



# ANOKA COUNTY UNION HERALD

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## Election integrity in Anoka County

Citizens organization Anoka County Election Integrity team seeks action on county elections

ELLIOT STEEVES, IAN WREISNER, HANNAH DAVIS AND MATT DEBOW  
APG ECM Staff writers

Ever since the seeds of doubt were sown during the 2020 presidential election, questions about America's election integrity continue to sprout across the nation.

Despite statements from the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency saying there was "no evidence that any voting system deleted or lost votes, changed votes, or was in any way compromised," both elected officials and members of the public continue to raise questions and concerns about the way elections are being handled.

Anoka County is not exempt from this, and such concerns spurred the creation of the Anoka County Election Integrity



BY IAN WREISNER/STAFF WRITER

The citizen-led group known as the Anoka County Election Integrity Team, no affiliation to Anoka County itself, gives a presentation to the Anoka City Council on Sept. 3.

Team, also called ACEIT. ACEIT is a local organization that has visited multiple cities throughout Anoka County. Made up of Anoka County residents, including several who have spent time as election judges, the group shares its goals with the councils it visits and

offers to give a presentation on the six actions it feels cities can take for a "simple, locally controlled and transparent" election process.

In the two years since its creation, ACEIT focused its early efforts at the county level, but after a year and a half of

struggling to gain traction, moved to making itself a steady presence in council chambers. The group has recently seen several area cities pass resolutions it drafted, largely to draw attention to the issue and put pressure on

County municipalities take ACEIT's advice, pass related resolutions regarding post election reviews

ELLIOT STEEVES, IAN WREISNER, HANNAH DAVIS AND MATT DEBOW  
APG ECM staff writers

Following nationwide conversations about election integrity, a group of Anoka County citizens got together two years ago to form the Anoka County Election Integrity Team. In that time since, the group — which has no official affiliation with Anoka County government — has gone around to all 20 cities and one township in the county, presenting the actions councils can take to, in ACEIT's opinion, make elections more secure.

The recommendations given by ACEIT can be found in the companion article "ACEIT seeks action on Anoka County Elections." What follows is a record

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the county, which, if implemented at the county level, could set a new precedent for elections going forward in Anoka County.

ACEIT member Derek Lind said during the Columbus City Council's Sept. 4 meeting that the group had worked for 18 months trying without success to get traction at the county level.

"I think you're also sending a message to the county that they need to do something," Lind said, later saying: "I mean, politics will be involved. We're active in the (Basic Political Organizational Units), and we'll apply political pressure as we can, but they can do whatever they want. If you get a bunch of cities that want to hand count and they tell them no, then we'll see what happens."

ABC Newspapers reached out to ACEIT's Derek Lind and Anoka County Elections Manager Tom Hunt to see how viable their plan for Anoka County elections is. ACEIT, in correspondence through members Lind and Bob Kirschner, declined an in-person interview, but Kirschner sent email responses to ABC Newspaper's questions. Hunt also declined an in-person interview and opted to respond to questions via email.

**MAIN GOALS**

ACEIT's main work has been through giving presentations to local governing bodies that include six actionable points that are backed up by the group with drafted ordinances that cities can tailor to their preference and put in action.

"We verify that our store purchases, bank transactions, investment selections and reports, academic scores/records, credit card charges, and so on were recorded accurately," ACEIT wrote in an email. "Why wouldn't we want to verify our election results every time, too?"

One ACEIT goal is the hand counting of paper ballots through local management. They cite Minnesota's hand piling system



FILE PHOTO BY IAN WREISNER/STAFF WRITER

Anoka County Elections Manager Tom Hunt runs through recount data on Nov. 15, 2023 with Anoka-Hennepin School Board candidate Susan Witt. The recount discovered one miscounted vote, which was marked as an overvote due to the voter overfilling the indicator bubble, taking then-candidate Zach Arco's lead from 13 to 14.

as the ideal example, saying that it takes six seconds per ballot when checking them during a hand count. ACEIT states that during a 2023 Anoka-Hennepin School Board election recount, the hand count time was five seconds per ballot.

While Hunt said that "Anoka County has complete confidence in its ballot-counting machines," Anoka County also has little say in whether a hand count is conducted. Hunt says the county has no authority to approve an election-wide hand count, and the sealed ballot cases that cast ballots go into at the end of election day only open in the event of a recount or Post Election Review.

When the ballots are hand counted, Hunt says the process is "time consuming and inaccurate."

