



SOLANO COUNTY GRAND JURY
2015 - 2016

LET'S SORT THIS OUT

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2014-2015 Solano County Grand Jury

I. SUMMARY

On August 4th, 2015, the Solano County Board of Supervisors (BOS) approved a Standard Contract to purchase one Elevate Sorter from Bell & Howell, LLC. The request for the mail ballot sorter was made by the Solano County Registrar of Voters (ROV). The cost for the new sorter was \$482,388 which includes shipping and a 5-year maintenance contract. Funding for the equipment was partially offset by a grant. Payment on the final invoice does not become due until successful completion of the June 2016 election.

The ROV stated that the sorter is the key piece in a new voting process that will save money, provide faster vote tallies, and keep pace with federal and state legislation to improve the voting process.

The 2015-2016 Solano County Grand Jury (Grand Jury) decided to investigate the merits of the new acquisition.

II. INTRODUCTION/BACKGROUND

As a result of approximately 2 million votes not being counted in the 2000 election, the Bush administration enacted the Help America Vote Act of 2002 (HAVA). This federal mandate requires the states to, among other things, upgrade voting machines and registration processes. The method of doing so was left to the individual states, but it was generally agreed that the punch card/lever-based voting machines needed improvement. HAVA requirements are applicable to federal elections only, and federal funding is available to the states for purposes of carrying out the HAVA directives.

Because of this and because the ROV had noticed an increase in the number of vote by mail ballots, it was determined significant time savings could be attained in the opening and sorting process by the purchase of the Elevate Sorter.

III. METHODOLOGY

After reviewing the basis for the ROV request, the Grand Jury used several methods to evaluate the application of the new sorting equipment and the new policies/procedures the ROV plans to implement for improving the voting experience in Solano County.

- Accessed Web sites to obtain background information
- Interviewed ROV staff

- Visited site to witness the operation of the mail ballot sorter and the procedures the ROV will employ during the next election
- Examined ROV Web site
- Reviewed the Federal Help America Vote Act (HAVA)
- Reviewed California's CalVote Project
- Reviewed Solano County Board of Supervisors Agendas and Minutes
- Obtained "White Paper" data sheets from Bell & Howell, LLC
- Reviewed other ballot sorter purchases from other counties
- Photographed the new Elevate Sorter

IV. STATEMENT OF FACTS (DISCUSSION)

On August 4th, 2015 the Director of Registrar of Voters and Assistant Director made a presentation to the BOS seeking approval to purchase new ballot sorting equipment with a maintenance contract from Bell & Howell, LLC. The stated reason for the procurement was to upgrade the current ballot sorter, which has limited capabilities that required additional lengthy manual processing. The new Bell & Howell Elevate Sorter solves the slow processing issue by providing the following features:

- ability to scan vote by mail packets
- reads barcodes
- automatically removes the secrecy flap protecting the voter signature
- reads and records voter signatures
- performs signature verification
- opens the vote by mail envelopes
- notes ballot envelope thickness to eliminate multiple ballots or empty envelopes
- sorts the material into collection bins representing voting districts determined by the County
- identifies and automatically out-sorts double feeds and slightly damaged packets

- sorts inbound ballots for up to 200 precincts from data contained on the envelope
- provides count by precinct after completion of processing
- integrates with existing Data Information Management System (DIMS) to provide voter status updates

All of this is completed in one pass with damaged, rejected, and provisional ballots reviewed manually.

The new equipment is the first of its kind that can do all of the above, and has an estimated serviceable life span of 15 years. The new sorter is expected to improve the processing rate from the current 1,000 ballots per hour to at least 5,000 ballots per hour. The increase in speed is expected to improve the ROV's ability to complete the voting process faster and more efficiently, reducing the time needed to provide voter tabulations for public dissemination.

The new equipment will be housed at the same location as the current ballot sorter, which is approximately 15 years old. Existing equipment will be used to count the actual ballots and archive results. The Elevate Sorter will not affect current staffing levels. Bell & Howell personnel will be on site during the June 2016 election to monitor and service the Elevate Sorter as needed.

V. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Finding 1

The purchase of the Elevate sorting machine is timely in light of upcoming changes to the California election process.

Recommendation 1

The Registrar of Voters (ROV) continue to address equipment needs in anticipation of new voting regulations and legislation, or when current equipment becomes outdated.

Finding 2

The recommendation by the ROV to purchase the Elevate sorting machine was a fiscally responsible use of both general fund and grant monies.

Recommendation 2

Continue to use grants to defray the cost of purchasing capital equipment.

Finding 3

The Elevate Ballot Sorter is a key part of long-term planning to keep Solano County in compliance with expected state-wide technological advances in voting.

Recommendation 3

The ROV continue its efforts in long-term planning on behalf of Solano County voters.

Finding 4

During the onsite presentation of the Elevate Sorter, it was noted by several Grand Jurors that the keyboard utilized to operate it was not adjustable, was intended to be used only while standing, and appeared to assume a standing height of five feet eight inches.

Recommendation 4

The Registrar of Voters (ROV) should seek to resolve this issue.

ATTACHMENTS

Photographs and White Papers

REQUIRED RESPONSES

Director of Registrar of Voters

COURTESY COPIES

Clerk, Solano County Board of Supervisors

Solano County Administrator

Assistant Director of Registrar Voters



CRITERION *Elevate*

MLOCR/BCR Sorter

Small footprint... advanced functionality

The Criterion® Elevate sorter has been designed to meet high-speed mail processing needs of organizations with strict space limitations. The Elevate is ideal for processing various types of mail including:

- Vote by Mail envelopes/mail ballots
- Incoming mail
- Outgoing mail

- Flat mailpieces

The Elevate sorter greatly reduces the amount of space needed to run a sorting operation, while still processing at high speeds. With two-tier bins, the sorter has one of the smallest footprints in the industry. It is portable for easy relocation so you can move the sorter to where you need it, when you need it.

The Elevate sorter handles a wide range of mail types from postcards to flats and a variety of processes from simple barcode sorting to complex database lookups and image processing. It supports all the devices from our larger sorters, resulting in the most comprehensive processing capabilities on a sorter.

be.com, or enable JavaScript

MMT SABRE

MMT SABRE®, our multi-line optical character reader, is an omni-font software-based image processing system with industry leading read rates. The MMT SABRE can perform a variety of functions:

- Outgoing mail processing:** converts a mailpiece's outgoing address to the appropriate delivery point Intelligent Mail® barcode
- Inbound mail processing:** several read modes from barcode reading to complex inbound database lookups
- Mail ballot processing:** Inline Automated Signature Verification integrated with complex inbound database lookups

Modularity

Specifications	
Documents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Height: 3.5" – 7.0" (88.9 – 177.8 mm) • (up to 13" (330.2 mm) with optional flats package) • Length: 5.0" – 11.5" (127 – 292.1 mm) • Thickness: 0.007" – 0.250" (0.18 – 6.35 mm) • *Please contact us about processing thicker envelopes
Cycle speeds	18,000 p/h (for #10 envelopes, MLOCR mode)
Dimensions with 16 2-tier bins (L x W)	14.3' x 6.2' (4.36 x 1.89 m)
Bins	Number of tiers: 1-2
Power	Single phase/three-phase, amps depend on configuration
Air	No air required with the cartridge printer option

When your sorting needs change, additional devices or software can easily be added to the Elevate sorter to expand its capabilities with minimal interruption to your operation. Available options include:

- Integrity:** A thickness detector, height detector, doubles detector or indicia verifier can be added to assure the quality and integrity of the sorting process
- Check/MICR detection:** A MIPR (Magnetic Ink Profile Recognition) device can be added to sort based on the presence/absence of checks, or other MICR marks
- Inline selective opener:** An inline opener that allows selective opening of the bottom edge of envelopes based on the sort scheme, without damaging the contents

- WayMark®**: A postage payment solution that verifies the weight of every mailpiece, calculates postage, and optionally prints customized indicia in one operation, saving money on meters, labor and supplies. Compliance with postal standards is achieved by verifying payment amounts based on conformance of mailpieces to the claimed weight categories

Key features

- Smallest footprint with multi-tier bins
- Handle the widest range of mail – postcards to flats
- Compact with built-in casters for ease of relocation between peak processing periods
- Single-phase and three-phase power options
- Industry-leading functionality

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Front view showing work station where unopened ballots are placed and PC terminal. Colored trays indicate “good” ballots (in green trays that are ready to be furthered processed), “yellow” trays that indicate a sorting problem, and “red” trays where ballots are rejected and need further processing.



Rear of Ballot Sorter showing extra bin storage.



Ballots sorted by districts, in this example that are accumulating in their respective slots. Once 200 acceptable ballots are collected they are moved to green trays and are further processed for the next step in the ballot reading process.



Security tabs that have been meticulously removed by a cutting laser operation are collected in this waste bin. Heat and fumes that are a by-product of this operation are vented outside the building.