

HOWARD COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS MEETING MINUTES

9770 Patuxent Woods Drive, Suite 200
Columbia, MD 21046

Monday, September 21, 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: Wayne Robey	Clerk of the Court, Howard County
Edward Johnson	Courtney Watson’s Office
Ken Johnson	MD Legislative Coalition
Ken Stevens	Guest
S. Mer	Guest

CALL TO ORDER AND DECLARATION OF QUORUM

Board President Donna Thewes called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm with an established quorum present. Before the meeting proceeded, she asked for a moment of silence to honor Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg.

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

SWEARING-IN OF CANVASS BOARD FOR PRESIDENTIAL GENERAL ELECTION

President Thewes then turned the meeting over to Wayne Robey, Howard County's Clerk of the Court, to swear in the Presidential General Canvass Board members by video conference.

Action: Mr. Robey proceeded to swear in members of the Board of Elections as Canvass Board members for the 2020 Presidential General Election, after which Mr. Robey left the meeting. Members signed the Oath of Office of the Board of Canvassers electronically.

President Thewes then 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.

APPROVAL OF BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Copies of the minutes for the August 24, 2020 Regular Open Board Meeting and the August 26, 2020 Emergency Board Meeting were provided to Board members by electronic mail for their review prior to the meeting. President Thewes asked for a motion to approve both sets of minutes. Ray Rankin motioned to approve the minutes for the August 24th and August 26th Board Meetings as presented and Tim Mummert seconded the motion.

Action: The minutes for both the August 24, 2020 Regular Open Board Meeting and the August 26, 2020 Emergency Board Meeting 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, with Early Voting from October 26th through November 2nd at five locations. There will be 17 Vote Center across the County on Election Day. The Early Voting Centers and Vote Centers for Howard County were approved by the State Board of Elections on August 28, 2020. Guy Mickley reported that the Howard County Council will meet this evening to discuss Council Resolution 144-2020—A Resolution establishing Wilde

Lake High School as a fifth Early Voting Center for the 2020 Presidential General Election. (This resolution was subsequently passed by the Council.) Diane Butler asked if the Council resolution was for the 2020 Election only, and the Director indicated that it was.

1. **Mail-In Ballot Applications** – Director Mickley stated that we expect at least 50% of the voters in Howard County will vote by mail. This would be over 113,000 applications to process, which will take the entire office working very long hours to accomplish. The State Board of Elections is opening a data center today to help work on these applications. The Director has added ten (10) part-time employees at the office to assist with processing the applications. We currently have 63,000 applications in the system, with a backlog of 15,400 applications yet to process. This equals 78,400 applications that have been received for processing. The Director stated that typically at least 15% of voters do not vote, and almost 35% of voters have already submitted applications to the office. He believes that over 50% of Howard County voters are already accounted for in mid/late September.
2. **Early Voting** – The Director reported that there will be Early Voting for eight days at five locations in Howard County from Monday, October 26 through Monday, November 2, 2020. Locations will be Long Reach High School, Meadowbrook Athletic Complex, Marriott’s Ridge High School, Reservoir High School and Wilde Lake High School. Staff will set up these Early Voting Centers the weekend prior to the start of Early Voting.
3. **Election Day Vote Centers** – The Director said that, as stated above, there will be 17 Vote Centers used on Election Day in Howard County. These will be set up by the staff the weekend prior to Election Day, with the exception of the five Early Voting Centers. At these centers, staff will swap out the equipment that needs to be changed when early voting ends on Monday Night November 2, 2020. There will be no Monday night judge meetings.
4. **Drop Boxes** – The Director reported there will be nine (9) drop boxes for the voters in Howard County. The locations will be the five Early Voting Centers, the office, and drop boxes at Elkridge Landing Middle School, Lisbon Elementary School and Laurel Woods Elementary School. The drop boxes at the office and the five Early Voting Centers will be available for voter use on September 30, 2020. The additional three boxes will be available between October 15-17, 2020. All will have security cameras, and the Board discussed drop box locations at the sites. The Director stated that he had to locate them in certain areas to allow gate closure at some sites, and security at others.

The Director then asked Board members if they would help with picking up ballots at drop boxes, and all members indicated they would. They should wear their name tags since they are sworn in election officials, and they will have chain of custody

documents to sign at the office when picking up the ballots at the drop boxes and dropping off the ballots at the office. He also mentioned that Board members might want to check the website for the maps Val Patterson put together with pictures of drop boxes, Early Voting Sites and Vote Centers.