"Using a hand count instead of a machine count for an entire election would be more time consuming, more expensive and make the process far more prone to errors and produce results that are much less reliable," Hunt wrote.

ACEIT also recommends that cities across Anoka County expand their Post Election Reviews, PERs, through requests to the county. By Minnesota law, Anoka County already does four random precinct PERs per election, reviewing the results for national offices.

Using a resolution drafted by ACEIT, several Anoka County cities have passed resolutions asking for the county to hold PERs in multiple precincts, sometimes reviewing local races, as well. A full list can be found in the companion article, "Anoka cities take ACEIT advice."

Hunt said that the requests have been passed on to the County Auditor. ACEIT responded to the fact that it would ultimately be up to the county to hold additional PERs if the county could nullify the

request anyway.

"Collaboration and respect between partnering entities is a win-win," ACEIT wrote. "Now that the County is aware of the Cities' and Town's desire to expand the Post Election Review, as allowed for by MN Statute 206.89, there is the opportunity for a great outcome for all involved — the county, the municipality, and the people. Those city councils and townships that pass resolutions requesting an expansion of the PER are doing so to provide confidence to their community members that their votes/voices counted in each race on the ballot."

ACEIT added that they would like cities to establish paper poll books that would be controlled through local management. They cite online security risks with poll pads; namely, that they are managed on a cloud, that they connect to hotspot devices, routers, and cloud drives.

Citing the Conservative Daily, ACEIT

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states that poll pads have been used as a “digital ledger” to add, shift, and delete large amounts of voters to achieve desired vote counts. They state that poll pads will slightly modify people’s names to add registered people, and that they will move voter registration records to non-existent addresses, before breaking an audit trail. According to a February 2024 Associated Press report, experts have suggested those polling pads could be a prime target again this year for those wishing to disrupt the U.S. election process. However, that same article noted there was no evidence of widespread voter fraud or tampering in 2020.

ACEIT added in an email that paper poll books are still required to be produced as a backup, and have decreased costs and technical difficulties associated with them.

“Paper poll books have always worked and are not reliant on connectivity and software on Election Day,” ACEIT wrote. “As we hear nearly weekly in the news, online activity is vulnerable to hacking; paper is not. Additionally, when machines are used, we need to take extra measures to certify/validate they are performing as designed. The expense of equipment, storage, software, updates, licenses, and certifications adds up. Paper poll books don’t have all those expenses.”

Hunt said that in 2018, when the county made the full switch to electronic poll pads, that staff “carefully studied that issue and concluded that the poll pads provide greater election security and transparency than the paper poll books did.” He said the instant check-in from poll pads prevents voters from being able to vote absentee and in-person on election day, as well as providing greater security at the polls themselves.

“When a voter appears before an election in ~~use~~ using a paper poll book, the

voter may be able to see the registration information for other voters who appear on the same page of the paper book,” Hunt wrote. “The electronic poll books eliminate that concern by showing only the voter’s own personal information.”

He said the electronic poll books increased efficiency at the polls, and paper receipts that are printed off after the electronic sign in — and are required to turn in to a poll worker to receive a ballot — still create a physical record of who voted.

Hunt concluded that Anoka County had zero issues with poll pads being compromised “in any way.”

Lind told the Columbus city council during the Sept. 8 meeting that it may receive some pushback if it decides to go back to paper poll books: “We’re not aware of any reason yet you can’t get rid of (electronic poll books). The county may push back a little bit on that. One of our members .... has been digging into that, but we don’t think there’s a joint powers agreement on that, so we’ve been back and forth on that.”

Another goal of ACEIT is to secure election judge data through local management and storage. According to ACEIT, there are several data security risks that come with outsourcing information to non-governmental organizations.

Hunt said that each vendor with access to county data is required to sign the Anoka County Information Technology Usage Agreement, requiring vendors to use firewalls, encryption and password protection in order “to ensure data security.” Twin Cities-based Modus is the county’s current vendor, and has been since 2011.

“Modus meets the IT Department’s stringent standards for vendors accessing Anoka County’s technology systems,” Hunt wrote.

ACEIT’s recommendation is for a resolution requesting personal data by ending Anoka County’s contract with Modus

parent company InTech Software Solutions, and return to local management and storage. They additionally cite “questions” about the Modus/InTech contract, as well as the government’s “obligation to protect personal information.”

Another goal is the verification of registered voters through local management. On a slide titled “Registered Voter List Accountability,” they discuss Minnesota law that states how “each county auditor shall prepare and maintain a current list of registered voters” in each precinct. ACEIT voiced concerns in the current system, which is stored on a cloud server.

