

Thurston County Elections 2021 VAAC Plan



Introduction

“Improving the Accessibility of Elections for Voters with Disabilities” is a plan developed by Thurston County Elections with feedback from its local Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee (VAAC). This plan is evaluated and updated annually to ensure that the County provides accessible service to voters with disabilities within given statutory authority and budgetary constraints and maintains compliance with local, state, and federal legal requirements.

The plan is divided into two sections. The first section details accessible voting processes through Accessible Voting Sites and Ballot Drop Boxes. The second section outlines the outreach strategies and efforts to ensure that the citizens with disabilities in our community are aware of the services that are provided by Thurston County Elections.

Accessible Voting Processes

Thurston County Elections maintains several services that ensure voting can be an independent, private, and secure process for all voters. These services include Accessible Voting Sites and 24-hour Ballot Drop Boxes.

Accessible Voting Sites

An Accessible Voting Site is equipped with accessible voting units (AVUs) that allow voters, with a wide range of physical abilities, to cast an independent, private, and secure ballot.

AVUs are touch-screen computers with enhanced visual features, response controls, and audio capabilities. These features help people with a wide range of disabilities, such as reduced motor control or low or no vision, mark their own ballot. The equipment provides the user the opportunity to review their selections before casting their ballot using an audio review process and verifiable paper ballot.

In August of 2019, Thurston County Elections implemented a new AVU system called the ExpressVote. The ExpressVote allows voters to mark their ballot independently using their own preferred devices (braille pad, sip n puff, audio, etc.).

Thurston County Elections will operate at least one accessible voting site for all elections.

Thurston County has a program called the ExpressVote roadshow. ExpressVote units are taken to communities in Thurston County. Examples of locations include The Olympia City Council of the Blind monthly meeting, Panorama (retirement community with assisted living and convalescent & rehabilitation centers), and Olympics West Senior Living Community. Voters with disabilities unable to get to the voting center or one of the roadshow locations can call our office and make an appointment for the ExpressVote to come to their home.

*This program has been suspended due to the pandemic.

The locations and hours of operation for the Thurston County voting center is:

Thurston County Courthouse
2400 Evergreen Park Dr SW
Olympia, WA 98502*

8am-4:30pm Monday-Friday

*During the pandemic, Thurston County moved the voting center to South Puget Sound Community College to provide safe conditions for voters. The location at the courthouse was too small to social distance. At the college there were 5 accessible voting units available. Dial-A-Lift information for transportation to voters with disabilities was shared with voters through our voting center phone bank.

The number of sites, site locations, and days and hours of operation were determined and influenced by several factors including access and convenience for voters with disabilities, historical use of AVUs, and the County's current financial condition.

Thurston County Elections ensures that equipment is delivered to the site and is fully operational during the designated hours. Thurston County Elections hires, trains, and supervises the accessible voting site staff.

24-Hour Ballot Drop Boxes

There are 29 ballot drop boxes in Thurston County. Voters can return their ballot directly to a drop box at any time (24/7) starting at least 20 days prior to an election through 8pm on Election Day.

See map on page 7 for plotted locations of the 24-hour drop boxes.

Factors considered in the selection of the sites were:

1. Proximity to population centers, ballot drop-off users, and major traffic corridors
2. Familiarity of locations for majority of the population
3. Access to public transportation routes
4. Accessibility features of the sites for voters with disabilities
5. Availability of parking
6. Ability to maintain consistent locations for all countywide elections
7. Ability to partner with a public organization with stable community ties
8. Administrative efficiency in supporting and operating the sites

In addition to the 29 ballot drop boxes, Thurston County partners with Timberland Libraries to provide voter services. Voters can register to vote, download a ballot, and deposit the ballot 8 days prior to an Election. There are five libraries in Thurston County, Lacey, Olympia, Tumwater, Tenino, and Yelm. *This program has been suspended during the pandemic.

In addition, the Auditor's Office will work to promote accessible voting options whenever and wherever possible, budget permitting. This includes, but is not limited to, working with local civic organizations and agencies to provide or promote accessible voting services throughout Thurston County. We will work to expand the number of accessible voting sites and services we provide to include, if feasible, in-home voting appointments and/or transportation.

In addition to the publicly accessible ballot drop boxes below, Thurston County Elections maintains a ballot drop box in the County jail and may allow other sites upon request.

Lacey Area

Lacey Fire 3, Station 34	8407 Steilacoom Rd SE
Lacey Fire 3, Station 35	3701 Willamette Dr NE
Lacey City Hall	420 College St SE
Lacey Post Office	5815 Lacey Blvd SE
Martin Village	5600 Martin Way E
Woodland Retirement & Assisted Living	4532 Intelco Lp SE

Olympia Area

Church of the Good Shepherd	1601 North St SE
Crain's Office Supply	1006 4th Ave E
Gloria Dei Lutheran Church	1515 Harrison Ave NW
Haggen NW Fresh	1313 Cooper Point Rd SW
Olympia City Hall	601 4th Ave E
The Evergreen State College	2700 McCann Plaza Dr NW
Thurston County Courthouse	2000 Lakeridge Dr SW
South Puget Sound Community College	2011 Mottman Rd SW

Tumwater Area

McLane Black Lake Fire, Station 95	5911 Black Lake Blvd SW
Tumwater Timberland Library	7023 New Market St SW
Tumwater School Administration	621 Linwood Ave SW

South County Area

Bucoda	103 S Main St
Tenino School District Administration	301 Old Hwy 99 N

Southeast County

Lackamas Elementary	16240 Bald Hill Rd SE, Yelm
Nisqually Tribal Admin Bldg	4820 She Nah Num Dr SE
Rainier City Hall	102 Rochester St W
Yelm School Administration	110 1 st St N

