



# DIANE TRAUTMAN

## COUNTY CLERK

---

### **Plan for Harris County Countywide Polling Place Program**

#### **I. Overview of Plan**

The Countywide Polling Place Program that I am recommending for Harris County is to leave all Election Day polling locations open and utilize Early Voting locations on Election Day. We would look at voting patterns and other criteria after several elections to determine voter needs. We would work with the Community Advisory Committee and the community in question before consolidating any existing locations. We will fully comply with the Voting Rights Act and give particular care to polling locations traditionally identified with people of color, members of language groups, and persons with disabilities. My office is committed to transparency, upholding the integrity of our elections, and preserving the right to vote for all residents. The voters of Harris County have made it clear that a Countywide Polling Place Program would have a positive impact on elections and I am confident that the transition to a Countywide Polling Place Program will be successful.

#### **II. Which Elections Will Use the Countywide Polling Place Program**

All elections including general, special, joint, primaries, runoffs, and uniform elections will be recommended to use the Countywide Polling Place Program. Every polling location would be considered a Voting Center.

#### **III. Community Advisory Committee**

The Community Advisory Committee will advise the County Clerk on potential new locations and consolidations of any precincts for Voting Centers, and will help with voter education after approval of the program by reaching out to the communities they represent.

This group would be comprised of one representative from various organizations, with a focus on non-profit community organizations, voting and civil rights organizations, super neighborhood representatives, ADA Compliance Groups, and both political party chairs. Groups that have expressed interest in the Community Advisory Committee include:

- NAACP Houston
- Houston in Action
- EmGAGE
- Mi Familia Vota
- ACLU of Texas
- Texas Civil Rights Project
- Voter Awareness Council
- Avenue CDC
- Acres of Angels
- Baker Ripley
- OCA
- LULAC
- Texas Organizing Project
- League of Women Voters Houston

#### **IV. Determining New Voting Center Locations**

New Early Voting locations will continue to be added each year to meet the needs of the expanding Harris County population. We will continue to work with election experts and researchers from area universities to determine new locations. Initially there will be a slight increase in costs for Early Voting and Election Day, which has already been factored into the 2019 budget. Recommended factors for selecting new locations include:

- Convenience for voter – distance and time to location
- Adequate staffing and equipment at location
- Proximity to other Early Voting locations that need relief
- Communities of Interest Measure – does it draw from voters who live nearby or far away

#### **V. Determining Consolidation of Precincts**

With over 1,000 precincts, Harris County has been combining Election Day locations for several years. In the November 2018 General Election we had approximately 700 polling locations. We are committed to working closely with the Community Advisory Committee and the community in question to ensure all locations effectively meet the needs of the community. We will give particular consideration toward the preservation of polling locations traditionally identified with people of color, members of language groups, and persons with disabilities. The final list of all locations will be reviewed and approved by Commissioners Court.

##### Criteria for Consolidation

1. Voter turnout compared to similar elections
2. ADA compliance
3. Wifi connectivity
4. Input from the Community Advisory Committee

After several elections using the Countywide Polling Place Program, the Harris County Clerk's Election Department will compare the data to similar past elections to determine voter needs. In the event of a recommendation for consolidation due to the above criteria, we would work with the Community Advisory Committee and the community in question to determine the best way to move forward.

Since we will be opening new locations every year, even if some locations are combined, we would stay very close to the original 700 polling locations we have now.

#### **VI. Criteria for Choosing Election Judges**

We will follow Texas Election Code, which states the Commissioners court must apportion the number of judges for countywide polling places in direct proportion to the percentage of election precincts located in each county commissioners precinct won by each party in the last gubernatorial election.

This will be very similar to the way we have always appointed Election Judges in Harris County and we are committed to equal representation.

## **VII. Plan for Voter Education and Outreach Upon Program Approval**

1. The announcement that Harris County will utilize Countywide Polling Places will be posted on the Harris County Clerk's webpage at [www.harrisvotes.com](http://www.harrisvotes.com). Once information about an election is officially announced, the website will contain a list of all available polling locations.
2. Upon approval, the Harris County Clerk will host a press conference to announce approval and an implementation plan. Ongoing media outreach may include interviews with local papers media outlets, podcasts and blogs.
3. The Voter Outreach team will host community meetings in conjunction with area organizations and civic groups and will address the need for translators as needed.
4. A Community Advisory Committee will be formed, and consist of representation from various community and advocacy groups. This Advisory Committee will meet prior to the first election in which Countywide Voting Centers are implemented and will meet on an ongoing basis to ensure the success of the program at a community level.
5. Public Service Announcements will be run on Harris County TV access stations.
6. Information about the Countywide Polling Place Program will be posted on the County Clerk social media.
7. A notice about the adoption of the Countywide Polling Place Program will be posted on county bulletin boards in English, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Chinese at the Harris County Clerk's office, annex offices, and at the County Commissioners Court.
8. We are looking at partnerships with Hart Inter-civic and Houston Endowment to lead a voter information campaign.
9. Procedural updates will be incorporated into curriculum and trainings for all Election Judges and clerks.
10. Meetings will be held to ensure the Asian, African American, and Hispanic Advisory Committees are informed of the adoption of the Countywide Polling Place Program and Voter Outreach representatives will be available to answer any addition questions.
11. The Harris County Clerk will explore emerging technologies, such as mobile applications or text messaging as a way to optimize communications.

## **VIII. Equipment Needs for the Next 5 years**

2019 – Expected recommendation is the addition of 4-6 new Early Voting locations. This would result in additional costs for equipment, training and staffing, which is included in the 2019 budget.

2020 – 2023 – We will review election information and look at Harris County’s growing and increasingly diverse population to determine what additional equipment and staff might be needed. This timeframe could include the introduction of new voting machines and infrastructure.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diane Trautman". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "D" and a long, sweeping underline.

**Office of DIANE TRAUTMAN - Harris County Clerk**  
201 Caroline, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Houston, TX 77002  
Phone: 713.274.8600