A year to innovate, set records, and defend democracy.

In November 2016, Colorado voters passed Propositions 107 and 108, restoring the presidential primary and allowing unaffiliated voters to choose candidates in all primaries, rather than relying on members of party caucuses to decide. Nearly four years later, in March 2020, the state held its first presidential primary election in two decades. This meant our Denver Elections Division administered three elections throughout the year and was tasked with mitigating potential issues arising from an open primary in a mail ballot model. Unaffiliated voters received both Democratic and Republican ballots but could only return one in the primary.

Following the March Presidential Primary, the division quickly pivoted to preparations for the June State Primary. At the same time, an unprecedented need for personal protective equipment, office modifications and remote work plans surfaced. The mail ballot model proved itself once again, and with the option to vote from the safety of home, more than 50 percent of voters turned out—a state primary record—and 99 percent of Denverites chose to return their ballots by mail or drop box.

With a successful state primary in the rearview, attention shifted to the November General Election. Tensions were high as misinformation spread quickly across social and traditional media. These attacks were attempts to sow public distrust of proven voting models, causing nationwide controversy about voting by mail. The Clerk and Recorder’s team of communication experts combatted these efforts with a variety of trustworthy information in the form of educational ballot processing videos, infographics, tours and constant social media monitoring with strategic response plans. The office also piloted a 24/7 livestream of its ballot processing rooms, available to anyone with internet access.

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 has kept us going in this impactful and momentous year.

In Solidarity,

[Signature]

Hon. Paul D. López
Our award-winning BallotTRACE communications platform was revamped in April 2020, with more robust search functions and increased usability and accessibility to get voters information on their ballots’ whereabouts.

Curbside ballot pick-up: A convenient and safe alternative

New in 2020, voters who hadn’t received their ballot or needed a replacement could request one online or by phone. Voters then scheduled a pick-up at a vote center drive-through. Ballots were ready in as quickly as an hour, and voters were notified via email or phone when their request was processed. This service greatly reduced the need for Denverites to enter vote centers and was a first-of-its-kind innovation.

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PANDEMIC-PROOFING THE ELECTION - The Elections Operations team dedicated countless hours in 2020 to ensure the health of staff, election judges and voters. This included maintaining a large supply of personal protective equipment and sanitization materials as well as modifying office spaces. Over 400 plexiglass shields were designed and installed.
600+ individuals reached via public meetings and presentations
Eight meetings, conducted virtually, were open to the public from August 2020 to February 2021
Several presentations were made to various community groups throughout January and February.

65,021 impressions on social media
Brand outreach publicized townhalls, meetups, the public comment period, and the survey.

358 public comments regarding voting methods collected
The Office of the Clerk and Recorder initiated the creation of an outreach and engagement plan in August 2020 with the goal of soliciting informed opinions on the options presented to the Charter Review Committee.

What else is on the horizon?
Denver’s municipal election laws were found to be outdated, putting at risk military and overseas voters’ ability to get their ballots in a timely manner between municipal and runoff elections. As a result, our office convened a Charter Review Committee at the direction of Clerk López. Starting in the summer of 2020, the committee was tasked with reviewing the city’s governing documents concerning elections and making recommendations for modernizing its antiquated election laws. These efforts are expected to save taxpayer money and increase voter participation.

99% of voters in the state primary and 84% in the general chose to vote via mail, drop box, or curbside ballot drop-off.

959 respondents to the online Charter Review survey
Offered in both English and Spanish, the survey launched in February 2021 and collected answers to a variety of questions for Committee review.

500,000 voter registrations surpassed
For the first time ever, voter registrations surged, youth engagement peaked, neighborhoods of concern and care were better served as promised, and nearly 86 percent of Denver voters made their voices heard.

1,180 election judges were employed for ballot processing and vote center operations
With more drop boxes and voting locations than ever, high levels of in-person engagement and digital outreach, and expanded access in areas like Montbello, Westwood, West Colfax and Elyria-Swansea, the results were profound:

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84% of voters learned about the 2020 election through social media.
80,000 daily impressions on social media.

A record 1,480 election judges
were employed for ballot processing and vote center operations.

BRAND NEW WAIT TIME DASHBOARD
helped voters choose where to cast a ballot in person.
Average wait time for the last day to vote (general election): 59 seconds!

CONFINED VOTING: 136 BALLOTS WERE CAST IN PERSON
“The genuine appreciation of so many people was overwhelming. Many told us this was their first time voting and they had no idea they had the right the vote. We clapped and cheered for every ballot that was dropped into a ballot box, and the smiles, even through masks, were unmistakable.”
Carrie, Denver Sheriff Department.

Clerk López invested more money into Denver’s mail ballot postage with an upgrade to a variety of questions for Committee review.
A year to redefine transparency and reconnect with our past.

