

**HOWARD COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS MEETING MINUTES**

9770 Patuxent Woods Drive, Suite 200  
Columbia, MD 21046

**Monday, July 27, 2020 – 4:00 pm**

**Note:** *This meeting was held by Conference Call due to the current COVID-19 restrictions and the Governor’s directives concerning limiting in-person gatherings & meetings.*

**Regular Open Board Meeting**

**ATTENDEES:**

**Board Members:**

Donna K. Thewes	Board President, Republican Member
Ann M. Balcerzak	Vice President, Democratic Member
Diane L. Butler	Republican Member
Timothy J. Mummert	Republican Member
Raymond M. Rankin	Democratic Member
Michael S. Molinaro	Board Counsel

<b>Staff:</b> Guy C. Mickley	Director
Charlotte B. Davis	Deputy Director
Phyllis A. West	Board Secretary
Val Patterson	Staff
Office	Staff

**Absent:** None

<b>Guests:</b> Joel Hurewitz	
David Zinner	Election Judge
Charles Davis	Election Judge
Emily Opilo	Baltimore Sun
Unknown	

**CALL TO ORDER AND DECLARATION OF QUORUM**

Board President Donna Thewes called the meeting to order at 4:04 pm with an established quorum present. She welcomed guests on the call and indicated they would have the opportunity to ask questions at the end of the meeting prior to the Board of Canvassers Meeting.

Since Board members were in different locations without flags available, the President indicated the Pledge of Allegiance would not be given for this meeting.

## **APPROVAL OF BOARD MEETING MINUTES**

Copies of the June 22, 2020 Board meeting minutes were provided to Board members by electronic mail for their review prior to the meeting. President Thewes asked for a motion to approve the June 22, 2020 minutes as corrected via email. Ray Rankin motioned to approve the minutes as corrected and Tim Mummert seconded the motion.

**Action:** The June 22, 2020 Board Meeting minutes were unanimously approved as corrected.

## **ADDITIONS OR CHANGES TO THE AGENDA**

Board members made no additions or changes to the agenda.

## **CORRESPONDENCE**

Director Guy Mickley referred Board members to the letter sent to Governor Hogan by the Maryland Association of Election Officials (MAEO) on behalf of the LBE members, a copy of which they received by email. He stated that MAEO has requested a meeting with the Governor to voice the Local Board's concerns including issues such as encouraging voters to vote by mail; discussing the significant shortage of election judges and consideration of voting centers; authorization to begin canvassing of vote by mail ballots 30 days prior to Election Day; as well as other important issues. Board members asked a few questions which Mr. Mickley answered.

## **PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

President Thewes had nothing to report and turned the meeting over to Director Mickley.

## **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

### **1. Continuing Items**

- a. ***General Office Update:*** Director Mickley reported on what has been accomplished and several things in the office and at the warehouse as the staff works on several processes for the General Election. The items are broken down as follows:
  - aa. ***General Election*** -- The General Election will be held on November 3, 2020. The Governor has decided that the election will be conducted in the regular format with eight days of early voting and full polling places on Election Day. In addition, the State will be sending out Mail-In Ballot Applications to all registered voters and we will have to process all of those as they come back into the office.
  1. **Mail-In Ballot Applications** – Director Mickley stated we expect that at least 50% of the voters in Howard County will fill these applications out to vote by mail. This would be at a minimum approximately 110,000 applications to process. This will take the entire office working very long hours to accomplish. The State Board of Elections is currently looking into establishing a data center to help work on these applications, but the initial word is we will be on our own. We currently have just under 9000 applications in the system at this time. This number is extremely high for this time of year, which is an indication of what we will probably receive from the mass mailing.

- 2. Early Voting** – The Director reported that we will be required to have Early Voting for eight days at four locations in Howard County. In order to better facilitate COVID-19 guidelines as set forth by the CDC, and since the Howard County Schools are doing virtual learning for the first semester, we have decided to give the Board what we consider our best plan of action for 2020, given the current situation. We are proposing to the Board that we use Long Reach High School, Meadowbrook Athletic Complex, Wilde Lake High School, and Marriott’s Ridge High School as the Early Voting Centers for the 2020 Presidential General Election. These larger facilities will provide us with the space and layout that will enable us to accommodate voters at a higher rate and still meet CDC guidelines. This does not in any way mean that it will be “normal”. We will still follow CDC guidelines as to how many people are allowed in any given room.

Board Members asked questions about the voting centers locations, which Director Mickley answered and indicated our best choices were schools and county owned facilities with large spaces to accommodate the voters. Hammond High School is not available until Election Day, so that was not an option.

