

BRUNSWICK COUNTY

BOARD OF ELECTIONS

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Meeting Minutes · Regular and Absentee Meeting · April 16, 2024 · 4:00 p.m.

Board Members Present: Chair Edward Lewis, Secretary Stuart Smith, Member Paula Clarity, Member Randy Pelton, and Member Timothy M. Randall

Board Staff Present: Director Sara LaVere, Deputy Director Melissa Chambers, Deputy Director Adrienne Rushton, Elections Computer Technician Butch Johnson, Election Logistics Technician Ryan Childress, Assistant Computer Technician Walter Norton, Absentee Assistant Christy Souter, and Training and Outreach Specialist Robyn Beliveau

Bipartisan Duplication Team Present: Julie Paladino and Christy Souter

Meeting Opening

Mr. Lewis called the meeting to order and everyone in attendance recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Approval of Agenda

Mr. Pelton made a motion to approve the agenda. The motion carried unanimously.

Public Comments

The board heard public comments from the audience. Ms. LaVere read comments submitted to the online portal.

In response to public comments the board and director acknowledged concerns about wait times and staffing issues. Ms. LaVere discussed that precincts will be assessed ahead of the general election once the second primary has concluded.

Mr. Lewis acknowledged concerns about efficiency and wait times at polling places.

Mr. Pelton acknowledged the work of the board and staff to try and alleviate lines and find efficient solutions. He gave his full support to the director in staff in any decisions they make on how to staff with poll workers.

Mr. Lewis reiterated his support and the full support of the board.

The staff continues to make efforts to recruit and train new poll workers with speaking engagements, outreach events at fairs and libraries and educational social media posts.

Director's Report

Voter Registration Statistics

Voter registration statistics were included in the agenda packet. Of note, although the number of registrations appears to be declining on the reports, it is attributed to the temporary hold on processing new registrations until after the second primary; removal continues as normal, but new registrations and party changes cannot be processed until after canvass of the second primary.

Fiscal Year 2024-25 Budget Update

Ms. LaVere explained the budget process; budget request is submitted to county management who returns with initial feedback and adjustment requests prior to the budget presentation to the Commissioners. The initial budget request included the addition of two full-time employees: one for outreach, public requests, media management, etc. and one for candidate filing and campaign finance management. County management has requested the Board of Elections cut more than \$363,000 from the budget request, including both requested positions. Although Ms. LaVere was able to make some cuts from the requested budget, including ballot-on-demand printers for each precinct, she will be requesting directly to the Commissioners during their budget workshop the two requested positions. The Board of Elections has not added a full-time position since 2016.

Old Business

There was no old business.

New Business

Announcement of Future Voter and I Voted Sticker Contest Winners

Ms. Rushton presented information about the inaugural 'Future Voter' and 'I Voted' Sticker Contest. Ms. Rushton and Ms. Beliveau spearheaded this new project for Brunswick County Students to design the stickers that will be used for the general election.

The contest was open to all Brunswick County students and all schools were contacted including public, private, charter, and home school groups.

Results for the 'I Voted' sticker:

- 1st Place – Mirabelle Donovan, 8th grade, Leland Middle School. Mr. Rupnik, art teacher
- 2nd Place – Haley Weaver, 10th grade, North Brunswick High School, Mr. Luitar, art teacher
- 3rd Place – Dane Edwards, 8th grade, Shallotte Middle School, Ms. Roldan, art teacher

Results for the 'Future Voter' sticker:

- 1st Place – Celine Tendo, 8th grade, Shallotte Middle School, Ms. Roldan, art teacher
- 2nd Place – Jordan Dickens, 5th grade, Jessie Mae Monroe Elementary School, Mrs. Reiter, art teacher
- 3rd Place – Lilah Kennedy, 3rd grade, Town Creek Elementary School, Ms. Lewis, art teacher

Winners will be recognized during the board meeting on May 7, 2024, at 6 pm. Trophies, gift cards and stickers will be awarded to the students and gift cards for the teachers/school for the 1st place winners. Photos will be taken, and light refreshments served.

Consideration of Early Voting Plans for the General Election

Early Voting Plans for the general election are now due to the state by May 7. Early voting dates are Thursday, October 17 – Saturday, November 2. All sites must be open on the last Saturday from 8 am – 3 pm. If unable to reach unanimity in favor of a plan, a member or members of the county board of elections may petition the State Board to adopt a plan for the county and the State Board may adopt a plan for that county.

