



# Board of Election Commissioners Go Digital to Protect Petition Integrity

The Oneida County Board of Elections (BOE) oversees elections in 45 villages and towns and two cities with a total of 13 districts plus 23 county districts to oversee. The front counter becomes a busy place during the run up to election season, as designating petitions flow in as a cascade of messy paper forms that may be battered from traveling porch-to-porch on multiple clipboards over a series of days.

Traditionally, post-submission processing within a BOE necessitated the movement of petitions from physical location to physical location as each process step advanced through the New York State compliance review. Even at the best-run BOE, there was always the possibility that pages could go astray or shuffle from one petition to another or that a petition could disappear under a pile of folders for a day or two, resulting in out-of-compliance processing.

## Electronic Management of Petition Documents Comes of Age

That's no longer the case at the Oneida County BOE. When a petition is submitted, it is logged, scanned and vaulted in the BOE safe in a process that can take five minutes or less. In the event of a challenge, the BOE can retrieve the paper original for the court's review with complete confidence in its integrity, as it has been maintained "as-submitted" under lock and key. Once the petition has been scanned, the digital images route through an electronic processing workflow that supports bipartisan review.

Many mandatory steps are even automated; for example, the system will automatically generate letters with relevant information, such as election race, designated candidate and contact person filled in. The system assures that today's submissions are acted upon today, and that certifications and non-compliance notifications are posted on time. This makes for a smooth-running operation in which it's virtually impossible to mislay a petition, because a few mouse clicks are all it takes to deliver it to a staffer's PC browser window.

## An "Ah-hah" Moment and an Opportunity Not To Be Missed

The genesis of the Oneida BOE's solution began with Anne Hartman, Director of Central Services for the County. Anne's department is responsible for Mail Room, Print Shop and Information Technology services, which includes department-specific software programming. This means she's familiar with how all of the County's various departments operate.

In 2014, the County District Attorney saw a demonstration of a case files management solution based on Laserfiche software. He pulled Anne in for a consultation that eventually resulted in a new implementation. Meanwhile, a metaphorical light bulb went on in her head based on what she learned during the consideration and deployment process.

What came to mind was how the features and benefits of the Laserfiche system could apply to the BOE. "First off," she recalled, "the system could store document images in a Department-of-Defense-certified secure format. I knew how essential it is to the Board's mission that a petition to run for office remain free of tampering." Her idea was to handle the original document once – from counter to scanning to lock-up – and enable the BOE to work on unalterable images of the petitions for the actual processing.

Laserfiche was a natural fit to enable this strategy. Its

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document management capability provided a ready way to index, store and archive TIFF images of the petition pages. Its retrieval capability meant that a given petition could quickly be searched and served back to an employee's desktop. And Laserfiche's workflow capability enables efficient processing and use of automation where appropriate. The routing rules built into the system can even assure bipartisan review (with an audit trail), which is at the heart of maintaining a transparent election process.

### Building on Bipartisan Security

Co-commissioners Rose Grimaldi (Republican) and Russell Steward (Democrat) were in the second year of their 2013/2014 terms when they learned of the Laserfiche opportunity. "When we sat down with Anne Hartman and ICC Community Development Solutions and talked about what the system could do for our office, we were agreeable to trying it," said Grimaldi. "Our shared goal as Co-Commissioners was to preserve the integrity of the election process."

The extremely short chain of custody from submission to scanning to storage offered an ideal solution. "Having petitions scanned in and immediately locked up in filing cabinets in the Election Management System (EMS) room accomplished what we wanted," Grimaldi pointed out. She added, "There are two locks on the door. The Republican Commissioner holds one key, while the Democratic Commissioner holds the other. No one can get into that room without both Commissioners being present."

### Reducing Stress and Enhancing Service

The Commissioners also appreciated the operational benefits that come with electronic document management. "Once the staff was trained and the process was up and running it seemed to work well," said Grimaldi. "The system has allowed our office to manage the petition process much better and it helped alleviate the stress that quick turnarounds and deadlines put on the employees." As an example of this, Grimaldi pointed out, "The system facilitates the creation of a letter to the candidate notifying them that their petitions have been filed and advising them of what other documents need to be filed with our office." Employees can accomplish their tasks with less keyboard entry and less opportunity for clerical error.

Grimaldi said, "2015 is a big year for the Oneida County Board of Elections and we are looking forward to working with ICC Community Development Solutions to tweak and utilize the system to the best of our ability to ensure the integrity of the election process in Oneida County."

### ICC Community Development Solutions

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