



# County of San Mateo

## Inter-Departmental Correspondence

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**Department:** ASSESSOR-COUNTY CLERK-  
RECORDER-ELECTIONS

**File #:** 16-825

Board Meeting Date: 12/12/2017

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**Special Notice / Hearing:** None  
**Vote Required:** Majority

**To:** Honorable Board of Supervisors  
**From:** Mark Church, Chief Elections Officer & Assessor-County Clerk-Recorder  
**Subject:** Woodside Fire District's Request to Change from Odd to Even-Numbered Year Elections

**RECOMMENDATION:**

Adopt a resolution authorizing implementation of the Woodside Fire Protection District Governing Board's request that future board elections be moved from odd to even-numbered years.

**BACKGROUND:**

In September 2015, the Governor signed Senate Bill No. 415 ("SB 415"), which is also known as the California Voter Participation Rights Act. SB 415 requires most jurisdictions, including cities, school districts, and other districts, that currently hold elections for governing board members in odd-numbered years to move their elections to even-numbered years. SB 415's goal is to increase voter turnout, given that even-numbered year elections generally have higher voter turnout rates than odd-numbered year elections. There are 70 jurisdictions in San Mateo County. As of December 12, 2017, three of them have not yet moved to even-numbered year elections. We anticipate that these remaining three jurisdictions will move to even-numbered year elections. The jurisdictions are required under Election Code to adopt a plan by January 1, 2018 to consolidate future elections with a statewide election.

On November 27, 2017, the Board of Directors of the Woodside Fire Protection District (the "District") approved a resolution pursuant to Sections 10404(b) and 10505 of the Elections Code requesting that election dates for future District board elections be moved from odd to even-numbered years. Notice of the District's requested change was submitted to the Board of Supervisors on November 28, 2017. The Resolution would move the District's next election, currently scheduled for November 2019, to November 2020. Current board members up for reelection in 2019 would have their terms extended through the next election in 2020, and board members up for reelection in 2021 will continue through 2022. Section 10404(e) requires the Board of Supervisors to act on the request within sixty days.

Under Sections 10404(d) and (e), the Chief Elections Officer shall submit to the Board of Supervisors

a report on the impact and cost-effectiveness of the proposed change. The Board of Supervisors is required by Section 10404(e) to approve the proposed change unless it finds that “the ballot style, voting equipment, or computer capacity is such that additional elections or materials cannot be handled.”

Within 30 days of approval by the Board of Supervisors, the Elections Division will, at the District’s expense, notify all registered voters affected by the approval.

**DISCUSSION:**

In order to assist the Board of Supervisors in making its determination regarding the District’s proposed change to even-numbered years, the Registration & Elections Division has reviewed the impact on costs, ballot style, voting equipment, computer capacity, staffing, and voter turnout.

When the Registration & Elections Division conducts an election for jurisdictions such as the District, those elections are almost always consolidated with other elections occurring on the same date. The costs for such elections are allocated proportionally among participating jurisdictions based on two key factors: the number of registered voters within each jurisdiction and the number of entities participating in the given election. Typically, General District Elections in odd-numbered years have higher proportional costs than Statewide General Elections in even-numbered years for cities, school districts, special districts and other jurisdictions because the number of entities with elections during odd-numbered years is fewer, resulting in less cost sharing. Statewide General Elections in even-numbered years include federal, state, and county contests, the costs of which are borne solely by the County, and these elections constitute a substantial portion of the total cost for each Statewide General Election. Thus, when jurisdictions participate in Statewide General Elections, they bear a lower portion of the total election costs because a large portion is paid by the County and other countywide jurisdictions.

