



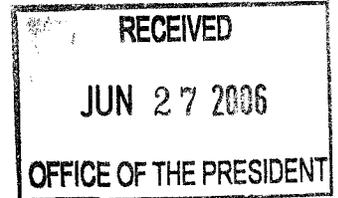
**TOWN OF  
PARADISE VALLEY**

**PHONE:** (480) 948-7411  
**FAX:** (480) 951-3715  
**TDD:** (480) 483-1811

**OFFICE OF Town Clerk**

6401 EAST LINCOLN DRIVE  
TOWN OF PARADISE VALLEY, ARIZONA 85253-4399

June 23, 2006



The Honorable Ken Bennett  
President of the Senate  
1700 W. Washington, Senate Wing  
Phoenix, AZ 85007

The Honorable James P. Weiers  
Speaker of the House of Representatives  
1700 W. Washington, House Wing  
Phoenix, AZ 85007

**SUBJECT: Mail Ballot Election Report to the Arizona State Legislature pursuant to A.R.S 16-409(B)**

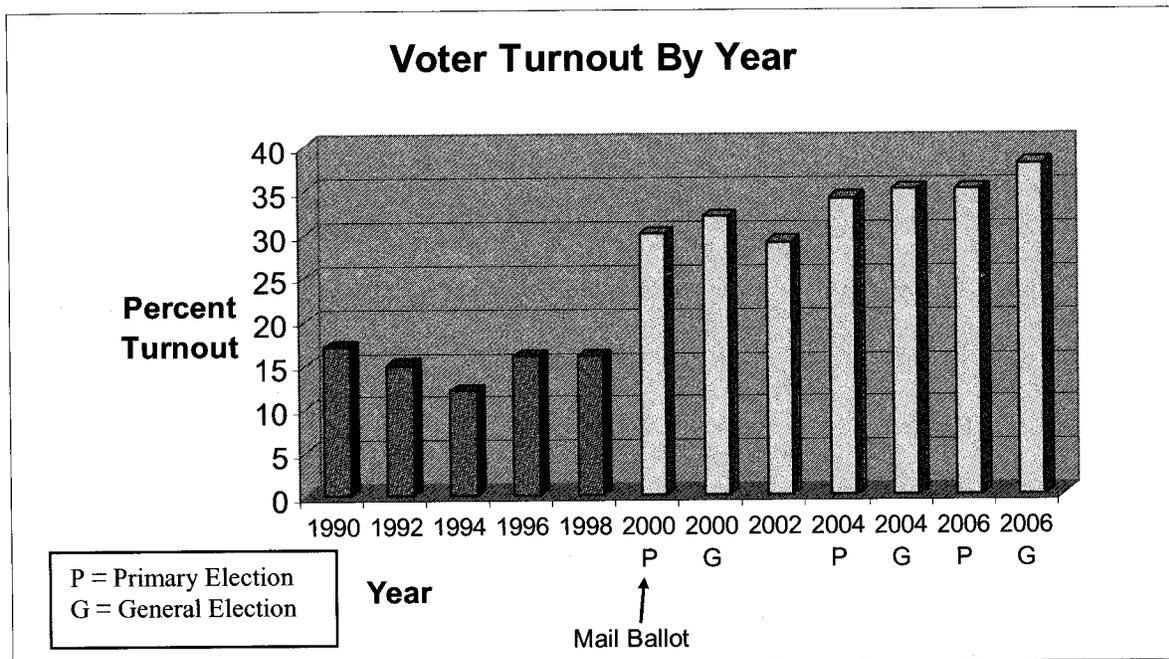
Gentlemen:

It is a pleasure to report, as required by A.R.S 16-409(B), that the Town of Paradise Valley conducted another successful election cycle utilizing the "all-mail ballot" voting method. The Paradise Valley Town Council adopted Resolution Number 1060 authorizing the Town Clerk to conduct "all-mail ballot" elections in the Town of Paradise Valley in accordance with the provisions of A.R.S. §16-409(A) for all future elections, unless specifically designated otherwise by the Town Council. The Town received pre-clearance for use of this voting method from the Voting Rights Section of the U.S. Department of Justice on October 31, 2001.

**Changes in Voter Turnout**

Non-partisan at-large elections are held in the Town every two years on consolidated election dates as governed by Arizona State Statute. This year, a total of five candidates competed to fill three seats on the Town Council. Two candidates received a majority of the total votes cast in the primary election. A run-off was held May 16, 2006 to fill the remaining seat. Additionally, voters were asked to decide two ballot measures.