- 3. Election Judges** – We currently have had only 102 judges express interest in working as judges during Early Voting. We have 800 slots to fill for eight days of Early Voting, and that number is a bare minimum number to efficiently run these centers. Unless every one of these 102 judges were able to work Early Voting every single day, we have a huge problem with staffing. Director Mickley stated that we will do our best as we move forward towards the election, but our ability to staff Early Voting Centers will directly affect the experience that a voter has at these Centers when he/she goes to vote.

The Director reported that the polling places on Election Day typically are at 90 different sites across the County. Currently we have 491 people who have told us they will be election judges on Election Day. One quarter of the people who have said yes also told us that if COVID-19 did not get better or worsened before the election, then they would more than likely change their answer to “no” for working on Election Day. We would be under 400 judges if that were to happen. The Director indicated that a secondary problem is that the baseline for recruitment strategies for judges does not exist in pandemic times. We rely heavily on word of mouth from other judges, festivals, carnivals, fairs, gatherings and recruiting events which are not happening at this time. Direct mailings and social media have become our only options, and neither has been that productive in the past. We would be extremely concerned if we were missing even 200 judges at this point in the process. However, we are missing more than 700 judges, so something must be done. Director Mickley stated that we cannot sustain 90 individual polling places with numbers like this.

Board Members discussed recruiting state workers, and Donna Thewes reported that she was checking with her HR Person at the state to see if an email has been sent to state workers. Director Mickley responded to a question indicating there would be

pay raises for judges for Early Voting and Election Day. Several Board Members requested flyers, so they could send them out via social media and post them at their local churches, which was subsequently done.

4. **Polling Place Consolidation** -- Director Mickley stated we are asking the Board to consolidate the precincts in Howard County from 90 polling places to 35 polling places. The consolidations are listed on the spreadsheet that has been provided to the Board. When approving the polling places, they will simply be approving the school or facility that will be associated with the precincts, not a room. Upon approval, staff will make the changes in the system and send all voters new Voter Notification Cards to let them know where their new polling place is located. Voters will also receive a sample ballot that gives them the same information closer to the election.

The Director stated that as soon as the Board approves, we will immediately start making new schematics and site visits if necessary to determine exactly what room or rooms in the facilities we will be utilizing to conduct the election. The VNC sent to the voter, as well as the sample ballot, will contain this information for the voter.

5. **Equipment** – The Director reported that all equipment used in the June Primary Election has been released, and we have performed Post-Election Maintenance.

Mike Molinaro asked if SBE had approved this, and the Director said yes, and he was the first to initiate this approach due to the shortage of judges. Many counties are now looking at this option

2. **Registration** – Director Mickley reported that registration numbers continue to slowly rise. The staff continues to do a good job of staying on top of the work and getting new registrations and changes in on a timely basis. The current situation in Maryland continues to result in a slow-down of registrations, as the MVA and most other State and County agencies are operating on limited schedules with the public.
3. **Budget** – The Director reported that we are now in FY 2021. He was able to encumber over \$700,000 from FY20 and bring forward our \$200,000 encumbrance from FY19 to cover costs from the April and June elections that were not going to be billed until this fiscal year, payroll from FY20 year end, and to provide a small buffer for what may be done with the election process in November. He reported that in spite of these adjustments, nothing he has done will be enough to cover our expenses for this election. We will be essentially conducting two elections simultaneously -- in-person and early voting as well as a Vote-By-Mail election. This will eat up funds in payroll, supplies, printing, postage and many other sections of our budget very quickly. The Director stated that we will probably have to go to the County again at some point in FY21 and ask for a lot more money. As we progress through the election cycle, he will be able to have a better understanding of how much money we will have to ask for from the County. He stated that he will keep the Board abreast of the situation.

- 4. Staff Work Schedules** -- Director Mickley reported that staff at the office and the warehouse are bouncing back and forth between telework and regular schedules. Fortunately, most of the planning that we are doing can be done from home or the office/warehouse, but with the Mail-In Applications coming in at some point starting in August, and judges training being ironed out, telework will probably quickly dissipate. The Director expects the full staff to be intact every day at both the office and the warehouse by mid to late August.
- 5. Warehouse** – The Director reported that the warehouse has and will be continuing to work on polling place schematics and structuring the polling places to COVID-19 specifications (assuming Board members pass the current consolidation strategy). The warehouse will also be planning, implementing and executing either videos that the judges can simply watch, or a virtual training class that they can attend, or a mix of both. We do not plan on having in-person training of any kind, unless we are required to do so, or if there are judges that do not have internet access for some reason. This will be a work in progress for several weeks. Our ultimate goal for training is to start the week of September 7. We will have our training plan ironed out long before that week.

