

Riverside VAAC Meeting Minutes

10 a.m. to 12 p.m.

April 27, 2017

Rustin Conference Center

2085 Rustin Ave.

Riverside, CA 92507

Committee Members:

Ruthee Goldkorn

Mario Janesin

John Kopp

Chuck Reutter

Gabriel Taylor

Guests:

Foster Tucker

Ray Kennedy

Meeting commenced at 10:15 a.m.

I. Welcome/Introductions

Introductions were provided by the VAAC members and guests present at the meeting.

II. General Meeting Structure/Creating a Working Dialogue & Meeting Procedures.

Mr. Taylor explained that the purpose for today's meeting is to discuss ways in which the VAAC Committee can accomplish more during their meetings.

Mr. Kopp suggested selecting someone to serve as a moderator, who can keep the conversation moving during the meeting.

III. Future Meeting Dates/Locations

Mr. Taylor mentioned that in other counties, the VAAC has meetings in alternate locations than the County Registrar's office, for the regular meetings every few months. He asked if this would be of interest to anyone else.

Ms. Goldkorn agreed that having the meetings in alternate locations is something the VAAC needs to do. She said it is essential that the VAAC is available to various communities and since the County is so large, the VAAC could divide their outreach efforts into four difference sectors. She added that the VAAC should have a presence in the Coachella Valley.

Mr. Kopp agreed the VAAC should find alternate locations for the meetings, and suggested the VAAC choose sites in different areas throughout the County. He also suggested the County distribute a meeting agenda well ahead of the meeting date, so that the VAAC members could provide suggestions for any additional items.

Mr. Taylor said that the County wants to assist the VAAC in organizing events and projects, but that the VAAC members have to be the driving force to plan events. He suggested organizing an event for National Voter Registration Day.

Mr. Kennedy recalled that the ROV already agreed to have at least one VAAC meeting scheduled in the Coachella Valley area. He also said that the six registrars in the southwest portion of the state have informal coordinating group that meets periodically. He thought the VAAC could function in a similar multi-county format. He said there was nothing specific on Imperial County's Elections website regarding a VAAC.

Mr. Kennedy recalled there was information on the Secretary of State's website that states the Counties may band together and organize a joint regional VAAC. He added that the Riverside VAAC could invite Imperial County staff to see if they would like assistance in setting up their own independent VAAC or if they would like to create a joint VAAC with Riverside County.

Mr. Taylor said Imperial County is currently in the process of setting up their own VAAC. He also explained that Disability Rights California recently released a publication on best practices for establishing and developing VAACs.

Mr. Kennedy said that the Chair of the VAAC should be a community member, not a member of the County staff. Mr. Taylor said that the County would be agreeable to assigning the roles of Chair and Vice-Chair to the VAAC members. The County just wants to make sure the meetings will continue to run efficiently and effectively with ongoing membership.

Mr. Tucker said it was unclear to him that the ROV understands everything the VAAC can offer the County. He felt that there should be a clear understanding between the County staff and the VAAC members on how this collaboration will work. He also agreed that the idea of regularly rotating the location of the VAAC meetings throughout the County was an idea that County staff agreed to. He added that the idea just has not moved forward.

Mr. Taylor said that it is the responsibility of the VAAC members to come up with the ideas for the alternate meeting sites. Mr. Kopp agreed and asked if the VAAC should meet offsite more than once a year. He also asked if the meetings should be held quarterly. He suggested the VAAC members could meet quarterly, then meet with the six sister counties in the interim between the VAAC meetings.

Mr. Kopp said that the postcard for voters to change to permanent vote-by-mail does still require postage. He suggested the VAAC could make a recommendation to Rebecca Spencer that postage for the ballots be provided by the County.

Mr. Janesin said that the County should not re-assign the chair and co-chair positions until the turnout at the VAAC meetings improves and the membership increases. He said the lack of attendance at the meetings is the main problem. He said increasing membership should be the number one priority. He suggested the VAAC focus on projects for the next two years to prepare for the eventual establishment of vote centers.

Mr. Kopp said that he asked his assemblywoman to sponsor a bill to request the SOS pay to monitor the cost of implementing SB 450, so that other counties will have an idea of the overall expense.

Mr. Janesin said it is expensive to hire election officers. He said there are approximately 3,200 election officers hired each year, and said that this total would be reduced by approximately 25% with the establishment of vote centers.

Ms. Goldkorn felt the VAAC should hold meetings more than just several times a year because there are a number of things for the VAAC to work on. She said there should be an updated and current VAAC membership list. She said the VAAC should have a membership drive combined with voter outreach events at the colleges and the high schools in the County. Ms. Goldkorn recommended the VAAC establish an outreach subcommittee to focus on these efforts.

Mr. Kopp said that the ROV could also approach the Superintendent of Schools in Riverside to discuss creating a concerted effort to pre-register 16 and 17 year-olds in the schools.

Ms. Goldkorn said that representatives from the County School District are already on the County's VAAC mailing list.

Mr. Reutter said the VAAC must focus first on improving voting accessibility. Mr. Taylor agreed with Mr. Reutter, but acknowledged that to have productive discussions, there have to be members present at these discussions.

Ms. Goldkorn suggested scheduling a meeting with representatives from the County schools and education offices to get them involved with the work of the VAAC.

Mr. Reutter said the VAAC must start taking action on making voting accessible.

Ms. Goldkorn said there should be direct access to the institutions the VAAC wants to involve. Mr. Tucker said he and Mr. Kennedy could work to set up a meeting site out near Palm Desert. Mr. Taylor asked everyone to send him two to three organizations that they would like the County to invite to the next VAAC meeting.

