

HOWARD COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS MEETING MINUTES

9770 Patuxent Woods Drive, Suite 200
Columbia, MD 21046

Monday, August 24, 2020 – 4:00 pm

Note: *This meeting was held by Audio/Video Conference 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

Staff: Guy C. Mickley	Director
Charlotte B. Davis	Deputy Director
Phyllis A. West	Board Secretary
Office	Staff

Absent: None

Public: David Zinner	Election Judge
Charles Davis	Election Judge
Emily Opilo	Baltimore Sun
Ginny Gick	Deb Jung’s Office
Edward Johnson	Courtney Watson’s Office
Ken Johnson	MD Legislative Coalition
Brigid Smith	Guest
Jay Gerarden	Guest
Joel Hurewitz	Guest
Ilana Bittner	Guest
Ken Stevens	Guest

CALL TO ORDER AND DECLARATION OF QUORUM

Board President Donna Thewes called the meeting to order at 4:01 pm with an established quorum present. She welcomed guests on the call and stated 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

A copy of the July 27, 2020 Board meeting minutes was provided to Board members by electronic mail for their review prior to the meeting. President Thewes asked for a motion to approve the July 27, 2020 minutes. Ray Rankin motioned to approve the minutes as presented and Tim Mummert seconded the motion.

Action: The July 27, 2020 Board Meeting minutes were unanimously approved as presented.

ADDITIONS OR CHANGES TO THE AGENDA

Board members made no additions or changes to the agenda.

CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

1. Continuing Items

- a. ***General Office Update:*** Director Mickley reported on what has been accomplished and several things that staff at the office and the warehouse have been working on to implement processes for the General Election. The items are broken down as follows:
 - aa. ***General Election Plan*** – The General Election will be held on November 3, 2020. The Director stated that we believe we have the final iteration of how the election will be conducted. Early Voting will be held from October 26 through November 2, and there will be 17 Vote Centers across the county on Election Day, November 3. The list of Vote Centers being proposed was provided to Board members and will need to be approved by the Board so that Director Mickley can submit the locations for the State Board's approval at their next board meeting on Friday, August 28th.
1. **Mail-In Ballot Applications** – Director Mickley stated we expect that at least 50% of the voters in Howard County will vote by mail. This would be approximately 110,000 applications to process, which will take the entire office working very long hours to accomplish. The State Board of Elections is currently still looking into establishing a

data center to help work on these applications. He will advise the Board if this is established. We currently have 28,000 applications in the system, with a backlog of 7000 applications to process. This equals 35,000 applications that have been received for processing prior to the State's mass mailing of mail-in ballot applications. This number is extremely high for this time of year, which indicates what will probably be received from the mass mailing. The State will be sending mail-in ballot applications to all registered voters who have not already applied tomorrow, and Howard County residents should receive them this week. Considering that typically at least 15% of voters do not vote, and that we have already received almost 16% of voter applications, he believes there are probably over 30% of Howard County voters already accounted for in late August for this election.

2. **Early Voting** – The Director reported that there will be Early Voting for eight days at four locations in Howard County, and the dates have changed to Monday, October 26 through Monday, November 2, 2020. To better facilitate COVID-19 guidelines set forth by the CDC, and since Howard County Schools are closed and doing virtual learning for the first semester, the Board had voted to use Long Reach High School, Meadowbrook Athletic Complex, Wilde Lake High School and Marriott's Ridge High School as the four Early Voting Centers for the 2020 Presidential General Election. These will be presented at the next State Board meeting. The Director then said he would like to discuss the possibility of moving the Early Voting Center from Wilde Lake to Reservoir High School with the Board. He stated that with a move to Reservoir High School, an additional 10% of voters would be covered, so he recommended this change from Wilde Lake High School (82% to 92%).