- On each weekday all satellite early voting sites must be open from 8:00 am to 7:30 pm.
- If satellite sites are open on Saturdays or Sundays, then all satellite sites shall be open for the same number of hours on those Saturdays or Sundays.
- These recommended locations have been reserved for use during the early voting period.
 - Leland Cultural Arts Center - 1212 Magnolia Village Way, Leland, NC, 28451
 - Brunswick Center at Supply – 101 Stone Chimney Road SE, Supply, NC 28462
 - Brunswick Center at Shallotte - 3620 Express Drive, Shallotte, NC, 28470
 - Sunset Beach Community Center – 200 Station Trail, Sunset Beach, NC 28468
 - Brunswick County Cooperative Extension - 25 Referendum Drive NE, Building N, Bolivia, NC, 28422
- It is not recommended to continue use of the Brunswick Center at Southport (Senior Center) due to parking limitations and the impediment of customer access to other businesses in the same plaza.
- Staff has explored other locations unsuccessfully in the Southport area including St. James Community Center, International Longshoremen’s Association Hall, Brunswick Little Theater, or renting commercial space.
- Requirements for Early Voting Locations include:
 - Should be in a building that the BOE is entitled to demand use of for election day
 - “...any school or other State, county, or municipal building, or a part thereof, or any other building, or a part thereof, which is supported or maintained, in whole or in part by or through tax revenues provided...”
 - State Board of Elections can approve a non-public building if:
 - “...other equally suitable sites were not available and that the use of the sites chosen will not disproportionately favor any party, racial or ethnic group, or candidate.
- The board can request use of a public building:
 - BOE to request in writing at least 90 days before start of early voting.
 - Identify specific portion requested, the dates and times requested, and the requirement of an area for election related activity.

- If there is no response within 20 days, the building may be used as stated in the request.
- If the governing board responds negatively to the request within 20 days, the BOE and that entity shall in good faith work to identify a building or specific portion thereof to conduct early voting.
- If no building has been agreed upon within 45 days from the date the BOE received a response to the request, the matter will be resolved by the SBOE.

The board discussed possible alternatives including Southport Elementary, Boiling Spring Lakes Community Center, Brunswick Community College, and St. James Community Center, citing its use in 2018.

Ms. LaVere had reached out to St. James again in hopes of revisiting the previous request of using its space. As of the meeting, Ms. LaVere had not yet heard back. The board directed Ms. LaVere to open discussions with St. James again prior to next week's meeting and report back to the board results from those discussions.

While any actions on satellite locations was tabled, the board discussed weekend hours.

Ms. Clarity emphasized that all available opportunities should be available to voters including Saturday and Sunday hours and asked what weekend our satellite locations were open in 2020.

Ms. LaVere provided information that counties were under executive order to provide at least 10 hours of voting on weekends during the pandemic. Weekend hours were 10 am – 4 pm on Saturdays and 12-5 pm on Sundays.

Mr. Smith said he remains concerned about breaks for staff and workers and noted he could support being open the first Sunday of early voting, but not both.

Mr. Pelton remains philosophically opposed to Sunday voting.

Ms. Clarity made a motion to approve weekend hours of satellite locations, those locations yet to be determined, as 10 am – 4 pm on Saturdays and 12 pm – 5 pm on Sundays, both full weekends of the early voting period. Motion carried 3-2, with Mr. Smith and Mr. Pelton dissenting.

Consideration of Absentee Ballots

Mr. Johnson opened the Verity Central Scan and printed a zeros tape for the board's signature.

Ballots for Today's consideration - 26

Ballots recommended for approval

- 21 Civilian ballots
- One military ballot that was returned electronically and will need to be duplicated
- Three Affidavit Review Pending Civilian Ballots returned with a properly executed Photo ID Exception Form

Each board member reviewed two ballots to confirm they were properly executed. Mr. Pelton made a motion to approve 25 ballots as recommended by staff. The motion carried unanimously.

Ballots requiring board review – recommended for approval

The board reviewed one Civilian ballot received in a sealed envelope, but the ballot envelope was unsealed. Numbered memo 2021-03 provides that when the ballot is inside the executed ballot envelope which is not sealed but the ballot envelope is received in a sealed return envelope, this anomaly is not a deficiency.

Mr. Pelton made a motion to approve the Civilian ballot as recommended by staff. Motion carried unanimously.

The approved ballots were opened. One ballot was damaged upon opening and was duplicated as necessary, along with the approved military ballot, by the bipartisan team. Ballots were then scanned into the Verity Central Scan.

After scanning was complete, Mr. Johnson announced that 26 ballots were scanned today with no overvotes. Ms. Rushton confirmed that was the number of ballots approved.

The ballots were placed in a bin and sealed, with seals signed by Mr. Pelton and Mr. Randall. The secure vDrive was placed in a storage container and sealed. The following vote count and seal numbers were logged and will be confirmed at the start of the next meeting.

- Ballot count: 26
- Ballot bin: 2617055 and 2617054
- vDrive storage container: 37471390

The board signed an audit sheet confirming the number of ballots scanned today and seal numbers.

Closed Session

The board went in to closed session to discuss personnel matters in accordance with [G.S. § 143-318.11\(a\)\(6\)](#). The board returned from closed session and reported no action taken.

Mr. Randall thanked the staff for the birthday card he received. He further noted that due to military service, he will be out of town May 27 – June 29 and will be unavailable during that time.

Adjournment

Mr. Pelton made a motion to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously.