# Ivins City Staff Report
# City Council Meeting 03/07/19

Agenda Item: Discuss and consider approval for Ivins City Municipal Elections to be conducted by Vote-by-Mail through Washington County

Submitted by: Kari Jimenez

**Recommended City Council Action: Approve the Vote-by-Mail process and contract with Washington County for Ivins City Municipal Elections and budget accordingly.**

**BACKGROUND:**

Ivins City has contracted with Washington County for all Ivins City Municipal Elections, providing election support for each election, Primary and General, including voting machines, programming, computers, ballots, envelopes, outgoing bulk postage and labor to mail the ballots to the voters. They also provided Poll Managers, Poll Workers and their required trainings, return postage, any return ballots/addressing issues, voter registration verification, election counting, voter signature verification and official canvass after each election. For these services, Ivins City has budgeted $4,000.00 for each election, for a total budget of $8,000.00.

In July, 2018, Washington County approved the Vote-by-Mail process beginning with the November, 2018 General Election. Drop boxes are permanently provided throughout the County, with the closest drop box for Ivins City residents located at the Santa Clara Library. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE that any residents where their municipality does not contract with Washington County for their elections, WILL NOT be able to vote or drop off their ballot at any County locations, only their own municipality.

The cost for each election through the Vote-by-Mail process is determined by the number of registered voters and decreases with the number of municipalities participating in the Vote-by-Mail process. Currently, the approximate cost for each election for Ivins City is $8,772.00, or $1.79 per registered voter per election, for a total budget of $17,544.00. Return postage is not include and is not required. (Salt Lake County is the only known entity in Utah that provides return postage.) Washington County has a postage due account that they pay if residents mail their ballots without postage but that isn't a common problem. The Deputy County Clerk has informed me that the Vote-by-Mail election cost will go down as other municipalities participate so the actual cost will likely be less, possibly down in the range of $1.35-$1.50 per registered voter. At the time of this staff report, Ivins City, Santa Clara City, the City of St. George and Hurricane City were not factored into the County's estimate. All but Ivins City have now decided to handle their elections through Vote-by-Mail with the County, with Mayor Pike expressing to St. George's City Council that to consider doing anything else is unrealistic.

## FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS:

**Convenience and Higher Voter Turnout:** Voting by mail is more convenient for residents and voter turnout is significantly higher. As an example, the Municipalities of Springdale and Rockville, Utah have been handling their municipal elections by Mail for nearly a decade. In November, 2007, prior to Springdale moving to the Vote-by-Mail process, their voter turnout was 49.88%. In November, 2011 when they held their first election through Vote-by-Mail, their turnout was 71.00% and in November, 2013 through the same process, their turnout was 74.84%. This is an example of the average turnout that has occurred with municipalities who handle their elections through the Vote-by-Mail process.

The first Vote-by-Mail election conducted by Washington County in 2018, which was a mid-year election, had a total turnout of 78.60%. In that mid-year election, 83.55% of Ivins City residents voted. The prior mid-year election total turnout was 45.79%, with 53.48% of Ivins residents voting and was not held through the Vote-by-Mail process. The turnout for Ivins City's last Municipal Election in 2015, was 24.85% with 4008 residents voting.

**Security:** There have been questions regarding security in the Vote-by-Mail process. Per the attached example of the ballot envelope, the Affidavit states that the person signing is doing so under penalty of perjury, they are a registered voter, they are entitled to vote in the election, the ballot is timely submitted and that they are not a convicted felon or currently incarcerated for the commission of a felony. The signatures in that Affidavit box are ran through a signature verification counting machine owned by the County, that reads the signature, compares it to the State of Utah signature database that is derived from DMV (Department of Motor Vehicle) records and the Voter Registration database and then counts the ballot or rejects it. These databases are updated as voters provide updated information. If the ballot is rejected, the signature on that ballot is manually compared to the signature database by an election official. If the signature is still suspect, within 24 hours, an election official calls or emails the voter to resolve the signature issue so the ballot can be counted. If they are unable to reach the voter by phone or email, a letter is sent to them. The voter has the option of going into the County building and providing proof of their identification and signature or they are mailed an Affidavit that they sign before a Notary and then mail back to the County. The contact process is the same if the County receives an envelope back with no ballot enclosed – note the hole on the ballot envelope – that is for the election official to easily determine if the envelope contains a ballot or not. The most common reason for signature rejection is in a multi-voter household where a voter encloses their ballot in an envelope signed by one of the other voters in that household. Of the 80,000 ballots counted in the 2018 Vote-by-Mail election conducted by Washington County, there were approximately 300 ballots that were not counted because the signatures could not be verified.

**Option for Ivins City to handle its own election:** I researched the possibility of Ivins City conducting its own election. Due to a number of factors, including having to print our own ballots and envelopes, the unavailability of County resources to machine count ballots, access to the State of Utah and Washington County database for voter registration and signature verification, the number of Ivins Staff required to count ballots on election

day and then conduct a timely election canvass and provide that data to the Lt. Governor's Office, it is our opinion that conducting our own election is unrealistic, just as Mayor Pike concluded. The County has a limited number of signature verification counting machines therefore, they are not available for use by Ivins City unless Ivins City contracts with the County. The cost to purchase one machine is $80,000. City Staff would have to manually count the ballots by separating the ballots into manageable stacks of 10 to 25, hand count and tally the votes with two (2) staff members calling out the vote, two (2) staff members tallying the called out vote and one (1) staff member overseeing the count. The count cannot be interrupted, requiring there to be at least two (2) additional staff members or Poll Workers attending to residents as they come in to vote. The current number of registered voters in Ivins as of the end of February, 2019, is 4880. Regarding the option for voting locations at City Hall and the Southern Utah Veterans Home, Ivins City would be required to conform with ADA (American's with Disabilities Act) requirements to provide voting access. When Washington County began the Vote-by-Mail process, the electronic voting machines were eliminated. To conform with ADA requirements, the County has an electronic marking device that is used for the sole purpose of assisting individuals with disabilities such as a sight or hearing impairment or other motor disabilities. That machine is only available if contracting with the County and would be on a limited basis.

**Confusion for Ivins City residents:** Ivins City's Municipal Elections are held every other year and State and County elections are held every other year opposite of the Municipal Elections and are held Vote-by-Mail. If Ivins City holds their own Municipal Elections, this will cause confusion every year as to where and how an Ivins City resident is able to vote. Contracting with Washington County for Ivins City's Municipal Elections through the Vote-by-Mail process is in the best interest of Ivins City's residents. In so doing, Ivins City Hall could act as a "drop box" location for residents' ballots and have ballots on hand at City Hall for anyone who did not receive or have their ballot for whatever reason. Residents could vote provisionally through that manner and the City Recorder would take those paper ballots to Washington County at the end of each day through the election period.

Dated this 21st day of February, 2019.

Respectfully Submitted: _____
Kari Jimenez, City Recorder

Content Review: _____
Dale Coulam, City Manager

Kim M. Hafen
Washington County Clerk
197 E Tabernacle St
St George UT 84770-3473

Apply
First-Class
Mail
Postage
Here




KIM M. HAFEN
WASHINGTON COUNTY CLERK
197 E TABERNACLE ST
ST GEORGE UT 84770-3473

Kim M. Hafen
Washington County Clerk
197 E Tabernacle St
St George UT 84770-3443

PRESORTED
FIRST-CLASS MAIL
U.S. POSTAGE
**PAID**
K&H

**RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED**

OFFICIAL ELECTION MAIL
*Authorized by the U.S. Postal Service*

# Official Ballot Enclosed

WAUT-E/0038W001