Board Members discussed this potential change. Ray Rankin said that Wilde Lake High School was near The Bain Center, a former Early Voting Center, and he believes there is a larger senior population in this area. He stated he was opposed to the move. Diane Butler agreed on the potential advantage of moving the site to cover an additional 10% of Howard County voters and indicated that Reservoir High School had better ADA parking than was available at Wilde Lake High School. Ann Balcerzak stated that Wilde Lake High School has a higher concentration of people who depend on public transportation and many people walk there. She believes the residents living in the southern part of the county are more of a driving population. Diane Butler felt that people in the southern part of the county have some of the same issues. Tim Mummert stated that there is public transportation available in the Columbia area to take individuals to the Reservoir High School location if they need a ride. Donna Thewes stated that the southwestern part of the county, including Laurel, were not well covered for Early Voting, and she felt the move to Reservoir High School helped to balance the coverage.

Guy Mickley interjected that he had added one additional vote center on Election Day because he wanted additional coverage in a few other areas. With that change, 99.4% of Howard County's residents will live within five miles of one of the Vote

Centers on Election Day. He stated the staff will run the election at any site the Board chooses.

Donna Thewes asked for a motion to approve the change in location of the Early Voting Center from Wilde Lake High School to Reservoir High School. Diane Butler made a motion to move the Early Voting Site to Reservoir High School from Wilde Lake High School and Tim Mummert seconded the motion.

Action: The vote was 3-2 in favor of the motion. Three members of the Board voted in favor of the motion – Donna Thewes, Diane Butler and Tim Mummert. Two members of the Board voted against the motion – Ann Balcerzak and Ray Rankin. The motion passed.

3. **Vote Centers** – Guy Mickley stated that with the planned 17 Vote Centers on Election Day, 99.4% of voters will be covered within five miles of their homes. He reminded the Board that any voter can vote at **any** Early Voting Center or Vote Center on Election Day. He showed the Board on his screen a list of the 17 Vote Centers he is recommending, and members asked for a copy of the list. He stated it will be posted on the Board of Elections website as soon as it is approved by the State Board. This Vote Center list will replace the regular polling place locations on the website to avoid confusing the voters. He then reviewed the 17 Voting Center sites and why they had been selected. The Director said he has one caveat -- the final site will be Laurel Woods Elementary School unless he hears back in the next two days from North Laurel Community Center and they are available.

Donna Thewes asked if anyone had any other questions before she asked for a motion to vote on the sites. Ann Balcerzak stated that for this election, the faster we can get this information out, the better for the voters. Donna Thewes agreed and feels the Board should approve the sites now. She asked for a motion to approve the 17 voting centers for Election Day with a caveat for Laurel Woods Community Center. Diane Butler made a motion to approve the 17 voting centers for Election Day presented by Director Guy Mickley for Board approval, with the caveat that if Laurel Woods Community Center responds to him by Wednesday, that location will replace Laurel Woods Elementary School on the voting center list. Tim Mummert seconded the motion.

Action: The motion to approve 17 Vote Centers for Howard County was unanimously approved by the Board.

4. **Election Day** – Director Mickley reported that Election Day will be run through the use of Vote Centers as stated above. Using this process, anyone in the county can vote at **any** of the seventeen (17) Vote Centers on Election Day. This will reduce voter confusion and limit the number of provisional ballots that would have been used in the consolidation strategy. He said that ballot ordering will be challenging

since anyone can show up anywhere across the county. The 17 Vote Centers have been strategically placed primarily at high schools and at several other places in the county to maximize voter coverage. Donna Thewes expressed the Board's thanks to the Howard County school system for working so well with us on locations for this election.

5. **Drop Boxes** – The Director stated that we plan to put out a total of nine (9) drop boxes if possible for the voters in Howard County. The locations will be the current locally approved four Early Voting Centers (*subsequently changed to five at the Board's Emergency meeting on 8/24/2020*), the office and drop boxes at Elkridge Landing Middle School, Lisbon Elementary School and if possible, Laurel Woods Elementary School. This gives us good coverage across the county for voters to drop off a ballot. The State is working to procure these drop boxes and have them delivered in a timely manner. He reminded the Board that voters can also take their ballot to a Vote Center on Election Day and drop off a ballot with the staff there in one of the yellow bags. He stated that on Election Day, we may place people outside the door or just inside the door for this function, so that a voter does not have to go all the way into a Vote Center to drop off a ballot.