2. **Registration** – Director Mickley reported that registration numbers increased to just over 226,000 active voters over the past month. He said that judging from previous election cycles, this is typical of the two months leading up to a Presidential General Election. 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.
 3. **Budget** – The Director continues to monitor the budget with the knowledge that he will probably have to go back to the county for additional funding in the last quarter of this year to adequately fund the office through this fiscal year. The County is working on CARES Act funding and other grant money that can be utilized to offset the growing costs associated with this election.
 4. **Staff Work Schedules** – Director Mickley reported that staff at the office and the warehouse have reported back to full, in-person duty on August 31st. They have been putting in huge amounts of overtime to prepare for the upcoming election, whether it be for mail-in ballots or in-person voting. This group is a hard-working, dedicated machine. He asked Board members to take a moment to thank the staff when they have the opportunity. County voters should be proud to have these individuals working for them. Donna Thewes asked if Howard County was using the State’s call center, and the Director reported that he had removed us from participating since they did not have enough employees there.
- The Director then informed the Board that the Howard County Times wants to do an article on him, staff and the election process.
5. **Judges Training** – The Director reported that judge training will be fully virtual. The staff is putting the final touches on several training videos and we will be placing them on our YouTube channel by the end of the week. Board members will have access to view the videos. Judges are being assigned now and assignment letters are being sent. All judges should be assigned by next week. Judge manuals will be mailed next week and links to their respective videos will be made available at that time. He mentioned that a Question and Answer session will be held the week before Early Voting starts for judges. The Director also reported that each voting site will have a mix of former and new judges to ensure some are already familiar with the processes and can help support and transfer the knowledge to the new judges.
 5. **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. Staff will be using smart phones and two-way radios as communication (Audio and Video) to and from the judges. Once processes are completed at the warehouse, staff will assist the office with processing mail-in ballot applications.

6. **Ballots** – The Director stated that ballots should arrive at the warehouse this week (500,000 have been ordered). Ballots will be packed according to Early Voting Center and Vote Center locations within the county to properly disperse ballot styles by precinct. He has ordered additional ballots to cover re-creation during the canvass. These will be delivered to the Canvass Center prior to the start of the canvass. Donna Thewes said she was pleased that the State has addressed voter concerns from previous elections to cover the voter’s signatures on the ballot envelopes. The Director said that if staff removes the paper cover and there is no voter signature, staff will try to “cure” the ballot by contacting the voter to try to get them to come in and sign their oath.
7. **Canvassing** – The Director reported that all canvasses will be conducted at Lake Elkhorn Middle School in the gymnasium. The public will be allowed in the room, but only where they are permitted. We will probably be building plexiglass “walls” to separate the public and the Canvass Board from the counters and scanners. There may be a separate room for the Canvass Board to make decisions on individual ballots. We will practice social distancing, physical distancing and proper cleaning protocols. We will ensure that the public follows all instructions for the canvass during COVID-19. Walter Maddox will be scanning using the DS-850 at the office, and there will be scanning set up at the canvass location as well. At this time, the Director is planning on scanning seven different days. He may start the canvass on or about October 15th, with the first date of ballot scanning to start on October 17th or 18th.

The Director plans to have 40 judges help with opening the ballots as well re-creating the ballots (in teams of two). Over 1,000 people said they could help with the canvass. There will be 20 ballot scanners at the canvass location plus the DS-850 at the office. With the assistance of the additional judges opening ballots, he believes he can meet the deadline.

8. **Petitions** – The Director reported that petitions for the Green Party and Libertarian Party have passed, and the petition for Amber Ivey -- Congressional 7 candidate -- did not garner enough signatures and failed.
9. **State Audits** – The State has decided to do a scaled back Voting Center evaluation program. Our staff will go over everything virtually, with the chief judge showing us everything on Duo video, after which we will complete the necessary paperwork. Our staff calls will be unannounced to the judges. In response to a question from Donna Thewes, the Director said he does not yet know how SBE plans to do the audit, but a minimum of one site will probably be used. He will know more after this Thursday’s Election Director’s meeting with SBE.

President Donna Thewes then asked the members of the public if they had any questions. One guest made comments on the following topics: drop boxes/locations and signage at regular

polling places directing voters to Voting Centers (this will be posted the day prior to Election Day).

BOARD COUNSEL REPORT

Board Counsel Mike Molinaro, Esq., reminded Board members that if they had any questions concerning canvassing or any other topics they would like him to ask, the State Board of Elections bi-weekly calls with LBE Counsels begin next week.

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 4th 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 4:42 pm to meet as the Board of Canvassers for the Presidential Primary Election.

The Regular Open Board Meeting reconvened at 4:50 pm. Donna Thewes reported that the Board of Canvassers for the Presidential Primary Election had approved the 3rd Post Certification Canvass Board Meeting minutes. In addition, twenty-nine (29) ballots were rejected as untimely. After discussion, Canvass Board members unanimously voted to adjourn the 2020 Presidential Primary Canvass.

OLD BUSINESS

Donna Thewes reminded Board members that there would be no Regular Open Board Meeting in October due to the start of Early Voting. The Director said he will keep Donna Thewes updated for her to disseminate any information to Board members. There will be a short Special Open Board Meeting on Election night to select a Voting Center(s) for the State audit, and President Thewes will advise members on that once we know the details. She said the next time the group would meet would be as the 2020 Presidential General Canvass Board at the opening of the Canvass in mid-October – date to be determined.

NEW BUSINESS

There was no new business

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 4:58 pm.

The next meeting of the Howard County Board of Elections will be a Special Open Board Meeting scheduled for Tuesday, November 3, 2020 at approximately 9:00 pm. This brief meeting will be held to determine what Vote Center(s) will be selected for the State audit.

Respectfully Submitted,

Phyllis A. West, Board Secretary

Donna K. Thewes, Board President