Given that the District has not recently conducted an election, we will use jurisdictions of similar size for comparison using costs from elections in 2013 and 2014. The costs for the 2017 General District Election are not yet available and, even if available, would not be a good comparison due to the large number of jurisdiction that have already moved from odd to even-year elections. The closest jurisdictions by number of registered voters are the Coastside County Water District and the City of East Palo Alto. In 2013, the Coastside County Water District paid \$21,676.93 for election services to 10,355 registered voters, at the rate of \$2.09 per registered voter. In the 2014 Statewide General Election, the City of East Palo Alto’s cost for election services to 8,624 registered voters was \$10,716.57 at the rate of \$1.24 per registered voter. Comparing this cost with the 2013 General District Election cost, we estimate that if the District switched to even-numbered year elections, it would experience cost savings of approximately 41% for an election conducted with polling places.

In September 2016, the Governor approved Senate Bill No. 450 (“SB 450”), which is also known as the California Voter’s Choice Act, which added Section 4005 to the Elections Code. Starting in 2018, SB 450 authorizes specified counties, including San Mateo, to hold All-Mailed Ballot/Vote Center elections under certain conditions. This could reduce costs associated with polling places, including poll worker recruitment and training, voting equipment, supplies and labor. Thus, when the County holds an All-Mailed Ballot/Vote Center election in future even-numbered years, there is the possibility that costs for the District may be further reduced. On September 12, 2017, the Board of Supervisors authorized the Chief Elections Officer to proceed with the implementation of SB 450 and conduct the June 5, 2018 Statewide Direct Primary Election as the first election held under the California Voter’s Choice Act. A more detailed analysis on the cost impact will be presented to the Board of Supervisors after the June election.

The District's requested change will not have an immediate impact on the ballot styles, voting equipment or computer capacity. However, as the remaining three jurisdictions move to even-numbered elections years, there will be a cumulative and significant effect on Registration & Elections Division operations. As jurisdictions have moved to even-numbered year elections starting in the November 2017 election, and continuing through 2022, the total number of candidates in jurisdictions holding even-number year elections will increase substantially, roughly doubling by November 2022 compared to the number of candidates in November 2016. This change will increase the variation in the Sample Ballot & Official Voter Information Pamphlets and the Official Ballot types. Overall costs for each election will increase, but the increase in costs will be distributed among more jurisdictions. Most importantly, staffing needs may substantially increase as tasks such as candidate filing increase and production of more voluminous election materials within statutory deadlines becomes more challenging during even-numbered years. Statewide General Elections will become more complex, requiring a shift from seasonal extra help staff to more experienced and knowledgeable permanent staff. The Division's operating budget needs will increase starting in FY 2017-18.

The voting and ballot counting equipment used by the Registration & Elections Division remain robust enough to permit the District, as well as the remaining jurisdictions within the County, to move its elections to even-numbered years from odd-numbered years. However, this equipment is nearing the end of its useful life. The Department has begun to evaluate new voting systems that will improve accessible voting and accommodate elections conducted in a vote by mail, vote center, ballot drop off location environment as proposed under SB 450.

In terms of turnout, voter participation of registered voters in General District Elections generally falls between 25 and 29 percent. Voter turnout in the two previous Presidential Statewide General Elections was 79 percent in 2012 and 81 percent in 2016. Voter turnout for the two previous Gubernatorial Statewide General Elections was 65 percent in 2010 and 46 percent (a historical low) in 2014. Accordingly, for the past seven elections scheduled in November (2010 through 2016), average voter turnout for Statewide General Elections has been at least double than voter turnout for General District Elections, so a move to Statewide General Elections is likely to significantly increase voter turnout in future District elections.

County Counsel has approved this resolution as to form.

Approval of this resolution contributes to the Shared Vision 2025 outcome of a Collaborative Community by allowing more voters the opportunity to make decisions about their community.

**FISCAL IMPACT:**

Moving the District's election to even-numbered election years will not impact the Registration & Elections Division in its conduct of elections at this time. However, since this jurisdiction held an odd-numbered year election in 2017 prior to their move to even-numbered year elections in 2020, their election costs increased in 2017 since there were fewer jurisdictions participating in odd-number year elections. While the County's costs for labor and services will increase as jurisdictions move to even-numbered year elections, the County's proportional share of election costs will be reduced.