Donna Thewes indicated she was pleased that there would be a drop box at all Early Voting Centers, and that voters could drop their ballots off at Voting Centers on Election Day. Diane Butler concurred and offered the Director her assistance with picking up ballots at drop boxes if he needed help. The Director said he will discuss this with the Board at a later date once ballots are about to go out, but it would help reduce some of the burden on the staff. Donna Thewes asked when they would be mailed out, and Guy Mickley indicated the State had announced a target date of October 1, 2020. Ray Rankin mentioned that the State said additional drop boxes were on order, and the Director indicated that three of our drop boxes will be delivered with the second batch coming to the State. Diane Butler asked if there would be security on each drop box, and the Director said yes.

Ray Rankin asked for a spreadsheet with all the locations, and the Director indicated that he would provide one as soon as all are approved.

Donna Thewes asked for a motion to approve the eight drop boxes with the possibility of a ninth one at Laurel Woods Elementary School if possible. Diane Butler made the motion to approve nine (9) drop boxes and read the locations. Tim Mummert seconded the motion.

Action: The motion to approve nine drop boxes for Howard County was unanimously approved by the Board.

Tim Mummert suggested that when posting information on these sites, it should be made clear to voters that these are contactless—like a mailbox—and they will have no

interaction with anyone. The Director stated that a list of drop box locations will be included in each voter's ballot packet and will also be posted on our website.

- 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 because of the advent of a multitude of Vote Centers on Election Day, we will need to order additional ballot carts and signage not currently in our supplies. We will also need to order many additional ballots to offset the unknowns of where voters will show up. Ann Balcerzak asked about the ballot costs, and Guy Mickley stated that they would be double or triple a regular ballot order, as we also need ballots for re-creation during the Canvass, and there will be a lot of ballots to re-create. All of this, along with other supplies he has reported on to the Board for many months, means we are going to need more money from the County before the end of the fiscal year. The County is prepared to use money from the CARES Act that they have available to offset some of our costs, since everything that we are doing that is different is because of COVID-19. The County is aware there will be overtime and other costs as well.
- 4. Staff Work Schedules** – Director Mickley reported that staff at the office and the warehouse will report for full, in-person duty on August 31st. There may be days when telework will be done, but for the most part, staff will be in their assigned locations.
- 5. Judges Training** – The Director reported that judges training will be fully virtual. The staff has been working on training videos done from the first-person point-of-view for the judges. Judges will watch the training videos, go through the quizzes and then take part in a Question and Answer Session with the Director and a few staff members. If they have an individual question about a certain piece of equipment or functionality, we will go to a live stream and show them exactly what they need to see on documentation or equipment. We believe this will give the judges a full experience without ever having to come into the office. The Director is planning on having the training videos available for viewing starting the second week of September and available for the judges through Election Day.
- 6. Warehouse Activities** – The Director reported that the warehouse staff continues to work on a support strategy for Early Voting and Election Day so that staff is not physically in the Vote Centers or the Early Voting Centers. We will have certain people that are the “Virtual Rover” for certain Vote Centers and Early Voting Centers. For Early Voting, he will have a staff member outside the polling place to assist directly if needed in most instances. The Director also reminded the Board that in addition to judge train, the warehouse staff is handling in person voting machines, equipment and supplies, Election Day communication and support of judges, Logic and Accuracy testing and more for the November Election. The office will handle all other processes including Mail-In Ballot Applications.

7. **Judges** – The Director stated that judges at each Vote Center and Early Voting Center in Howard County will receive smart phones this election so that we can fully utilize audio and video communications to and from the judges. Judges will also have two way-radios, with four at each location, so they can communicate between adjoining rooms. The Director also confirmed that he would have three chief judges at each location since there will be more than one room used at these locations.
8. **Canvassing** – The Director reported that canvassing can begin on October 1, 2020. He does not believe we will be canvassing on that date, as he does not think the ballots will be out to the voters in time for people to have returned them to the office by that date. However, it will allow us to canvass early if there is an opportunity for the staff to do so. He said that canvassing early may be challenging, as there must be multiple staff members present to run the canvass even if we use other volunteers through the process. With the many other things that the staff will be executing, it will be extremely difficult to canvass early to the extent that we would want to, but we will work through the scheduling.

