

## Bucks County weighs option as state pushes for new voting machines

<http://www.buckscountycouriertimes.com/news/20181216/bucks-county-weighs-option-as-state-pushes-for-new-voting-machines>

By [Chris Ullery @ulleryatintell](#)

Posted Dec 16, 2018 at 5:17 AM

Five vendors showed various models Thursday of potential new voting machines that make paper copies of ballots, which the state is pushing counties to implement by 2020.

With the clock ticking on a state order to update voting machines due to continuing concerns about election security, the state came to Bucks County last week to showcase the possibilities at the polls.

Some 200 people converged on the county administration building to check out a vendors expo highlighting the five voting machines that Gov. Tom Wolf and advocates hope will modernize and harden voting security in the Commonwealth by the 2020 presidential election.

In April, Wolf gave counties a deadline of 2020 to switch to voting machines that leave a paper trail and make them less susceptible to hacking and other cyber attacks.

The mandate, however, comes with a hefty price tag: Estimates put costs at upward of \$150 million statewide. Earlier this month, Wolf said he would push to have the Legislature pay at least half the costs.

Montgomery County already has set aside \$8 million in its 2019 budget. Bucks County hasn't earmarked any in next year's spending plan, but officials said they will begin researching new machines in 2019.

"We're continuing to do our due diligence," County Commissioner Chair Robert Loughery said. "Until we have all the facts and we know which system we're purchasing (and) how much money we're getting in, I don't think we can really give you a good idea of the timeline the county will be on."

Bucks and Montgomery counties are not alone as they consider the future of voting.

Pennsylvania is one of 13 states still using what are known as "Direct Recording Electronic" voting machines. Fifty of the state's 67 counties, including Bucks and Montgomery, have voting machines that leave no paper trail.

Kathy Boockvar, senior adviser to the governor on election modernization, said the recent push to replace aging machines is part of a national, bipartisan effort.

"The machines we vote on now were all manufactured before the first iPhone," Boockvar said Thursday.

She said the five machines on display at the expo, one of a handful being held statewide, were "light years ahead" of the security and accessibility of machines in Bucks and across the state.

In 2006, Bucks County spent about \$4 million to upgrade its lever machines to the Danaher ELECTronic 1242, according to [votespa.com](#). Federal funds helped defray some of the county's costs.

While the Danaher machine electronically records a “ballot image,” all ballot information is recorded to eight internal memory sources, including one battery-powered RAM bank, information on [verifiedvoting.org](https://verifiedvoting.org) states.

While hacking and cyber-security issues are among the main factors in the push to upgrade machines, the potential that thousands of votes could be lost if a machine’s memory is corrupted or loses power also is a concern.

State officials also worry that the operating systems the machines run on are “so outdated that support for those systems will soon end,” according to a spokeswoman for the Department of State.

“The current voting equipment in counties works and can be audited. **They cannot be audited.** But new voting machines with paper ballots or voter-verifiable paper backup will improve auditability and augment security,” said Acting Secretary of State Robert Torres in February, when he issued a directive that voting systems purchased from that point on must have a voter-verifiable paper ballot or paper record.

Following the directive, [a group asked the Bucks County commissioners](#), who also serve as the Board of Elections, to consider upgrades.

Members and supporters of the group SAVE-Bucks Votes implored the commissioners to change the about 900 machines used by the county over to a voter-marked, paper-based optical scan (PBOS) system.

Commissioner Chairman Charley Martin wasn’t convinced, saying at the time he had “no concerns” and that there’s “never been a complaint” about the machines.

### **Funding new machines**

The costs to Bucks County to replace its voting system is a relative unknown at this point, due in large part to price negotiations between the state and the vendors, said Willie Wesley Jr., director of business development for voting machine manufacturer ES&S, on Thursday as he displayed his company’s technology at the expo.

For example, ES&S machines could cost as much as \$4,500 each, but Wesley said it could be much less through negotiations. That’s comparable to another estimate of between \$3 million and \$4 million that advocates provided earlier this year.

