sites using the August 2004 survey tool.

Note: The survey tool used by the Rovers was provided by the Secretary of State in August 2004 in consultation with the State Department of Justice and the Office of the State Architect. We were told the survey tool complied with Title 24 of the California Building Code of Regulations and the Americans with Disabilities Act Accessibility Guidelines. Unfortunately, the Department of Justice used a different survey tool in November 2004 that applied different access requirements than the survey tool provided to us in August 2004. We are now attempting to determine which survey tool we should use in Phase II of our Accessibility Plan.

- e. Equip all Roving Inspectors with tools to survey sites for compliance:
  - Digital “Smart Levels” for slope measurements;
  - 25” Tape measures for fine measurements;
  - Screwdrivers to adjust the voting booth extenders for stability;
  - Rolling Distance Measurement Tool;
  - Cones for any site that needed additional markings;
  - Signage to make paths clearer.
- f. Revise guide to Election Officers on how to assist Voters with Specific Needs and Bilingual Voters.
- g. Provide cell phones to Roving Inspectors and other Inspectors for Election Day access to answer questions pertaining to Access and Election Processes.
- h. Apply for \$56,400 under the Election Assistance for Individuals with Disabilities (EAID) Grant Program to purchase items that could be used to temporarily mitigate barriers at polling sites, such as additional cones, portable ramps, threshold ramps, door handle modifiers, surveying tools, etc. These funds have not yet been awarded by state.

### Part 3: Improve Access to Election Materials

- a. Recorded the 14 local measures on the November 2, 2004 ballot onto cassettes for visually impaired voters or those with developmental disabilities. The Secretary of State’s Office provides the State Propositions on cassette. We also distributed the tapes upon request to any voter.

- b. Added a page to the Sample Ballot booklet explaining why polling sites may be changing and the Department's commitment to providing accessible voting sites.

#### Part 4: Continue Ongoing Outreach Programs

- Quarterly meetings with Voter Accessibility Advisory Committee to obtain community input on changes the departments can make to improve access for voters with specific needs.
- Provide information in Voter's Information Pamphlet mailed to all voters alerting them to ballot delivery and voting assistance services provided by county elections officials. In addition, send out media releases alerting voters to this service.
- Voter outreach program with convalescent homes, residential care facilities and independent living centers to provide site visits to register voters and schedule times for voter assistance.
- Voter outreach program to individuals who require at-home or individual on-site assistance. This service includes delivery and pick up of ballots and other voting materials, as well as assistance in marking or reading the ballot upon request.
- On Election Day dedicate two staff persons for assistance to voters that suddenly find themselves unable to access a polling place due to unforeseen illness, disability, etc.
- Access programs at the polls including curbside voting program, magnifying glasses, attachments to make writing utensils easier to grasp, etc.

## **Phase 2: January 2005 through June 2006**

In Phase 2, Santa Cruz County will utilize data obtained from the November 2, 2004 election and continue to improve access to polling sites used in the County. The county's Access Compliance Specialist will continue to advise the county regarding actions to take.

It is imperative that one survey tool be used in this phase. The Department of Justice now has provided three different versions, and a final version needs to be determined prior to implementation of this phase.

### Part 1: Compile and Analyze Polling Site Data

- a. Compiling results of Roving Inspector's surveys from November 2, 2004;
- b. Comparing DOJ November 2, 2004 surveys to Rover's surveys;
- c. Comparing DOJ March 2, 2004 to DOJ November 2, 2004 surveys;
- d. Using all surveys completed to set resurveying priorities for Parts 2-4 of our plan to achieve compliance.

### Part 2: County Facilities

- a. Resurvey all County sites used as polling sites;
- b. Report survey results to County General Services Department by February 16, 2005;
- c. Request response from County General Services Department by March 31, 2005 detailing a timeline for barrier removal.