The Director also reported that the canvass is allowed to be done through remote canvassing again this election with the board meeting remotely and cameras showing the activities to the Board and the public. We do not know exactly how we will perform the canvass at this time, but we have time to decide as we move through the election cycle. He stated that he will not be holding the canvass in the office or the warehouse. He will advise the Board as to how we intend to proceed in the near future. Donna Thewes said she knows this will be challenging, but if the Board can help, please call on them. Ann Balcerzak concurred.

9. **Petitions** – The Director reported that petitions were done for the Green Party, Libertarian Party and Amber Ivey- Congressional 7 candidate. The Green and Libertarian Parties had enough signatures to be recognized as parties in the State of Maryland. He did not yet know the disposition of third petition.
10. **MAEO** – The MAEO Conference will be held virtually tomorrow. He had provided the Board with the conference agenda and call-in information for this event in previous emails.

Board members then asked several questions. Ray Rankin wanted to know how we were doing with judge recruiting. The Director indicated we have 800 judges assigned and 1715 needed. We will need approximately 595 to fill slots on Election Day and 1,120 for Early Voting Centers. We are still waiting to hear back from several hundred individuals. He thinks we can cover the sites, but we also lose judges every day. Donna Thewes mentioned that the State Board meeting is scheduled for 12:00 Noon on Friday, 8/28/20, and there is a link on their website. The Director said the State Board has 300-400 Voting Centers and Early Voting Centers to approve across the state.

President Donna Thewes then asked the members of the public if they had any questions. Four guests asked questions by phone and email or made comments on the following topics: publicizing wearing masks at Early Voting and Vote Centers, drop boxes, what is judge pay for

this election (Chief Judges - \$350 and other judges \$295 on Election Day, and training pay to be determined, but not less than \$30), use of judges for canvassing, putting signs at old polling places (the Director stated that our additional signage includes posting signs at traditional polling places with a list of Voting Centers on Election Day), Early Voting Centers, and can judges work multiple days (yes).

BOARD COUNSEL REPORT

Board Secretary Phyllis West first reminded Board members that the Presidential General Election Canvass Board would be sworn-in at the September 21, 2020 Board meeting. Board Counsel Mike Molinaro, Esq., then reported that he had contacted Judge Tucker and sent a request for an Administrative Order allowing the swearing in electronically. He will advise the Board once he hears from the judge. This would be consistent with the Governor's order limiting gatherings regarding COVID-19. He also stated that Nikki Charlson and the State Board of Elections staff will be holding their bi-weekly conference calls for LBE Board Counsels starting at the end of September to discuss election issues and share advice. Donna Thewes stated she appreciated Mike Molinaro and Phyllis West making these arrangements.

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 3rd 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 5:31 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 the 2nd Post Certification Canvass Board Meeting minutes. In addition, twenty (20) ballots were rejected as untimely.

Ann Balcerzak asked if the two new parties had any candidates. Donna Thewes stated that she believes to remain active, they need to have candidates.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Donna Thewes asked for a motion to adjourn the Regular Open Board Meeting. Ray Rankin made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Tim Mummert seconded the motion.

Action: Board members unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 5:35 pm.

The next Regular Open Board Meeting of the Howard County Board of Elections will be held on Monday, September 21, 2020 at 4:00 pm. **(NOTE: An Emergency Board Meeting was subsequently called and held on August 26, 2020. Since the number of judges available to work had increased significantly, the Director suggested we add a fifth Early Voting Center at Reservoir High School, which was approved by the Board.)**

Respectfully Submitted,

Phyllis A. West, Board Secretary

Donna K. Thewes, Board President