

KHTS Hometown Station AM 1220

County Voting System Overhaul To Include Options

Written by Mark Archuleta

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The Los Angeles County Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk (RR/CC) has embarked on the most significant overhaul of the voting system since 1968.

Although the system has been upgraded and adapted to keep up with changes in technology and in the regulatory environment, this project has a much larger scope.

"What we're embarked on now through the Voting Systems Assessment Project (VSAP) is a full scale effort to actually completely replace our voting system," said Efrain Escobedo, Executive Liaison for the Registrar-Recorder/County Clerk.

In September of 2009 the RR/CC through VSAP began to engage a number of community organizations, and election and civil rights advocates to find out what they thought about the current voting system, and what a future voting system should be able to do and to provide to voters.

The RR/CC admits that traditionally they have focused their procurement and evaluation of voting systems on technical requirements and hardware. Very little focus was given to the "people" element of the process.

"It's going to be voter oriented and it's not necessarily going to be the system the Registrar of Voters likes the best when they go shopping," Escobedo said.

What VSAP research has revealed is that voters want options.

"There's options for everything right? You can either receive your bill in the mail or you can get it via email or you can call up over the phone get it taken care of over the phone. It's all about options and I think when it comes to voting, voters would like more options," said Escobedo.

Other options voters want is expanded voting by mail, and more days to vote. Other voters still like the old-fashioned system.

"There's voters who really value the experience of going out to the polling place and being able to, within the community and as a community activity, exercise their to vote and go out cast a ballot -- physically cast a ballot in a secure ballot box," Escobedo said.

One thing voters did not find important, even in this economy, was cost.

"I'll tell you in the focus groups that we conducted in our conversations with voters and organizations I would rank cost effectiveness more towards the bottom of the list. Security, accuracy, and ease of use are at the top of the list," Escobedo said.

The RR/CC says the cost of elections is going up and they do focus on maximizing cost efficiency, but they also want ensure that they don't put a price on democracy.

"Do we want more people participating or do we less people participating? What's more important, a dollar or a vote?" Escobedo said.

The RR/CC hopes to present their research to the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, the County CEO William T Fujioka and the public early next year.

They hope to have a new voting system in place by the November 2015 elections.