The warehouse will also be working on a support strategy for Early Voting and Election Day so that we are not physically in the polling places or the Early Voting Centers. We will have certain people that will be the “Virtual Rover” for certain polling places and Early Voting Centers. For early voting, we will probably have a staff member outside the polling place to assist directly if needed in most instances. He stated that we will be using smart phones in several ways as communication (audio and video) to and from the judges. The judges at each polling place in Howard County will be receiving smart phones this election so that we can fully utilize the technology that we are currently putting in place.
- 6. Office and Warehouse Responsibilities** – Director Mickley stated that the warehouse will handle judge training, in person voting machines, equipment and supplies, election day support of judges, Logic and Accuracy testing and so forth for the November Election. The office will handle all other items, including Mail-In Ballot applications.
- 7. Canvassing** – Director Mickley reported that as it stands now, canvassing will not begin until the day that we could start the Absentee 1 canvass, which would be November 5. This puts us in jeopardy of not being able to certify the election on time. Depending on how many ballots we receive in the mail, it could result in us running into the Electoral College and swearing-in deadlines. Once again, we will do whatever we can to get through this portion in a timely manner, but it will be difficult.
- 8. MAEO** – The Annual 2020 MAEO Conference will be a virtual conference. Director Mickley stated that he has provided the Board with the agenda and the call-in information for this event in previously sent emails.

Board members asked several other questions, which the Director addressed. President Thewes then asked the guests attending if they had any questions they wished to ask. Three indicated that they had questions, as follows:

Charles Davis, an election judge, thanked everyone for their services. He wants to help recruit election judges and said he is involved with Toastmasters International. If we can send him flyers electronically, he will present them at their next meeting (this was subsequently done). Mr. Davis also indicated that if judges were needed to count or open ballots in the canvass, he is available to help. President Thewes thanked him for his assistance with recruiting judges and for his offer to help.

David Zinner, an election judge, stated that a team of judges might be able to help with handling mail-in ballots. He wanted to know if we were doing same day registration on both Early Voting Days and Election Day, and President Thewes indicated yes. He likes the idea of using different rooms for different election processes and said it might be a challenge for chief judges to handle this. He also asked for a description of the PPE to be used at voting locations and could judges bring their own? Director Guy Mickley reviewed what was being done and supplies that will be made available and said judges could bring their own. He asked several additional questions, which the Director answered.

Joel Hurewitz stated he thought the Presidential Primary Election went very well and gave his views on several issues being discussed for this election and how he would address them.

#### **BOARD COUNSEL REPORT**

There was nothing to report.

#### **OLD BUSINESS**

There was no old business.

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

There was no new business

#### **BOARD OF CANVASSERS MEETING**

President Donna Thewes asked for a motion to recess the Regular Open Board Meeting so that the Board of Canvassers for the Presidential Primary Election could convene for their 2<sup>nd</sup> Post Certification Canvass Board Meeting. Ray Rankin moved to recess the meeting and Tim Mummert seconded the motion.

**Action:** The Board voted unanimously to recess the meeting at 5:29 pm to meet as the Board of Canvassers for the Presidential Primary Election.

The Regular Open Board Meeting reconvened at 5:33 pm. Donna Thewes reported that the Board of Canvassers for the Presidential Primary Election had approved the minutes from Canvass days 5, 6 and 7 as well as the 1<sup>st</sup> Post Certification Canvass Meeting minutes. In addition, ninety-one (91) ballots were rejected as untimely.

#### **EXECUTIVE SESSION**

President Donna Thewes then requested a motion to recess the Regular Open Board Meeting so that the Board could convene in closed Executive Session under General Provisions

Article 3-305B to discuss personnel issues. A motion to recess the Regular Open Board Meeting was made by Ray Rankin and Tim Mummert seconded the motion.

**Action:** Board members in attendance voted unanimously to recess the Regular Open Board Meeting at 5:34 pm.

The Regular Open Board Meeting was reconvened at 6:24 pm. Present Thewes reported that the purpose of the Executive Session was to conduct the semi-annual performance reviews of the Director, and to approve the Executive Session minutes from the May 18, 2020 meeting.

**ADJOURNMENT**

Donna Thewes asked for a motion to adjourn the Regular Open Board Meeting. Ray Rankin made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Diane Butler seconded the motion.

**Action:** Board members unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 6:24 pm.

The next regular Open Board Meeting of the Howard County Board of Elections will be held on Monday, August 24, 2020 at 4:00 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

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Phyllis A. West, Board Secretary

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Donna K. Thewes, Board President