



BOARD OF SUPERVISORS  
AGENDA LETTER

Clerk of the Board of Supervisors  
105 E. Anapamu Street, Suite 407  
Santa Barbara, CA 93101  
(805) 568-2240

Agenda Number:

Submitted on:  
(COB Stamp)

Department Name: Clerk-Recorder-Assessor  
Department No.: 062  
Agenda Date: June 9, 2026  
Placement: Administrative Agenda  
Estimated Time:  
Continued Item: No  
If Yes, date from: <Insert Date>  
Vote Required: Majority

**TO:** Board of Supervisors  
**FROM:** Department Director(s): Joseph E. Holland *Joseph E. Holland*  
Clerk-Recorder, Assessor & Registrar of Voters  
Contact: Christina Valenzuela, Elections Manager  
**SUBJECT:** Request for Waiver of Competition in Purchase of Ballot Sorting System

**County Counsel Concurrence**

As to form: Yes

**Other Concurrence:** Purchasing

As to form: Yes

**Auditor-Controller Concurrence**

As to form: Yes

**Recommended Actions:**

That the Board of Supervisors:

- a) Authorize the County Purchasing Agent to procure the Elevate Vote by Mail Sorter with Automated Signature Verification component from BlueCrest, Inc. without being required to conduct a formal bid process.
- b) Determine this action is exempt from the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) pursuant to Section 13578(b){S}, which are organizational or administrative activities of governments that will not result in direct or indirect physical changes to the environment.

**Summary Text:**

Under County Code section 2-39, the Clerk-Recorder-Assessor, Elections Division, is requesting that the Board authorize the County's Purchasing Agent to purchase a Vote By Mail ballot sorter with automated signature capture from BlueCrest, Inc. as a sole source procurement.

The current Vote By Mail envelope scanner and sorter machine is reaching end of life, and the direct integrations required for high-speed processing and reporting are not currently included. Data must be manually transferred and loaded into the Elections Information Management System, and the proposed replacement would eliminate that. The proposed replacement would also enable the Elections Division to timely meet California Secretary of State's newly mandated deadlines and

reporting requirements. In addition, this would remove physical operation processing bottlenecks and reduce the wait time for tabulating ballots. **Furthermore, grant funding to support this project was recently approved in December 2025 and must be spent by August 31, 2026** (equipment on site, not necessarily installed).

The Elevate solution being acquired utilizes BlueCrest's ReliaVote VBM software. This platform offers several productivity and audit features that are not available on any other competitive system. In particular, the Elevate is unique in its ability to scan and image both sides of an envelope. Use of a back camera, along with proprietary software, provide benefits unavailable on any other VBM sorting systems. Examples include:

- BlueCrest's ReliaVote is the only solution that can automatically process and account for mixed-orientation mail coming from drop boxes or vote centers. Voter preferences and USPS concerns cause higher volumes of non-USPS mail, particularly on election day. This feature would help the county to absorb this higher workload within required timelines.
- The same back side camera can be used for image archiving from both sides of the envelope. This is particularly useful when processing ballots received after election day. Images captured from these items provide an easily accessible image audit for inquiries related to post-election day envelopes.
- BlueCrest's ReliaVote is also unique in its near real-time interface with your current voter registration system. This proven interface ensures accurate processing throughout the early voting period when frequent and timely communications are critical.

### **Discussion:**

This project is a critical infrastructure replacement and upgrade for the existing Vote by Mail ballot envelope scanner and sorter which is end of life. The proposed replacement will replace the current legacy Agilis machine used for this purpose. The legacy machine was designed to handle Vote by Mail volume pre-COVID, which ranged from 20-40% of total ballots cast; presently Vote By Mail ballots accounts for more than 80% total ballots cast. This increase is often a bottleneck to process ballots for tabulation purposes and has had increasing maintenance needs and is reaching its functional end of life regarding software and support for elections purposes.

The proposed BlueCrest Elevate Vote By Mail Sorter is a high-speed mail processing device which meets all upcoming Secretary of State requirements and mandatory deadlines for ballot envelope processing and reporting and, critically, enable timely and efficient processing of Vote by Mail ballots. The BlueCrest Elevate machine would further enable direct integration into our current Election Information Management System for reporting purposes; something that is currently processed manually. Eliminating the manual steps and processing will enhance security. All the election software, DFM Associates Election Information Management System and the BlueCrest Elevate Vote By Mail Scanner and Sorter, are self-hosted. No external communication is required; any systems updates are delivered as completed build and delivered securely by the Secretary of State.

It also meets the California Secretary of State Vote By Mail reporting requirements and will allow the Elections Division to continue processing ballots on supported equipment and software. It also will enable direct integration into our Elections Information Management System for loading data, images, and reporting automatically, replacing the required manual process currently used. In other words, we can integrate this system into our current elections system (not currently possible) and

maintain a supported and secure system. This machine is anticipated to have a service life of at least 10 years.

**Background:**

The County Elections Division (Elections) has used Automated Signature capture software since 2006 for processing incoming Vote by Mail ballots, across multiple vendors. This system allows us to scan returned ballots and automates the signature verification process.

In 2014 an integrated system was purchased that included a ballot sorting system with signature capture. The ballot sorter hardware created greater operating efficiencies by automating the time-consuming manual process of sorting returned vote by mail ballots to sort out ballots without signatures, and ballots that have been challenged.

The current hardware is at the end of its useful life. The proposed BlueCrest Elevate Vote By Mail Sorter project was approved by EITC on 3/25/26 (RITM0043174).

Procurement is the most important aspect of this project; there are a very limited number of vendors in the elections equipment space that have a National Association of State Procurement Officials (NASPO) and like agreements in place.

**Performance Measure:**

N/A

**Contract Renewals:**

The County will need to maintain an annual contract for maintenance and Automated Signature Verification software. This will be included in the Clerk-Recorder-Assessor's annual budget.

**Fiscal and Facilities Impacts:**

Budgeted: Yes (FY 26-27)

**Fiscal Analysis:**

The purchase has been included in the FY 26-27 budget, funded by a release of Committed Funds 9842—Elections Voting equipment.

The not to exceed one-time cost of the Elevate VBM Sorter is \$299,975. On-going annual hardware and software maintenance costs of this system will be \$51,900.

The one-time system costs are eligible for reimbursement through the Secretary of State's Voting System Replacement Grant (Agreement 18G30142); purchase must be complete by August 31, 2026. On-going system support costs will be funded within the existing Elections operating budget.

**Staffing Impacts:**

N/A

**Special Instructions:**

Clerk of the Board: Please send a copy of the minute order to:

- 1) Vanessa Graeff, Fiscal Manager, Clerk-Recorder-Assessor at [vgraeff@countyofsb.org](mailto:vgraeff@countyofsb.org)
- 2) Phung Loman, Chief Procurement Officer, General Services at [ploman@countyofsb.org](mailto:ploman@countyofsb.org)

**Attachments:**

**Attachment A** – Elevate VBM Sorter Proposal

**Contact Information:**

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Elections Manager  
[cvalenzuela@countyofsb.org](mailto:cvalenzuela@countyofsb.org)