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For immediate release

Rice County's new assistive voting devices ready for township elections

New Minnesota-made assistive marking devices will be in place by the time Rice County's rural residents head to the polls, Tuesday, March 8.

The federal government requires devices that meet Americans with Disabilities Act requirements – including the OmniBallot tablets purchased by Rice County – to be located in polling places with more than 500 registered voters during township elections, and all polling places during state and federal elections. In Rice County, Morristown, Richland and Wheeling townships have fewer than 500 registered voters.

While ADA accessible, the devices are available to any voter making a request. Voters simply place their paper ballot into the attached printer and make their selection(s) on the tablet. Once the voter reviews their ballot and selects "Accept" on the device's screen, the printer marks the ballot, which is then ready to go into the ballot counter.



New assistive voting devices will first be used in Rice County during the March township elections. The technology meets ADA requirements, but can be used by any voter who chooses. (Photo courtesy of SeaChange Print Innovations.)

The devices will be set up to ensure privacy when voting and placed on tables that allow wheelchairs to slide underneath them. They are hardened tables that do not access the internet and do not calculate vote totals.

The tablets allow voters to:

- Zoom in or out, making text larger or smaller
- Use headphones to listen to voting instructions and lists of candidates for each office on the ballot
- Adjust the speed at which the speaker is talking
- Select a white screen with black lettering or a white screen with black lettering
- Use Braille to aid them in making their selections

The system ensures that the voter doesn't choose more candidates per race than permitted, that the ballot is legible, and in primary races, that they vote only within their selected party. Voters can use the keypad or touch screen to add write-in candidates.

The 33 machines, will replace devices purchased in 2006 that are years beyond their lifespan and are about a third the weight of their predecessors, making them much easier to transport. The cost for the new devices is \$152,328. To help defray costs, the county has applied for \$76,164 in federal grant money. It expects to submit a second request, this time to the U.S. Election Assistance Commission, for another \$34,983.

The machines will be available for voters to test weekdays between 8 a.m.-4:30 p.m. from Tuesday, Jan. 25 to Monday, March 7 at the Rice County Government Services Building, 320 Third St., Faribault. Rice County offices are closed Monday, Feb. 21 for Presidents Day.

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