



HOA Voice of the Village Special Election Edition No. 3 November 3rd Election Update

How Safe Are Your Ballots?

An Interview with Susan Harrison, Loudon County Administrator of Elections

The upcoming election on November 3rd has generated a lot of discussion in the press and social media about how votes are cast, the safety and security of the ballots, and measures in place to ensure that all votes cast get counted and votes are not cast more than once.

As part of the HOA Voice Special Election Update series, Dennis Dougherty, HOA VP-Programs, reached out to Susan Harrison, Loudon County Administrator of Elections, to get a more detailed understanding about how the voting process works in Loudon County. In doing so, we hope this edition will make you better informed of how votes are cast and recorded, and ballots are securely managed.

We have also reached out to the Monroe County Election Commission to get similar input on their voting processes. We will provide you that information when it becomes available.

But first, a few background facts and clarifications on Loudon County Voting...

- Loudon County uses a computer-based system for voter registration. It is updated every day and backed up to a secure server.

- During Early Voting, when a person applies to cast their vote, their application to vote is recorded in the computerized voter registration system that is recorded in the centralized location.
- The Election Day data base is based off the voter history from Early Voting and absentee ballots cast.
- A 'Provisional' ballot is a paper ballot that are used in two circumstances:
 1. If the person should come to the polls and the election official cannot find a record of their registration or the voter does not have the proper photo ID.
 2. There is some question as to whether a voters record is not accurate and/or the voter claims a mail-in ballot was lost or not showing in the voting record and they show up at a polling place to vote.

More on Provisional ballots later.

HOA Questions and Susan Harrison s Responses

DD: Dennis Dougherty; SH: Susan Harrison

DD: During Early Voting and on Election Day at the polls, how would an election official know whether someone has already voted somewhere else or voted by mail?

SH: The computer system that we use on Election Day and during Early Voting would alert the workers that a person has received a ballot and/or has voted. Early Voting has 3 colors on the screen: Green-Good to vote, Yellow-the voter has been sent an application or ballot; Red means the person has voted. On Election Day the system would say a voter has already voted if they have sent in a ballot. If any discrepancies come up, the election official will try to resolve them on the spot. If unsuccessful, the voter will be given, at their option, a provisional ballot to vote on that day or they can decline to vote on that day. If it is Election Day, they would be encouraged to vote a provisional ballot.

DD: During Early Voting and on Election Day, how secure are ballots?

SH: Very secure, with multiple security checks. First of all, we use electronic voting machines on election days. The only paper ballots used are for provisional voting and in the event of an emergency e.g. voting machines go down. These paper ballots are picked-up in sealed ballot bags by election officials on the day before the election. They are in the custody of the election official until they are brought to the polls on election day. These ballots will only be used for provisional ballots and only if for some reason all the voting machines were to go down. In many cases this sealed ballot bag is never opened.

DD: What happens at the polls if the computerized voting machines go down during Early Voting and/or on Election Day?

SH: Voting continues. Instead of using the computerized voting machines, voters will be given a paper ballot that they fill out manually. That ballot is then scanned into a special voting machine once the voter has made their choices. Those ballots are then delivered to the Election Commission in a sealed ballot box (seals are recorded before they leave a polling place) by a member of each political party on election night. Those seals remain in the ballot box until after election day and the election has been certified and the contest period has passed.

DD: How are Absentee Mail-In Ballots processed?

SH: When someone is an authorized registered voter, has submitted an Absentee Mail-In Ballot request, and the ballot is issued, it goes into the voter record that the request was made and a ballot was issued, along with the dates the request was made and the ballot was mailed out.

When a ballot is returned, the ballot is not opened. The signature on the mail-in ballot is compared to the signature on file on the voter record. Once accepted, the ballot is logged into the system and the ballot is placed in a secured ballot bag with a lock and seal representing each political party. The ballots will remain there until Election Day at which point an election commissioner from each party will come and unlock the secured bags for the counting process.

DD: What if a person asks for a mail-in ballot but does not use it, for whatever reason, and decides to go to the polls instead?

SH: The voter would be given a provisional ballot (paper) to fill out manually. They cannot vote on the voting machine because records would have to be checked to make sure their first ballot has not been returned and counted.

This is the same process for all provisional ballots. Provisional ballots will not be processed until after all votes are tabulated on Election Night. The election commission will go back and check the records to make sure the original ballot was not returned. If the first one was returned, they will investigate why the voter was trying to vote again. Only one vote will be counted.

DD: When will election results become final?

SH: A lesser known fact is that election results are not final on Election Day. Voter precincts will report out the 'tabulated' results from the voting machines after the polls close. That is *usually* a reliable indicator of who won a particular race. The results are technically not final until ALL ballots have been counted, including mail-in and provisional, and all audits have taken place and votes and voters reconciled. At that point, the election commission meets and will certify the results. This is usually within about 2 weeks.

DD: So, what s all the fuss about?

SH: With the impact of COVID-19, a significant increase in Absentee Mail-in Votes is anticipated across the country. Each county in the country handles its own vote processing. A large influx of Mail-in and provisional ballots could put a strain on those processes particularly if the county has not prepared for it.

In addition, there is concern that in some areas there may be delays from the USPS mailing out ballots on time and handling all the ballots in time when they are mailed in. In Tennessee ballots are only mailed out to the registered voters that have requested them.

DD: Do Tellico Village voters have anything to worry about?

SH: In Loudon County we certainly don't think so. We only mail out ballots to those that request them, and we keep very accurate and verified records. We have a long-proven set of processes and procedures to handle all eventualities. We are staffing up in anticipation of the larger mail-in volume and have an excellent working relationship with the Loudon Post Office.

DD: As voters, are there things we can do to help the situation?

SH: Yes. If you are planning to use Absentee Mail-in Voting, get your request in early. You can submit a request from now through October 27th. Similarly, if mailing in your ballot, do so as early as possible to give the post office extra time if they need it. Ballots must be returned to the election commission by USPS, FedEx, or UPS, no later than the close of polls on election day. You cannot drop off your ballot at the election commission office. However, you CAN take your ballot to the Loudon Post Office (only) and drop it off. Inform the postal employee that this is an absentee ballot and they will immediately place it in the LC Election Commission post office box.

Ballots have just started to be mailed out. Once your ballot has been mailed out, you can track its progress at: <https://tnmap.tn.gov/voterlookup/>

DD: Susan, on behalf of the Tellico Village HOA and our resident voters, I want to thank you for setting aside the time during an extremely busy period for you and your very thorough answers to our questions.

SH: My pleasure. If you have other questions you can check out these websites:

<https://sos.tn.gov/elections/voter-information>

<http://loudoncountyvotes.com/>