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20111209 Coin flip to decide deadlocked Woodland City Council race

After Monday's hand recount of 1,138 ballots, the Woodland City Council race between Scott Perry and Robert Ripp remained a tie and will be decided by a coin flip Wednesday.

Cowlitz County election officials spent seven hours Monday separating, sorting and tallying ballots before concluding that the original count was accurate, with Ripp and Perry tied at 569 votes each.

Ripp and Perry are competing to replace incumbent council member Darwin Rounds, but neither candidate has gotten too caught up in the process or the outcome.

"I'm not really nervous. I think it's kind of fun," Perry said. "I think we're all chuckling and waiting to see what happens."

The coin toss has been scheduled for 11:20 a.m. Wednesday at a special student assembly at Woodland High School.

"I think this is a great opportunity for the students to learn the difference one vote can make," said Amy Hair, chief deputy auditor for the Cowlitz County Elections Office.

Hair and three other county election officials reopened each of the county's 16 sealed boxes and waded through every vote to sort out those from the Woodland area. Ballots were then parsed by precincts before being grouped into votes for each candidate and write-ins. One person counted each stack out loud, while another person made a written tally. Each pile was then recounted to double check.

"It's tedious," Hair said. "I love it."

The last manual recount in the county occurred in 2008 for several precinct committee officer positions. Doug Reel beat out Scott Wheeler in a coin toss for a Kalama City Council position after the race ended in a tie after a hand recount in 1999, according to the elections officials.

Automatic recounts are triggered in local races when there is less than a quarter percentage point 0.25 percent between the candidates.

Wednesday's coin flip will not make use of any common two-bit piece. Elections Supervisor Carolyn Myers has purchased a special coin with the number one and two on each side. Ripp appeared first on the ballot and so will be number one. Perry is designated number two.



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The system avoids any difficulty in choosing who calls heads or tails, or any mishaps that could come from a person changing their mind mid coin flip.

"I didn't want there to be any confusion," Myers said. "I wanted it to be in stone."

Both Perry and Ripp have become the talk of the town. A half dozen people asked Ripp about the coin flip at the grocery store Monday night. Perry has had at least four or five people poke their head into his real estate office in town asking for updates.

"I'm taking it as it comes," Ripp said. "I can't worry about it at this point, there's not much I can do."

County elections officials seemed more jazzed about the recount process than either candidate. Neither showed up during the process.

"I got to admit, it's pretty exciting," Perry said about the coin flip. "But watching someone count ballots isn't something I'd want to do."
