



CASE STUDY

Commissioners Court Buy-In: A Step-by-Step Purchasing Approach



Laura Watkins, Elections Administrator, Palo Pinto County, Texas

When it came time for Palo Pinto County, Texas to replace its aging voting system, Elections Administrator Laura Watkins laid out a clear path for an informed choice.

There was no question – Palo Pinto County’s aging election system needed to be replaced before 2018’s November election. Elections Administrator Laura Watkins was new to the North Texas county position, but she moved quickly to persuade the Commissioners Court to authorize a purchase.

Challenge

Making a successful case for a new voting system purchase to the budget-minded Judge and Commissioners.

Action

Watkins spearheaded a thoughtful, efficient approach to help Palo Pinto County make the best decision for its budget, voters and workers. She kept the Commissioners Court informed at every step.

Result

By the time Watkins presented a proposal to the Commissioners Court in May, each elected official had been presented with the costs and options to make an informed decision. The purchase was approved 5-0 within five minutes.

STEPS TO GAINING BUY-IN:

1. **Gathering information**
2. **Meeting one-on-one**
3. **Showing actual costs**
4. **Relying on a solid partner**

Planning the work.

Working the plan.

When Watkins began her search for the right election system, she knew that buy-in from the Commissioners Court, voters and election staff was crucial. "Planning and communication are key," she emphasized. To gain support for the initiative, she applied her 16 years of election experience and a practical decision-making approach sourced in the article Planning your Next Voting System Purchase. [<https://www.hartintercivic.com/wp-content/uploads/PlanningYourNextVotingSystemPurchase.pdf>]

1. Questions. Questions. Questions.

Watkins started by quizzing election workers about their needs. Simplicity and security led the list. Plus, they were adamant that voters wanted a private system that does not require election workers standing nearby to punch in codes or select a ballot.

As the list of needs and wants grew, Watkins asked the County's existing vendor and Hart to prepare two days of demonstrations. She then invited the County Judge, Commissioners, ballot board members, party chairs, election workers and others to test drive both systems. As Watkins solicited input and shared feedback among the groups, it quickly became clear that Hart's Verity Voting system was the best option for Palo Pinto County.

2. One-on-One Communication

To make sure the Commissioners Court and others were completely comfortable with Verity, Watkins arranged with Hart to leave Verity units set up in her office for one week following demonstrations. This gave her the chance to talk one-on-one with each stakeholder, address any concerns and allow everyone more hands-on time with the system. She met individually with the Judge and each Commissioner and made sure vendor representatives were available to answer their questions.

The Commissioners Court and other decision-makers were sold on Verity. But would the budget work?

"Planning and communication are key."

3. Showing Actual Costs

Watkins was not discouraged by the mid-year budget she had inherited. She knew that ultimately, the long-term costs of a new system outweigh an initial price tag, so she showed the Judge and Commissioners projected costs and savings in black and white.

Watkins and her staff prepared a 10-year Total Cost of Operation spreadsheet comparing their existing vendor's system to Hart's Verity Voting system and accounting for recurring fees such as ballot processing, hardware maintenance, warranties and licensing. The bottom line showed a dramatic difference that the Commissioners Court appreciated.

She also met with the County Auditor, who helped determine available funds that could be applied to the purchase, lining up a plan to respond to anticipated questions from the Judge and Commissioners.

Finally, Hart worked with Watkins to arrive at a purchase price that worked for the County.

4. Relying on a solid partner

Having worked with Hart in another county previously, Watkins trusts that the company is the best partner for Palo Pinto County. Hart's approach to customer support earned the confidence of the Commissioners Court as well.

"Hart's reputation for customer service can't be beat," Watkins said. "Our Hart representative is outstanding, but you can go into any room of Elections Administrators or County Clerks and hear the same thing about Hart's customer service."

A 5-0 Vote in 5 Minutes

Watkins' diligent approach paid off for Palo Pinto County:

"It was the longest five minutes of my life, but when it was over, I knew that our hard work and preparation had been worth it. With Verity, we have a system that will serve our county well into the future."

Additional Resources
Election Insights
hartintercivic.com/electioninsights

For Hart InterCivic information
or a Verity Voting system
demonstration call us at
888.216.4278 or email
sales@hartic.com

www.hartintercivic.com