Mr. Reutter re-emphasized that the focus of the VAAC should not be on the meetings. The members should focus on establishing accessible vote-by-mail ballots. He explained that there are still concerns for voters who are blind or low vision and making sure their vote-by-mail ballots are accessible.

IV. Potential Project Ideas

Mr. Taylor asked the present members to review the list of potential project ideas that were included with today's meeting materials, and send him the top three preferences for projects for the VAAC members to work on that he can then present to Rebecca Spencer and County staff.

Ms. Goldkorn asked if people were interested in having more meetings of this working group who could discuss and address the ongoing progress of the VAAC's action plans.

Mr. Reutter asked why it was important to increase the membership of the VAAC. Ms. Goldkorn said it would allow for increased participation of voters with disabilities.

Mr. Reutter said the purpose of the VAAC is to make it easier for voters with disabilities to vote. Ms. Goldkorn said the issues the VAAC deals with are much broader than just making it possible for voters with disabilities to vote. She added that not all people with a disability want to vote by mail.

Mr. Reutter said that maybe everyone with a disability should vote by mail. Mr. Kopp said there has to be a collaborative effort between

different groups of people with disabilities to work towards making the voting process more accessible.

Mr. Taylor said that, currently, the VAAC does not have representation from voters with developmental disabilities. He added that to broaden the scope of voting accessibility needs, all disability groups must have representation on the VAAC.

Mr. Reutter said that the State of Oregon requires all citizens to vote by mail. He said he is concerned with the accessibility problems for voters with vision disabilities.

Mr. Taylor said the VAAC could propose a voting systems demo event from different voting system manufacturers to Rebecca Spencer and County staff. Ms. Goldkorn proposed having this be part of the VAAC's voter registration event in September.

Ms. Goldkorn said that the VAAC should also have representatives at the County's Mental Health Resource Fair on May 25th at Fairmont Park.

Mr. Kopp recommended the County invite a representative from the Braille Institute to the next upcoming VAAC meeting as another organization that could provide useful input.

Mr. Reutter recommended the VAAC members stress the importance and the benefits to the County of vote-by-mail.

Ms. Goldkorn said the accomplishments of people with disabilities in Riverside County with voting accessibility are significant, including polling place accessibility, having polling place inspectors with disabilities, and having poll workers with disabilities.

Mr. Reutter said he is aware that is difficult for people with disabilities to obtain decent employment.

Mr. Janesin said that Riverside County could not begin implementing an all vote-by-mail system until after 2018. He encouraged the current members to recruit new members with different disabilities who can help advocate for a shift to this all vote-by-mail system. Mr. Janesin explained there are a large number of people who still enjoy going to the polling places on Election Day to vote.

Mr. Janesin said there is a large number of people who are registered vote-by-mail voters who still drop off their ballots in person at the polling places. He agreed with Mr. Reutter that this vote-by-mail initiative should be a high priority for the Registrar of Voters office. He emphasized that in the meantime, the VAAC should focus on increasing its membership.

Ms. Goldkorn asked that a discussion be included at the next VAAC meeting on what the Secretary of State in Iowa is doing by providing tablets with ADA Checklist apps at the each polling place in every county throughout the state. Mr. Taylor said he would request this.

Discussion of VAAC Goals

Mr. Taylor said that for the VAAC to make progress and move forward, the VAAC members have the responsibility to meet the County half way. He explained that the members have to be open to sharing their experiences when it comes to certain accessibility concerns so that County staff can hear why these issues are important.

Ms. Goldkorn agreed that the VAAC should serve as a bridge between the disability community and the Registrar of Voters office. She said the VAAC should fill in the development of the programs involving voters with disabilities, including the County's polling place inspection program and their polling place checklist.

Mr. Reutter asked if there is a way to find out how many voters who are permanent vote-by-mail voters actually vote. Mr. Kopp said that in the November 2016 Election, voter registration in Riverside County totaled more than 1 million total voters with approximately 264,000 voters who voted at the polls and 504,000 people voted by mail. He added that approximately 49% of the total number of voters in the November 2016 Election were vote-by-mail voters.

Ms. Goldkorn said that voters still like having the option of either going to the polls or voting by mail, but added the vote-by-mail totals have historically been higher.

Mr. Kopp said the focus should be to advocate to change the order of the questions on the voter registration cards for first time voters, particularly with the question regarding permanent vote-by-mail status.

Ms. Goldkorn agreed that the question asking voters whether they would like to be a permanent vote-by-mail voter should be more prominent on the questionnaire form. She said that people with disabilities are unable to get elected to offices at the local level, the state level, or the Federal level. She said the turnout of voters with disabilities in elections is inaccurate because people do not disclose whether or not they have a disability. She explained that this could be fixed by adding a simple question to the voter registration. "Do you need an accommodation to vote?" She said it could serve as a mechanism to determine a more accurate turnout of voters with disabilities.

Mr. Kopp said he could contact Tom Steyer at Next Gen California to see about getting support to make these changes to the voter registration card.

Mr. Taylor said the focus for the VAAC should be on networking within the Riverside County community so that more people know they exist and are looking for active participants.

Ms. Goldkorn said it would be beneficial for the VAAC to invite Mr. Steyer to a future VAAC meeting to talk about opportunities.

Mr. Reutter said the VAAC must have goals. He added the VAAC should focus on one goal at a time and added that the first goal should be accessible vote-by-mail.

Mr. Taylor asked the present VAAC members to send him a list of top three goals that he could then pass along to Rebecca Spencer. He also said he would contact her about the Mental Health Fair event on May 25th.

Meeting adjourned at 12:02 p.m.