Boockvar said estimates of how many voters a machine can process per hour varies, and the setup of each polling place, or the hourly volume of voters, affect the number of machines a county would need to purchase, and ultimately the cost. **Her comments seem to give the impression that all voters must vote on machines (ballot-marking devices) because only that type of system needs additional machines to accommodate more voters. A majority of voters hand-marking their ballots only need one scanner, which only takes a second to insert the ballot and cast one’s vote. Only one ballot-marking device needed per precinct for disabled voters.**

Roughly 5 percent of Pennsylvania’s 8.6 million voters are registered in Bucks County, where there are more than 457,000 registered voters in 304 voting districts as of Nov. 26, data from the [state](#) and [county](#) election boards shows.

Pennsylvania has \$14.15 million to upgrade voting machines, which is made up of \$13.5 million from the federal government’s \$380 million available for election security nationwide and a 5-percent state match.

Boockvar said Wolf also is seeking state funding for at least half of counties' costs for new voting systems. Officials said he will work with the General Assembly in 2019 to develop specific proposals for state funding and financing of the machines.

The Department of State has also said it will reissue a statewide purchasing contract that vendors and counties can leverage to support voting system purchases later this month.

County Commissioner Diane Ellis-Marseglia said Thursday that Bucks County could ultimately pay only 40 percent of the total costs.

"If it becomes mandatory that we have to replace our current machines, and the commissioners elect to do so, we would look for whatever potential funds are available," Bucks County spokesman Larry King said earlier this month.

Montgomery County [Commissioner Chairwoman Valerie Arkoosh said](#) the county plans to have new machines, on which officials will spend \$8 million to replace its 20-year-old models, ready for the 2019 municipal election in November.

### **Funding fight in Harrisburg**

While Boockvar said early talks for additional state funding were going well, the push for the funding already is facing criticism from the Republican-controlled General Assembly.

The total state funding needed to cover half the costs for upgraded machines has been estimated between \$110 million to \$150 million, according to state Sen. John Gordner, R-Columbia, Senate Majority Whip. **This is incorrect. The total is \$110 - 150 million; state funding would cover half of those amounts so would be \$55 – 75 million.**

Gordner has written legislation to require legislative approval before counties are forced to purchase new machines. "The governor did this on his own without any consultation with the legislature, which he seems to be doing a lot of," Gordner said on Dec. 4.

He said cyber-security concerns are overblown, and many machines — like those in his district — are not connected to an online network, and are not under threat of being hacked. **Wrong—“not connected to internet” argument is invalid, see why at [www.SAVEBucksVotes.org](http://www.SAVEBucksVotes.org) homepage.**

### **New machines on display**

Det Ansinn, a former Doylestown Borough councilman and founder of BrickSimple LLC, said the machines at the expo Thursday might not be secure enough. Ansinn's company is a national software development company based in the borough.

"For me, as someone who thinks about security — who thinks about scale — I haven't done a lap here that gives me a lot of confidence," Ansinn said.

The machines all used some form of scanning hardware to read or cast the ballot, which Ansinn said was like using a password where stricter security measures should be in place.

Ansinn said flaws in those scanning systems could manifest in a misinterpreted ballot from the machine, alluding to the “hanging chad” problem in Florida during the 2002 presidential election.

The vendors Thursday said there were safeguards against that.

Every machine on display used a touch screen to cast the initial votes and then printed a paper copy, except for the Election Services Inc. (Clear Ballot/Electec) machines. That system used only paper ballots filled out by the voter to be scanned and submitted by a poll worker.

Russ Dawson, national director of sales for the company, likened the system to the kind of test answer sheets from Scantron Corp. used in schools.

He said one of the biggest benefits to that system was that it is impossible to hack a paper ballot.

Among other security features, vendors for the other touch screen machines demonstrated how their machines alerted voters if they attempted to vote for more options than available in a single race. All scanners can do that, do not need to vote on the touchscreen ballot-marking devices to have that advantage.

Boockvar added that all the companies will need federal and state certification, which includes security “penetration testing.” Unisyn and ES&S, two of the vendors, currently [are listed as](#) certified electronic voting systems in 2018 on the state department’s website.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.