The recommendation on this front from ACEIT is to adopt a resolution for the City and County to work together to secure a voter list. They state that city election clerks must encourage the county auditor to maintain a master voter list, and that election personnel should double check the county’s list of registered voters for validation.

Hunt responded that Anoka County updates its master list as required by Minnesota law, and that the updates are done daily as new information is received. Sources for this include the Minnesota DVS, the Department of Health, the US Postal Service, Department of Corrections and the Electronic Registration Information Center. Identity verification occurs through either driver’s license numbers or social security numbers and mailed confirmations.

ACEIT also seeks to use only validated paper ballots for elections, run through local management.

ACEIT argues that cities should adopt two resolutions: one to administer absentee ballots, and another to create a ballot board and appoint judges. They state that counterfeit and absentee ballots carry a risk of fraud.

Hunt stated that Anoka County, as required by MN state statute, currently

uses paper ballots that are counted electronically, and maintain a chain of custody. He emphasized that there is no evidence of counterfeit ballots being a problem at a small scale in Minnesota, let alone a scale “large enough to make a statistically significant difference.”

ACEIT has also been pushing for cities to keep their precincts below 2,000 registered voters, stating that this is the recommended maximum by Minnesota Secretary of State. They call for a resolution capping precinct sizes to 2,000.

Hunt responded that precincts are determined by municipalities, and that over 89% of precincts in the county were under 2,500 voters, citing absentee voting and poll pads for the increased maximum size.

ACEIT’s presentation details its opposition to third parties getting involved in elections. When asked if ACEIT should be considered a third party, they responded that its status as a citizens’ group did not apply.

“ACEIT is not funded by any source except our own time and resources and it does not contract with any government entity to provide services,” ACEIT wrote. “We have spent time learning, sharing our learning, and encouraging local management of election processes.”

ACEIT does not host a list of its group members online, but in a presentation to Ham Lake described themselves as a “group of conservative Christians.” ACEIT did not respond to a question regarding if there were any DFL members in the group, stating instead that they don’t ask members about their political affiliation.

“Election integrity is an issue that every political affiliation cares about,” ACEIT said. “We don’t ask what, if any, political views a person has because we are focused on our election processes, which serve all. We pledge allegiance to one nation, under God.”

## ACEIT's impact/

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of all the resolutions passed by Anoka County municipal governing bodies at the recommendation of ACEIT:

### ANOKA

Anoka passed two resolutions based on drafts provided by ACEIT at its Sept. 16 City Council meeting. The first one passed unanimously, and stated that the city of Anoka would work to keep its precinct sizes at 2,000 voters or less, which the city is already compliant with.

"To me, this is a pretty simple one," Council Member Erik Skogquist said. "It's a good practice that we've done for many years, and recommended by the Secretary of State, so it doesn't hurt to say (we'll keep doing it)."

Less common ground was found on a vote to pass a resolution requesting that the county host a Post Election Review for two of Anoka's eight precincts, reviewing the full ballot.

"Once they're pulled out and stacked up, my friendly amendment is going to be that we check every box," Mayor Phil Rice said. "Not every race is going to be contentious, but I think what we're really going for here is to validate the process and validate the

technology being used."

The vote passed 3-2, with Council Members Sam Scott and Skogquist against. Skogquist said that he did not want to budget city money towards something that they could not be sure would pass, as the PERs would have to be approved by the county election officials. He also brought up a 2022 recount of Anoka-Hennepin School District district two seat, which found one incorrectly marked ballot, taking then-candidate Zach Arco's lead from 13 to 14.

"Out of just under 5,000 votes, a change of one," Skogquist said. "At this point, I'm fine with the system as-is. ... I know it would always be better, but just from the frame of mind that the government has limited resources and we already have tests. I'm not in favor of throwing money on it when, really, we don't have a say."

### HAM LAKE

At its Aug. 19 meeting, the Ham Lake City Council unanimously passed a resolution as part of the consent agenda that they would request the Anoka County Canvassing Board perform a Post Election Review on one precinct in Ham Lake. The resolution also requests that the PER feature every race with multiple candidates, excluding the judiciary.

That followed discussions about elections at the Ham Lake's Aug. 5 city council meeting, where Ham Lake Mayor Brian Kirkham expressed claims of election fraud in Minnesota.

