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By ROBERT PIERCE

- Leader & Times

The Seward County Clerk's office will soon be getting some new election equipment.

Tuesday, county commissioners approved the encumbrance of around \$9,300 from the department's 2013 election funds to purchase eight new Poll Pads from Knowink, a St. Louis-based vendor specializing in election equipment.

The price tag for the new Poll Pads includes delivery, set up, training and software licensing. Elections deputy Crystal Clemens said the purchase was a necessary one after the clerk's office previous poll equipment ran into some problems.

“In 2007, Seward County was one of the first counties that started using electronic poll books,” she said. “We utilized the Express Poll 5000. When we got the Express Poll 5000, what made them stand out to us is that we were able to program the card in the poll book when you go vote. We stick the cards in, and they work with our machines.”

Clemens said, unfortunately, over time, programming issues arose, and poll books could no longer be programmed in house.

“Now, we have to pay the vendor,” she said. “We’ve had issues going back and forth with the vendor on the programming. We’re starting to have issues with the hardware as well.”

Clemens noted one such set of problems that arose recently.

“It was the 2012 presidential election,” she said. “I don’t know if any of you were out there after 5 o’clock and seeing the lines we had out the door.”

Clemens said she and county clerk Stacia Long were using iPads to help voters get through lines faster by helping to check registrations.

This, she said, eliminated people waiting in line for as much as half an hour, only to be told they needed to go to another line.

“It makes a big difference,” she said.

Clemens said the clerk’s office recently got a visit from a representative with Knowink, and she and other local election officials thought this would be a good opportunity for the department to look at updating the equipment, doing so by encumbering funds from last year’s budget.

She added electronic poll books take the place of the traditional paper poll book. This means, election workers no longer have to flip through pages searching for a name, and those names are now placed into one machine.

“When you check in, before, you always had to check in at a precinct, or you had to check in by last name,” Clemens said. “That was because we were limited with the paper poll books.”

She noted with electronic poll books, voters can now check in at any table at an election precinct.

The new poll books will also eliminate unnecessary wires, and now, election workers can communicate with Bluetooth.

The commission voted 4-0, with commissioner Randy Malin absent, to approve the encumbrance.

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