

Board of Elections Approves Hand-Count Audit and BVI Observers for Primary; Mismatch Between Machine and Manual Tallies Will Trigger Full Recount

Selected primary ballots will be hand counted, rerun through an unused machine and livestreamed as BVI officials observe; any difference among the original machine tally, manual count and second tabulation will trigger a full recount within 10 days.

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The V.I. Board of Elections has approved a new audit procedure requiring selected ballots from early voting and election day to be counted entirely by hand, reprocessed through a second voting machine and compared with the original tabulation.

The audit must occur no later than five days after the upcoming primary election, placing the deadline on August 6. Any variance among the original machine count, the manual tally and the secondary machine tabulation will trigger a full recount of the election within 10 days.

The entire audit will be livestreamed to provide public access and accountability.

Board members approved the new procedure Tuesday by an 8-1 vote. They also agreed to formalize the policy before the November elections and use it for future election audits.

Selected Ballots Will Receive Full Hand Count

Under the new process, board members who are not seeking re-election will randomly select one voting machine from each district that was used during early voting.

They will also choose one machine from each district used on election day.

Audit teams will open the selected ballot containers, count the physical ballots and conduct a full manual tally of every contest appearing on each ballot.

The same ballots will then be fed into a second voting machine that was not used during the election. That process will provide an independent machine count for comparison with both the original results and the manual tally.

Previous election audits focused primarily on procedural safeguards.

Those reviews included verifying chain-of-custody seals, examining poll books, confirming the total number of paper ballots and, in some cases, rerunning ballots through election machines up to 30 days after an election.

Board member Cleopatra Peter argued that those steps did not directly verify the accuracy of the vote totals produced by tabulators.

“procedural audits...do not determine whether the tabulators counted the votes correctly,” noted board member Cleopatra Peter.

She proposed direct manual verification as a stronger method of confirming the results.

Any Variance Will Require Full Recount

Board member Barbara LaRonde proposed that the primary audit be conducted within five days of election day.

She also recommended that any variance between the original machine tally, the hand count and the second machine tabulation automatically require a complete recount.

That recount would have to occur within 10 days.

The board adopted both recommendations.

BVI Election Officials to Observe Primary

Members also discussed the presence of election officials from the British Virgin Islands during Saturday’s primary.

The delegation will include BVI Supervisor of Elections Carlene Herbert and Deputy Supervisor Kenrico Wheatley Jr.

The officials will shadow local election operations and observe the territory's administration of the primary and use of voting-tabulator technology.

Board Chairman Raymond Williams said the BVI representatives will not handle ballots, equipment or any other part of the voting process.

They will also have no role in the subsequent audit and will receive no access beyond what is available to members of the general public.

Mr. Williams said the visit is strictly educational and observational.

Before ending Tuesday's meeting, board members agreed to place the newly adopted procedures into a formal written policy before the November elections and apply them to future audits.