"I think that a lot of energy needs to be pushed towards the state for changes," Kirkham stated. "Voter ID requirements would be one thing, and having early voting open as long as it is, I don't really think it needs to be. I think it leads to more fraud."

Council Member Gary Kirkeide also clarified that the cost would be on Ham Lake for ACEIT's measures.

"We're already spending \$45,000 on the election this year," Kirkham said. "What's \$750 to make sure that we count one precinct?"

### OAK GROVE

Oak Grove's City Council unanimously passed a resolution for a request to do a paper PER for all four precincts at the April 29th meeting.

Mayor Weston Rolf, at the April 29 Oak Grove City Council meeting, emphasized that he had no hard feelings about election judges while a resolution was being considered for a PER in the city.

"You were never asked to verify the mail-in ballots and these other things, and we trust the county to

hope that the machines are right," Rolf said. "We appreciate all the hard work that you all do, and we hope that you continue."

Rolf then clarified that he was proposing a measure to verify the machine counting. He stated that he had done a lot of research, and that it had gotten pushback from Anoka County.

"What I am proposing is that we do a PER that includes all the mail-in ballots," Rolf stated.

Noting the hourly rate that Oak Grove paid its election judges, Rolf proposed that two of Oak Grove's four precincts be picked at random for a PER.

"We're requesting that the county do two of our four precincts at random," Rolf said. "If there's enough support here, I feel like we've got something."

Council Member John West stated he would take it one step farther, and wouldn't mind doing every precinct in the city.

"I think it's a good start," West said, "and like you, I hear from a lot of people that are concerned about the vote. If it doesn't take a lot to do, why wouldn't we?"

Rolf asked what the ballpark estimate for cost was, to which the staff response was for around \$2,000 in total.

"I don't like just throwing money around when times are tough,"

Rolf said, "but knowing \$2,000 or less is being spent on this, it's a good idea."

West stated he would be all in even if the cost was expensive.

Council Member Mike Wylie, while iterating that he didn't think this was necessary, stated that he would support it if it was all four precincts if the rest of the council wanted it. Wylie also added that, if they were to go through with everything, that he would want to get the dollar amount.

The resolution for a request to do a paper PER for all four precincts passed unanimously that same meeting.

### RAMSEY

At its June 11 meeting, in the consent agenda, the Ramsey City Council passed a resolution asking for a post-election review for six out of its nine precincts.

Following an ACEIT presentation during a city work session on April 23, Council Member Debra Musgrove said she's served as an election judge before and agreed with ACEIT's sentiments.

"I've done hand counting. I think the smaller precincts make that more feasible," Musgrove said. "So I think there are some things that we can look at that may make

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a difference ... but those are great pieces of feedback and information that we as a council should be hearing to know, 'Hey, these are some things we can do to shear up our elections ...'

## LINWOOD TOWNSHIP

Linwood Township, at its Sept. 10 meeting, passed a resolution for a Post-Election Review on paper for contested races. The count contains both precincts. The final vote was 4-1, with Board member Carol Searing delivering the opposing vote.

Board member Pam Olson, referencing ACEIT, stated that she played around with a cost sheet they had given her, and that the \$477 estimate was for the larger of the precincts. She added that it was based on the number of races that would be counted, and that the town board could decide to not count unopposed seats.

Board member Andy Luedtke asked about how the money would play out, to which Pam stated that Linwood had been conservative on the number to which Pam stated that Linwood had been conservative on the number of judges they had used in order to stay within budget,

and that they were preparing meals for the judges for hand-counting in November.

Linwood cited Minnesota Section 206.89 for the move, which states that if a voting machine or other system fails to count accurately, it must be examined and recertified by the Secretary of State before it can be used again.

## EAST BETHEL

The Anoka County Election Integrity team approached the East Bethel City Council on May 28, leading to a work session presentation and the council considering an expanded Post Election Review as a result. That measure failed for lack of a second on Aug. 26.

Despite the proposed recommendation of a PER covering only one of East Bethel's three districts, Council Member Bob DeRoche said that he would vote against it "due to the taxes it would put on the election judges," as per meeting minutes.

East Bethel Elections Manager and Administrative Coordinator Carrie Frost shared the challenge of finding election judges earlier that meeting.

"Often, I'm scraping for election judges," Frost said at the Aug. 26 meeting. "Not necessarily for applications, but it's between our budget

and the number of applications we have and having to keep party balance at all of our precincts throughout the entire day. There are a lot of moving pieces that we have to balance."