The following chart illustrates voter turnout percentages over the last sixteen years. There is a conspicuous increase in voter turnout in the 2000 and subsequent elections, presumably as a result of the vote-by-mail method. In 1994, using the traditional voting method, turnout fell to the lowest level of 12 percent. In the most recent "mail ballot" election, turnout increased to over 38 percent.



**Cost of Mail Ballot Election**

The Town contracts with Maricopa County for election services. Jurisdictions are charged a fee per registered voter. The services provided in a mail ballot election include:

1. Preparation, design, Spanish translation, printing and distribution of the Official Ballot.
2. Mailing of Official Ballot, affidavit and instructions to all voters
3. Conducting logic and accuracy test
4. Furnishing and transporting election supplies to town hall for Town's replacement ballot/depository site.
5. Processing mail ballots for signature authenticity
6. Tabulation of ballots and preparing official results for the Town's canvass.

In 1998, the Town conducted a traditional "on the ground" election with two polling places. The Town was charged \$6,200 total. Voter turnout in that election was a mere 16%. This equates to \$3.95 spent per ballot cast. If the Town had held an "on the ground" election this year, Maricopa County would have charged \$0.87 per registered voter for a total cost \$7,590.75. However this figure does not include costs associated with securing polling locations, employment of poll workers, and associated costs.

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In the vote-by-mail elections held this year, the Town was charged \$1.47 per registered voter or \$13,293.21 (\$4.14 per ballot cast) for the Primary Election and \$12,825.75 (\$3.74 per ballot cast) for the General Election. Voter turnout was 35% and 38% respectively.

### **Suggestions for Improvements or Refinements in the Mail Ballot Program**

The Town has previously expressed disappointment with the amount of time it takes to receive final election results in vote-by-mail elections. However, with the number of people taking advantage of early voting in all other elections and the additional time now needed to process conditional provisional ballots pursuant to Proposition 200, there is little difference between the two voting methods in when final results are available.

### **Frequency and Severity of Mail Ballot Irregularities**

Neither the Town of Paradise Valley nor the Maricopa County Elections Department observed any irregularities.

### **Voter Satisfaction with the Process**

Paradise Valley voters have generally expressed satisfaction with the ease and convenience of this voting method. However, in this election a number of complaints were received regarding return postage and U.S. Post Office handling errors. In Maricopa County, with the exception of the City of Phoenix which does not contract with the County Elections Department, voters must pay return postage on voted ballots. In the May election, Maricopa County switched from a two-column ballot to a three-column ballot. This increased the weight of the return ballot envelope to exactly one ounce. The Clerk's Office, through its voter information campaign, announced that one first-class stamp was sufficient to cover return postage costs not knowing that something as simple as taping the envelope closed increased the weight over the first-class threshold. Unfortunately, many voted ballots were returned to the voter for insufficient postage. Ballots were returned to the voter even though Maricopa County set up a "shortage" account with the U.S. Post Office to avoid this issue.

Cities and towns which contract with Maricopa County are not given the option of paying return postage. Although this might prevent the issue from repeating, in all likelihood, having to pay for return postage would make "all-mail ballot" elections prohibitively expensive for most jurisdictions including Paradise Valley.

The only other feedback received from voters concerns the amount of time it takes to release final election results. As previously stated, there is little that can be done to accelerate the process.

### **Number of Nondeliverable ballots**

A total of 375 ballots were returned as undeliverable in the Primary Election and 192 were returned in the General Election. This highlights one of the advantages of a vote-by-mail election. When two official election related mailings are returned by the Post Office, the County Elections Department may move that voter to the inactive list. This helps County

Recorders update and maintain accurate active voter lists. It has the added benefit of reducing the cost of elections for cities and towns since county election services are assessed based on the number of active voters in the jurisdiction.

**Conclusion**

The Paradise Valley Town Council has expressed support for the continued use of this voting method by adoption of a resolution authorizing future elections to be conducted in this manner. The Clerk's Office is pleased with the process and maintains that vote-by-mail increases voter participation. Vote-by-mail elections do not require Clerks to recruit, train, and pay poll workers. Polling locations do not have to be identified and reserved. The Clerk's Office does not have to respond to telephone calls on Election Day directing voters to their proper polling locations. Voters are offered the option of voting and returning their ballot through the mail or going to the Clerk's Office or any County Elections Office and voting in person.

It is hoped that Paradise Valley's positive experience with vote-by-mail elections will not only encourage other municipalities to experiment with this voting method, but also justify the legislature's foresight in offering elections officials an opportunity to use 21<sup>st</sup> century technology to increase voter participation in Arizona.

Respectfully,



Duncan Miller  
Town Clerk