Elections

Our first presidential primary in two decades, followed by two high-profile elections during a global health pandemic, made 2020 an election year like none other. Throughout 2020, our communications team worked tirelessly to promote our pandemic-proof voting model, fight voter misinformation driven by a false national narrative, and solidify our position as a leader in elections administration and security. We fielded hundreds of media inquiries from local, national and international news outlets during the 2020 general election.

Holding a general election during a global health crisis presented several challenges. But due to our election model, and our own innovations, we executed a state primary election in which 99% of mail ballots were returned via mail or drop box with only 1% of voters appearing in-person to vote.

The subsequent 2020 general election saw the second highest turnout (86%) with 94% of all ballots returned via mail and drop box. And on Election Day, since the vast majority of ballots were already returned, voters who did vote in-person experienced an average wait time of just 59 seconds.

This success can be credited to our commitment to voter accessibility, including 38 ballot drop boxes throughout Denver (nine of which added during Clerk Lopez’s tenure). We employed 1,180 election judges at our central ballot processing center and at 36 voting locations. For the first time, we operated vote centers at the Denver County Jail and Downtown Detention Center and, through partnership with Denver Public Schools, established seven school-based vote centers.

We also implemented a new curbside ballot pick-up program for the June State Primary and November General elections, allowing voters to retrieve ballots with minimal physical contact.

In 2020, we fully staffed our outreach and engagement team, the first of its kind in the state, tasked with strategic outreach throughout Denver’s neighborhoods to drive voter participation and education. Despite the pandemic, our team hosted more than 80 virtual and in-person events to grow our reach, build engagement, and inform residents across Denver, regardless of language, zip code or socioeconomic status.

With all eyes on Denver’s election model, we innovated to increase transparency into the voting process. In April, we unveiled a new and improved version of BallotTRACE, our award-winning ballot tracking platform to better inform voters of the status on their registration and ballot. During the November general election, we allowed the public a birds-eye view into our ballot processing rooms via a 24/7 live feed. Voters could also utilize our new, interactive vote center wait time dashboard.

City Clerk

Unprecedented national interest in election security and transparency meant that in 2020, our office handled more than twice as many Colorado Open Records Act (CORA) requests as in 2019. In fact, 2020 saw more CORA requests than 2018 and 2019 combined.

Following the determination that Denver’s laws governing municipal elections can potentially hinder military and overseas voters’ ability to get their ballots in a timely manner between municipal and runoff elections, the office convened a Charter Review Committee at the direction of Clerk López. Starting in summer of 2020, the committee was tasked with reviewing the city’s charter and making recommendations for modernizing the city’s antiquated election laws in order to maintain necessary voter access and participation.

To strengthen a culture of process improvement and transparency, the City Clerk team began to overhaul the way we administer campaign and financial disclosures. We have formalized a partnership with Maplight, a civic nonprofit technology firm, to develop a custom application to administer Denver’s campaign finance regulations. This solution will provide long-overdue, modern, and in-depth search functions for the public and implementation of the Denver Fair Elections Fund.
From the Clerk

This past year was a challenging one for workplaces, governments, and workers worldwide, and our office was no exception. As if we didn’t already have our work cut out for us, the pandemic created the most difficult of circumstances in which to operate — from severe budget impacts and occupancy restrictions to finding enough personal protective equipment and managing the constant stress of uncertainty. Despite it all, we went to work and marched into the eye of the storm to execute our civil duties and continue operations with new ways to serve the residents of Denver.

From new mail and drop box services to virtual marriage licensing and recording appointments, our entire team adapted quickly to the ever-changing realities of life during COVID-19. With three major elections in a single year, we ensured that our democracy was safe, secure, transparent and accessible to all residents from our pandemic-proof voting model. Our voter registration surpassed 600,000 for the first time in Denver’s history, and with the eyes of the state and nation upon us, our dedicated office conducted an election that stood up to not only the pandemic, but to the national deluge of disinformation and the stress of heightened global scrutiny.

The pandemic proved that we can innovate under pressure, but our mission has always been to deliver efficient, modern, and secure services to Denver residents. The lessons learned in 2020 will pave the way as we move from response and resilience toward growth and healing in 2021.

Thank you, Denver, for having faith in us as essential workers, your support keeps us going.

Public Trustee

The Public Trustee saw a 62% increase in volume of Releases of Deeds of Trust, with more than 58,978 executed in 2020. The increase in releases (the most in any year going back to 2004) drove revenue for our office and helped us stay on budget. The moratorium on foreclosures of federally-backed mortgage products prohibited lenders from initiating foreclosures during the pandemic. As a result, the Public Trustee handled only 223 foreclosures in 2020, compared to 581 in 2019. However, we anticipate that we may see an influx of foreclosures as these restrictions are lifted in 2021.

In preparation, Clerk López has assembled other city agencies and community partners to hold nine virtual town halls aimed at engaging and equipping Denver residents with the information necessary to navigate though financial distress and a complex and often intimidating foreclosure process.

Our office disbursed more than $1 million back to homeowners whose foreclosed homes sold at auction. We also transferred $418,609 of unclaimed excess funds to the Great Colorado Payback Program last year.

Budget and Revenue

The Office of the Clerk and Recorder generated $2.3 million in 2020, 26% more revenue than 2019. This was generated mainly through serving our customers seamlessly through the pandemic and by receiving reimbursements from the State and other entities for expenses incurred and paid out throughout the year. After conducting three elections in 2020, the office incurred greater expenses than usual. The increased expenses were partially reimbursed by these other entities.

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<tr>
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<th>2018</th>
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Recording and Marriages

When the State issued public health orders restricting in-person office capacity, our office designed and implemented a new remote services model in just four days. Despite a global pandemic, we continued to provide our vital services to the public, which were primarily offered in-person prior to COVID-19.

In the first half of 2020, our office processed hundreds of marriage license applications via mail and our new, dedicated drop box. We also created work-at-home strategies to continue to process eRecordings and prevent backlogs. We processed 5,582 marriage licenses in 2020, and recorded 215,907 documents.

In July, we pivoted back to in-person services as the city entered its “Safer—at-Home” phase. We implemented strict sanitation practices, mandated personal protective equipment and distancing requirements, and rolled out a flexible and responsive appointment calendar. As COVID-19 positivity rates and risk changed throughout the year, we responded to keep our staff and residents safe. Dedicated to meeting the needs of our residents, we designed, tested and piloted a system for virtual appointments to verify marriage and civil union licenses.

Our contact-free innovations allowed us to provide excellent service to residents while preserving the health and safety of our staff. Despite learning curves, record volume, and new processes, we experienced no backlogs in recording processes in 2020. These innovations generated a much needed $2.3 million influx to the city’s hurting general fund.