On Sept. 9, a PER appeared in the consent agenda of the regular City Council Meeting and it passed 4-1, after it was pulled for discussion. Frost again expressed concern over East Bethel's number of election judges, with Lewis adding that the council could still vote to increase election judge pay to encourage more applicants.

Frost, on Sept. 9, said another specific concern for East Bethel was the need for a party balance between judges. She said that there were not enough DFL-affiliated applicants, and unaffiliated judges are not allowed to handle marked ballots.

Mayor Kevin Lewis asked if the county does approve the request and "you can't come up with enough judges of both parties" what would happen?

Frost said that the task would then go to staff, which would then get in the way of other city tasks. Lewis amended the resolution for a PER to only trigger a PER if the difference between the top two vote getters is less than 20%.

## COLUMBUS

The Columbus City Council was set to vote on Wednesday, Sept. 25 (after ABC Newspapers' press deadline) on an ordinance based on the draft from ACEIT that would require the city to perform a PER in all future elections, costing the city an estimated \$1,200 based on projections by city administrator Jack Davis.

It's uncertain as of press time whether the measure will pass, but two council members seemed to receive ACEIT's presentation positively.

Council member Janet Hegland had previously met with an ACEIT member and City Administrator Jack Davis to learn about the group's efforts before ACEIT presented it to the City Council on Sept. 4. The goal, Hegland said during the Sept. 4 meeting, is "isn't about contesting prior elections, or even contesting the election. It's putting processes in place so that everybody can feel comfortable that there is integrity in the system, that things haven't been hacked, that there's checks and balances over and above what currently is now, and that makes a lot of sense to me," she said.

Support seemed to also come from Mayor Jesse Preiner.

"Your vote is a pretty important thing, it'll be the last thing we have left," Preiner said.

Council member Sue Wagonon didn't voice a strong opinion, but said: "I'm for voter integrity, and I hope everybody is" as she asked about the hand recounts.

Council members Ron Hanegraaf and Rob Busch — who are both battling for the mayoral seat this election as Preiner has opted not to run for re-election — did not offer opinions on the matter, with Busch only asking a single question after the presentation.

After ACEIT member Derek Lind expressed that

After ACEIT member Derek Lind expressed that he hopes the cities will send a message to the county that their efforts are succeeding at the municipal level and will change their mind, adding if the county tells says no, "then we'll see what happens" to which Hanegraaf replied: "That's what elections are for."

Hegland, the council member who expressed the most vocal support for the group, did bring up concerns over what the city legally has local control over.

"From what I know of our process, a lot of it gets dictated by the county, so it might say in statute that municipalities have some ability to sort of make decisions. That hasn't been what I've observed," she said.

Hegland emphasized that ACEIT's efforts — and also the city — should try to work with the county, stressing to the group: "I think one of the important steps, to continue to maintain that collegial relationship with the county, so that we're working towards this in lock-step, rather than feeling like it's an adversarial thing."

# OPINION

## League of Women Voters explain Post Election Reviews

A random selection of precincts are drawn by the canvassing board after every statewide general election for the Post Election Review. For the PER, party-balanced election judges hand-count the ballots from the selected precincts to make sure they match up with the tabulating machine data, working in bipartisan pairs at all times.

All post election reviews are public. The time and date of each county's public meeting to audit the election results are shared on the Minnesota State Secretary of State's website.

In addition to the PER process,

candidates can request a recount of their race. If it is within a certain threshold, it is publicly funded. If not, candidates can request a discretionary recount. The recount process is also open to the public, and is again conducted by election officials in pairs at all times.

What are Cast Vote Records? After the 2020 election, county officials across the state have seen an uptick in requests for cast vote records.

So let's discuss how they can be used and the safeguards put in place to ensure election security while protecting the privacy of

Minnesota voters.

Each cast vote record corresponds to one ballot that was tabulated. Like the ballot, it shows what combination of selections the voter made, for example that they voted for one particular candidate in one race, left a second race blank, and voted for another particular candidate in a third race. Also like the ballot, it is not tied to a specific voter. From the collection of cast vote records, it is possible to answer such questions as how many voters "split their tickets," voting for candidates from multiple parties.

The 2023 Minnesota Legislature

provided clarity on what CVR information cannot be made public such as the order in which votes were cast, the method with which a voter cast a ballot and images of ballots cast.

*This column is provided by the League of Women Voters, based on information from the Minnesota Secretary of State. The League of Women Voters is a non-partisan organization that's goal is empowering voters and defending democracy through voter education and engagement, advocating for democracy, and encouraging civic participation.*