



Secretary of State

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Ballot Drop Boxes in All Communities

Clearinghouse Elections Notice

Issue #17-01

May 19, 2017

The Legislature amended RCW 29A.40.160 relating to voting centers and ballot drop boxes. We've worked with the Attorney General's Office and Code Reviser's Office to interpret the amendment in Substitute Senate Bill 5472 (underlined).¹

RCW 29A.40.160(15) states, "For each primary, special election, and general election, the county auditor may provide election services at locations in addition to the voting center. The county auditor has discretion to establish which services will be provided at the additional locations, and which days and hours the locations will be open except that the county auditor must establish a minimum of one ballot drop box per fifteen thousand registered voters in the county and a minimum of one ballot drop box in each city, town, and census-designated place in the county with a post office."

The determination is there must be a ballot box in each city, a ballot box in each town, and a ballot box in each Census Designated Place (CDP) with a post office. Additionally, the County Auditor must provide a minimum of one ballot drop box per fifteen thousand active registered voters.

All incorporated cities and towns need a drop box. A CDP with no post office does not need a drop box.

How do I identify a city or town?

Your county's election management system identifies cities and towns. They're also listed on the websites of the Association of Washington Cities (AWC) and Municipal Research Services Center (MRSC).²

If an area is not incorporated, it does not need a drop box unless it (a) is officially designated as a CDP **and** (b) contains a post office.

¹ [SB 5472](#).

² [AWC website](#), [MRSC profiles](#).

How do I identify a CDP?

A CDP is a community that is town-like, even though it's not legally a city or town. It's an area officially designated for statistical purposes by the US Census Bureau and your county planning department. CDPs may include residential settlements, rural commercial centers, and urbanized areas that are not part of a city.

Identifying CDPs in your county will be an important step. Try using the Census Bureau's mapping tool.³ Then, determine if the CDP has a post office.

How do I identify an official post office?

For the purpose of this legislation, private mailing stations and "Approved Postal Providers" are not considered post offices. Check the official list of post office locations on the USPS website.⁴

How do I determine if I've met the new standard?

SSB 5472 involves two thresholds:

1. One drop box in each city, town, and CDP with a post office, **and**
2. At least one box per 15,000 active registered voters in your county.

Here's how to begin:

- Identify cities, towns, and CDPs with a post office.
- Add together the number of boxes you currently have installed and any more boxes needed to serve cities, towns, and CDPs. This is the **number installed** (or to be installed).
- Divide the total number of active registered voters in your county by 15,000.
 - Use the whole number, ignoring anything after the decimal point. This is the number of required boxes to meet the minimum **numerical standard**.
- If the required number of boxes is equal to or less than the number installed (or to be installed), your county will have met the requirement just by adding the boxes for your cities, towns, and CDPs.
- If not, you will need to **add** boxes to meet the minimum numerical standard. These additional boxes may be placed anywhere in your county.

For example:

- Your county has 2 boxes, but it must add 8 boxes to serve cities, towns and CDPs for a total of 10 boxes installed.
- Your county has 100,000 active registered voters. Divide 100,000 by 15,000, for a result of 6.66. Ignore the numbers to the right of the decimal point, determining 6 as the minimum numerical standard.

³ Go to the Census Bureau's [mapping tool](#) and select the checkbox for "Places and County Subdivisions." Zoom in to Washington.

⁴ Change the USPS [drop down menu](#) from "Post Offices and Approved Postal Providers" to "Post Offices," then add a zip code to view post offices within twenty miles. Increase the number of miles to include more area.

- Because 10 is more than 6, the number of boxes installed (or to be installed) is in compliance with the minimum numerical standard.

[WAC 434-250-320](#) “Locations to deposit ballots” is still in effect. Each county must have at least two deposit sites at different geographic locations.

Should we recheck drop boxes before Certification Day?

Yes, [WAC 434-261-140](#) “Precertification procedures” requires the County Auditor’s Office to exercise due diligence to confirm all returned ballots have been received, processed, and reconciled. The County Auditor should exercise due diligence after Election Day by **rechecking** all drop boxes and ballot storage containers to verify they have been emptied before certification.

If you have questions regarding this legislation, please contact the Certification and Training Program at ctsupport@sos.wa.gov or (360) 902-4180.