Southwest County

Grand Mound Center	19949 Old Hwy 99 SW, Rochester
Littlerock Fire 11	10828 Littlerock Rd SW, Olympia
Rochester Fire 1, Station 3	18346 Albany St SW

Steamboat Island

Griffin Fire 13, Station 1	3707 Steamboat Lp NW
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North County

South Bay Fire 8, Station 81	3506 Shincke Rd NE
South Bay Fire 8, Station 83	5046 Boston Harbor Rd NE

Ballot Drop Box Locations

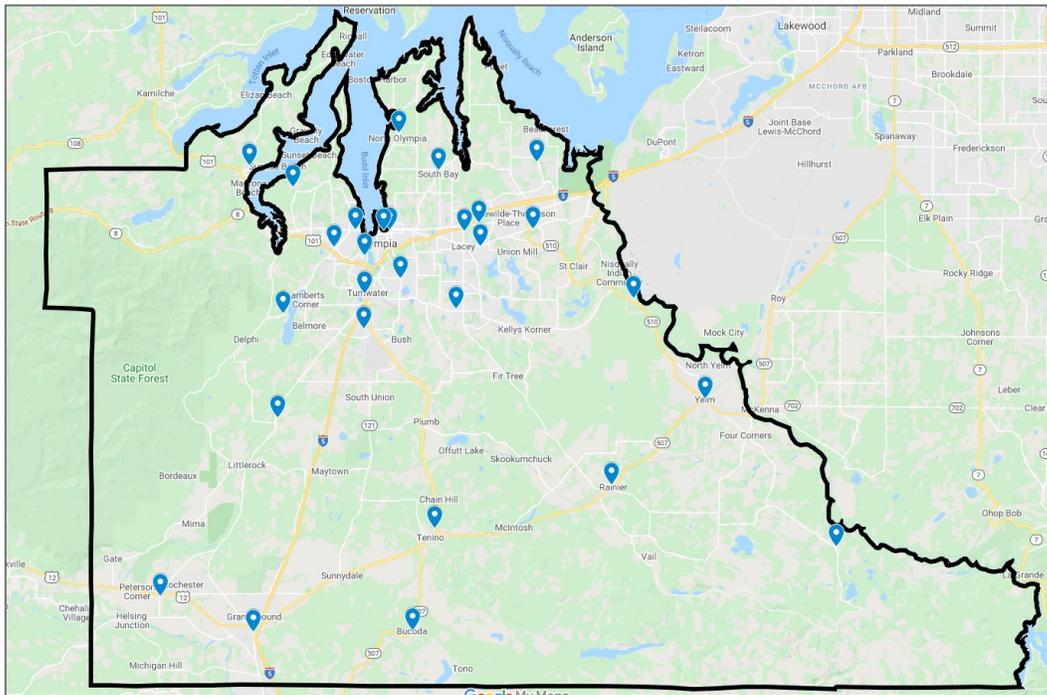


Figure 1: Ballot drop box locations

Thurston County Elections has developed a Google map layer for the ballot drop locations that is available through the county website. Website visitors can use the navigation/directions tools built into Google Maps to find directions to each location.

Outreach to Voters with Disabilities

To ensure that voting services information is available to voters with disabilities and that those services meet voters' needs, Thurston County Elections is committed to many outreach activities.

2021 Goals

2020 was an unprecedented year. The COVID-19 pandemic brought changes to the way we do business at every level of society. Many of the activities in which we participated have undergone massive transformation. Much of our business is carried out online. With that in mind, the Auditor's office has two goals for 2021:

1. Increase membership and participation in the VAAC Committee
2. Reimagine and reintroduce public-facing programs designed to expand access to voting and other elections services (e.g. candidate filing)

These are not the only goals of the VAAC program for 2021. This list needs input and direction from the VAAC Committee. These goals serve only as a starting point for our agency in the new COVID-19 environment.

Information Available through the County Website

Thurston County Elections will maintain accessible voting information on its website including the availability of accessible voting equipment, online markable ballots, and ballot drop box locations. In addition, a link will be provided to Disability Rights Washington's Voting Assistance Guide (<https://www.disabilityrightswa.org/publications/assisting-voters-disabilities/>).

Annual Report

Track the effectiveness of the 2020? Plan in an annual report, which could be a spreadsheet report combined with the current ExpressVote™ usage figures.

Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee Meetings

Thurston County conducts annual meetings of its Voting Accessibility Advisory Committee. These meetings focus on reviewing the plan for accessible voting services and strategizing outreach activities. These meetings also provide an opportunity to capture feedback and lessons learned from the previous elections. We will also seek to increase the number committee members and move meetings to a quarterly basis beginning in 2021*. Information will be made available through local and social media platforms.

*Depending on state and local COVID-19 restrictions meetings may be held virtually.

Press Releases

Thurston County Elections prepares press releases for each election that include information on accessible registration and voting processes. Our releases are sent to regional, social, and local media and community groups. Anyone interested in receiving our press releases can be added to the list.

Local Voters' Pamphlet and Ballot Inserts

Thurston County advertises the services provided and the availability of the Accessible Voting Sites along with the 24-Hour Ballot Drop Boxes in the local voters' pamphlet and election ballot inserts. Each household is provided a copy of the local voters' pamphlet in the Primary and General Elections. Every voter receives a ballot insert with information on the site locations and hours.

Community Events

Thurston County Elections is available to support election information sharing and voter education through local community events, such as Harbor Days and the Thurston County Fair. We will attend community events to demonstrate the accessible voting equipment, share voter registration and election information, and generally support existing voter education efforts in the community.

To request Thurston County Elections support at your community event, contact Jamey Davidsmeyer at 360.490.8809 or jamey.davidsmeyer@co.thurston.wa.us