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## **Bucks Board of Elections recommends hand-marked voting machines for 2020**

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The Bucks County Board of Elections voted to recommend the county purchases a machine that creates a hand-marked paper ballot.

Members of area voting rights advocates were relieved to learn Wednesday the county's Board of Elections is recommending new [voting machines](#) by [Clear Ballot Group](#).

Wednesday's 2-1 vote on a machine that offers what's known as a "hand-marked paper ballot" will go before the county commissioners next Wednesday morning for a final decision.

The three county commissioners make up the election board.

The change in machines follows a 2018 state mandate requiring counties to switch from machines with digital-only memory in favor of those that make paper copies over security concerns.

Gov. Tom Wolf and the Department of State set a deadline for counties to choose new voting machines by the end of this year, and have them in polling places statewide by the 2020 election.

There were five vendors to get state and federal approval for officials to choose from, including a model by Election Services & Software.

Election board member Charley Martin, the dissenting vote, said he would have rather had the ES&S machines as he believed they would be cheaper, easier to implement and was the most popular machine statewide.

Ardith Talbott, of the [Bucks County League of Women Voters](#), echoed past comments that the hand-marked machines in general were the best option for the county to implement next year.

"After studying the various types of voting systems available, the league found that many electronic machines are vulnerable to technology that comes between the voter and the final count," Talbott said.

The league and [SAVE Bucks Votes](#) have been [staunch supporters](#) of hand-marked systems in the past, but neither group advocates for one model over the other.

The main difference between machines is one type prints results to a machine-readable barcode and the other has to be filled in by the voter, similar to a standardized test in schools.

SAVE Bucks Votes President Janis Hobbs-Pellechio said she and members of other groups would help in any way they can to educate voters on how the machines work before the next election.

Talbott, Hobbs-Pellechio and others at the meeting described the vote as tremendous relief just before the Thanksgiving holiday when election board Chairwoman Diane Ellis-Marseglia called the vote to recommend the Clear Ballot machines.

Assuming the commissioners cast the same vote next week, the county will likely finalize the purchase early next year.

County officials said at a budget presentation last week the costs of the machines were a relative unknown at this point due to uncertainty over state funding.

Pennsylvania has \$14.15 million to help counties 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% state match.

Gov. Tom Wolf has also pursued assigning more state funds to ease the financial burden to county taxpayers for the upgrades.

Montgomery County rolled out its new machines made by Dominion for the May primary. Officials spent \$5.8 million to upgrade to machines that produce paper ballots.

Board members did not discuss costs during the meeting and the county used a collective bargaining program called COSTARS to review bidding documents submitted by vendors.

The COSTARS website has had a request for bidding documents on its website since April 2018, but the documents do not appear to be published online.

Bucks County Chief Operating Officer Brian Hessenthaler said last week the final costs depend on the state and federal funding, the training required and legwork needed to get everything in place by next year.

Loughery commended the county's staff for the work they have done over many months leading up to Wednesday's vote.

The commissioners' Dec. 4 meeting starts at 10 a.m. in the first-floor meeting room at 55 E. Court St. in Doylestown Borough.

