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## Atlantic County seeking new voting machines

### Commissioners to consider \$3.2 million bond

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Staff Writer

Atlantic County Commissioners are expected to introduce a \$3.2 million bond ordinance at their meeting Tuesday to buy new

voting equipment.

Superintendent of Elections Maureen Bugdon said the bonding would enable the county to replace all of its voting machines 20 years or older with newer, touch-

screen computerized machines that also create a paper trail.

"Even though the Advantage machines have served this county so well, it really is time for them to go," Bugdon said of the machines the county has been using. "They are starting to show indications of

wear and tear beyond what is appropriate."

Replacement parts for the old machines are getting more and more difficult to find, she said.

The total cost would be \$3.38

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are to pay \$255 annually for each unit without a kitchen and \$413 annually for each unit with a kitchen. The annual per-room rate for hospitals, nursing homes and other medical facilities will also be \$255. Qualifying seniors will receive a discount, seeing their bill fixed at \$450 per year.

The rate increases are the first since 2010. City officials have said prior city governments were

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### Bonding

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million, which would be paid for by a \$161,000 down payment and \$3.22 million in bonds.

The funding would buy approximately 325 voting machines to replace all current machines, including some extras to be used for training and for replacement of machines that have an issue at the polling site, Bugdon said.

The new machines will be purchased from Election Systems & Services of Omaha, Nebraska, and are the same ES&S machines used

by the county for early voting this year and last, Bugdon said.

The county already has a full fleet of ES&S electronic poll books, she said.

"The beauty in this at this time, is ... we will have a full fleet in 2023, which will give poll workers and election officials a full year to get used to and train on, so we are not going into the presidential election (in 2024) as novices," Bugdon said. "That's when we have the big turnout and there may be lines. It gives us the best takeoff to have a successful presidential election."

Any new voting machines pur-

chased in the state must have a verified paper trail auditing component, as these do, Bugdon said.

The old machines, which are direct recording electronic machines (DREs) had to be programmed digitally and did not have a paper trail, she said, while the new machines are like voting on large iPads or tablets.

The new machines also have contrast capacity and larger font capacity, to help those who are visually impaired, Bugdon said. And there is an audio component as well for those who are fully blind or want that assistance.

"It permits a completely in-

dependent vote for the first time for some of Atlantic County's residents," Bugdon said of fully blind voters who have had to rely on another person's help in the voting booth. "It's sensational. I'm super proud of that."

Currently the county deals with two different machine vendors, but after the purchase will only deal with one vendor. That will simplify the process for her office in setting up the equipment and overseeing it, and will help the other two election offices as well, she said.

"It helps the clerk's office on the results end, and the Board of

Elections with training (of poll workers)," Bugdon said. "The three elections offices are in unity on this."

In August 2021 the Atlantic County Board of Commissioners approved two resolutions to spend about \$2 million on 74 new ES&S voting machines and about \$1 million on 400 electronic poll books.

ES&S also provides to the county the scanning equipment for counting paper ballots.

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