### Part 3: City and Public Agency Facilities

- a. Resurvey all sites by June 30, 2005;
- b. Notify agencies of barriers, requesting removal, and alerting them by July 31, 2005 that the State Department of Justice is aware of non-compliance;
- c. Pursue back up plans to survey other area facilities in hopes of identifying alternative sites that either comply or have barriers that we can temporarily mitigate such as ramps, threshold ramps, knob correctors, etc.;
- d. For facilities that are unable to comply (or that cannot be mitigated by temporary measures) and no other facilities are available to replace them, by December 31, 2005 provide programmatic compliance after completing documentation of exhaustive search.

### Part 4: Privately owned, Public Accommodations, and Religious Institutions

- a. Resurvey all sites by December 31, 2005;
- b. Notify facility owners of barriers, requesting removal, and alerting them by January 31, 2006 that the State Department of Justice is aware of non-compliance (religious institutions are not under covered by the ADA. California access regulations cover churches for new and remodeling construction.);
- c. Pursue back up plans to survey other area facilities to identify alternative sites that either comply or have barriers that we can temporarily mitigate such as ramps, threshold ramps, knob correctors, etc.

- d. For facilities that are unable to come into compliance (or that cannot be mitigated by temporary measures) and no other facilities are available to replace them, by March 31, 2006 provide programmatic compliance after completing documentation of exhaustive search.

Part 5: Improve Poll Worker Training

- a. Review and improve poll worker training materials, providing more diagrams and photographs displaying proper polling site setup;
- b. Provide more hands-on training with Polling Place Inspectors on setting up parking for persons with disabilities and proper posting of signs.

Part 6: Survey sites used for the June 6, 2006 Primary Election

- a. Hire 24 to 30 Roving Inspectors who will re-survey all polling sites used on Election Day;
- b. Train Roving Inspectors on correct usage of tools and survey instrument;
- c. Equip all Rovers with cameras to photograph sites.

### **Phase 3: July 2006 through November 2006**

#### **Part 1: Compile and Analyze Polling Site Data**

- a. Compile results of Roving Inspector's surveys from June 6, 2006 Primary Election;
- b. Determine if any other mitigation measures can be taken to bring non-compliant facilities into compliance. If so, obtain needed improvements (i.e., thresholds, door handle modifications; portable ramps; etc.);
- c. Identify polling sites that continue to be structurally non-compliant and facilities that have not been able to comply.

#### **Part 2: Identify Course of Action for Structurally Non-Compliant Facilities**

- a. Document and review all possible alternative sites;
- b. Determine if the site can be moved to another site where one or more polling places are located. Such consolidation requires adequate parking to accommodate the increased number of voters who will vote on Election Day;
- c. Work with State Attorney General's Office and Secretary of State's Office on determining if any legislative remedies exist;
- d. Determine any other course of action.

# INTER-OFFICE MEMORANDUM



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TO: Gail L. Pellerin, County Clerk  
FR: Tracey Rosenthal and Jaime Young, Program Coordinators  
RE: Access Compliance Plan On Hold Pending November Election  
DT: July 26, 2005

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This is to advise you that deadlines for implementation of the Santa Cruz County Polling Place Accessibility Plan must be revised due to the Special Statewide Election called by the Governor for November 8, 2005. Due to this unscheduled election, the focus of staff and time allocation must be diverted at this time to conduct the election.

Following the November 8, 2005 election, we will provide you with a revised time schedule for continuing to implement our Access Plan.

In the meantime, we continue to work on the following items:

- After a June 29 meeting with the Secretary of State's Office, State Department of Justice, county representatives, and Santa Cruz County's Access Compliance Specialist, the Secretary of State's Office is rewriting its survey for all counties in California to use when surveying polling sites. The decision was to use the US Department of Justice Survey as a base and add Title 24 requirements unique to California. A first draft and review of the survey was conducted by the California Association of Clerks and Election Officials Committee on Voters with Specific Needs. We have suggested numerous changes and revisions. Once there is a final version of the survey tool, it will be forwarded to our access compliance specialist for review and input.
- In response from a request from the Santa Cruz County Clerk's Office, the Secretary of State's office is developing a training program for polling place surveyors that will be implemented across the state. When this training is made available, all surveyors in Santa Cruz County will take the course.