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, and more than 20 in November alone.

To strengthen a culture of process improvement and transparency, the City Clerk team began to overhaul the way the office administers campaign and financial disclosures. This included the hire of full-time campaign finance staff and the formalization of a partnership with Maplight, a civic nonprofit technology firm, to develop a custom application to administer Denver’s campaign finance regulations. Launching in the fall of 2021, this solution will provide much needed in-depth search functions for the public and assist in the implementation of the Fair Elections Fund for candidates.

Though innovation is highly valued in the Office of the Clerk and Recorder, we can’t discuss Denver’s future without looking at its past. The City Clerk team plays a crucial part in preserving our city’s history, with more than 11 million records available online, real estate records now searchable back to 1950, and marriage records searchable back to 1903. Among the records kept lie precious gems detailing notable figures and events as they relate to our beloved city.

In response to an ever-evolving Denver, our communications team launched a campaign of weekly throwback posts on Facebook and Twitter. Each post uses records from our archive, going as far back as the city’s founding in 1859 to tell stories of the city’s history. In 2020, this series garnered more than 39,000 impressions from our social media audience.

A year to help Denverites get through troubling times.

The pandemic touched more than Denver’s elections. Following a downward shift in the economy, many homeowners feared that a loss in income would lead to a loss of housing. The 2020 moratorium on foreclosures of federally backed mortgage products prohibited lenders from initiating foreclosures during the pandemic. Meanwhile, our Public Trustee office went straight to work equipping residents with information needed to stay in their homes or remain afloat in turbulent times.

The Office of the Clerk and Recorder saw only 223 foreclosure starts in 2020, far less than the 581 foreclosures in 2019. However, an influx of foreclosures is anticipated after the moratorium is lifted. By hosting multilingual information sessions and town halls throughout 2021 with partners in the city’s financial and housing divisions, our office is empowering Denverites with knowledge in preparation of what’s to come.

Releases of Deeds of Trust soared in 2020 by 62 percent more than the previous year, likely driven by low interest rates, high home values, and COVID-19. For some, it was worth it to refinance due to interest rates alone, but for others—and particularly those whose jobs were lost due to the pandemic—the refinancing of homes to withdraw equity may have driven the increase in releases.

Finally, our Public Trustee 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.

The increase in releases drove revenue for the office and helped keep the city afloat in the midst of financial challenges caused by the pandemic.

My jaw dropped when I learned that some of Denver’s historic records have been literally under old pipes and in a parking garage. We now have a strategic plan in place to prioritize the audit recommendations, some of which will require additional funding from the general fund for 2022.” – Clerk López
A year to commit to love against all odds.

Prior to the pandemic, the Recording department dropped wait and transaction times considerably by instituting a variety of efficiencies. Following stay at home orders, in-person operations ceased, and marriage licenses were processed via mail and drop box. However, the office continued to be efficient during the transition to its remote service delivery model and eventual switch back to limited, in-person operations.

The office implemented strict sanitation practices, personal protective equipment use and social distancing requirements. Physical modifications were made to the office environment to ensure the health and safety of staff and residents. And in addition to creating a flexible and responsive appointment calendar, we designed, tested and piloted a system for virtual appointments to verify identification, collect payment, and issue marriage and civil union licenses. In spite of 2020’s obstacles, the office issued 5,582 marriage and civil union licenses and recorded 215,903 documents—the most ever in a single year. With safety and efficiency at front of mind, eRecordings rose by 18 percent over the previous year.

Despite learning curves, record volume, and the retirement of our long-time Recording Manager, we experienced no backlogs in recording processes in 2020. These innovations also generated a much-needed $2.3 million infusion into the city’s general fund. In 2020, the Office of the Clerk and Recorder served the whole of Denver through countless innovations, proactive outreach, the administration of three elections, and the amplification of trusted information to keep our community informed.

Generating $2.3 million for the city, the office actually increased its revenue by 26 percent during a time of economic uncertainty. This achievement stemmed mostly from serving customers seamlessly through the pandemic, supplemented by reimbursements from the state and other entities for expenses incurred and paid out throughout the year. The budget increase for 2020 was largely due to the higher number of elections.

As we continue into 2021, we’re diligent in staying focused on our mission: “To provide customer friendly processes that are efficient and transparent, records that are easy to access, and elections that are accurate, secure and convenient for voters.” At a time when voter suppression laws are being introduced and passed in many state legislatures, we’re on the front lines of the fight to expand voting rights and access for Coloradans regardless of ZIP Code, ability or language spoken. And as always, we’re deeply committed to the people of our great city whom we serve in so many ways, whether it’s about a home, marriage, or history. Thank you, Denver, for the remarkable year amid a new normal.