

MINUTES

City of Charlottesville Electoral Board Meeting of September 1, 2021

The meeting was called to order by the Chair at 6:05 p.m. on Wednesday, September 1 in the office of the Charlottesville General Registrar. Those present were Electoral Board members Jon Bright (Chair), Anne Hemenway (Vice Chair) and Jim Nix (Secretary), and Acting Director of Elections and General Registrar Taylor Yowell.

On a motion by the Vice Chair, seconded by the Secretary, the agenda was unanimously approved without change.

On a motion by the Vice Chair, seconded by the Secretary, the minutes from the July 21 meeting were unanimously approved without change.

Public Comment

Ms. Bekah Saxon, Co-chair of the Charlottesville Democratic Committee was present and spoke to express strong support for providing at least one opportunity for Sunday voting during the early voting period for the November 2 election. She expressed the opinion that Sunday voting would benefit a variety of Charlottesville voters in addition to religious groups seeking to establish “souls to the polls” drives.

Ms. Sue Lewis, representing the League of Women Voters (LWV) was also present for this meeting. She too spoke in favor of Sunday voting emphasizing that this would be of particular value to voters who work six days a week.

Budget Discussion

Ms. Yowell provided the Board members with printed copies of a budget spreadsheet covering the fiscal years 2017 to the present. For the years 2017-2020 actual expenses were listed by category along with the adopted budget for the fiscal year just begun and initial estimates for next year’s budget. While the projections are preliminary a few amounts generated Board member questions. For example, the high monthly cost for polling place cell phones was questioned since these phones are normally only used for two days per year. A switch to so-called “burner phones” with minutes purchased as needed was suggested and Ms. Yowell agreed to investigate this option. There were a few suggestions for modifying expense categories to provide more useful information. The budget panel meeting for the Registrar’s Office will take place in December.

Planning for the November 2 General Election

Ms. Yowell updated the Board reporting that coordination with other City departments has been done, polling place parking has been set up and all key officer of election positions have been filled with experienced personnel. She added that most of the other precinct personnel assignments have been made and the roster should be complete by the end of the week.

The subject of the location of the Carver precinct within the Carver Recreation Center building was raised, specifically the placement of the polling location on the second floor when logically the first floor would be more convenient and accessible to voters. No one present knew why the upstairs location was selected but compliance with ADA access standards was postulated as a reason. However, it was acknowledged that the lower level used the same building entrance as the upper level and that the same elevator, adjacent to the entrance, providing ADA compliant access to both floors. Furthermore, the gym floor in the second-floor room required protective measures on election day that would not be an issue for the multi-use first floor room. Ms. Yowell agreed to check on this and report back to the Board.

A discussion of anticipated election day turnout and the level of staffing required at the polling places led to the subject of personnel requirements for handling the drop boxes at the precincts. It was agreed that these could be managed with fewer people than were assigned for last year's general election. Ms. Yowell pointed out that a closer interpretation of the law governing the precinct drop boxes revealed that they can be returned to the office only by two election officials or a single member of the office staff. Board members are not authorized to perform this function.

Appointment of Election Officials

Ms. Yowell presented applications for seven individuals seeking appointment as election officials. On a motion by the Vice Chair, seconded by the Secretary six listed below were unanimously appointed for three-year terms with the Registrar to seek additional information from the seventh applicant for consideration at a future meeting:

Joshua Harris Goldstein
Barbara K Ronan
Haley (McAllister) Lehman
Anna Claire Fotopoulos
Jane Ellen Teller
Patsy Downer

Electronic Pollbooks (EPBs) for Early Voting

One of the advantages of the new EPBs acquired earlier this year was their suitability for use in early voting. However, it has become evident that, for technical reasons, it is

not possible to use the same EPBs for early voting and election day voting. Therefore, it is necessary to purchase an additional set dedicated to early voting. A proposal is in hand from the vendor and Ms. Yowell asked for Board guidance on whether to undertake the purchase using current funds or submit a capital budget request. The Vice Chair moved to purchase these items using funds from the current budget. The motion was seconded by the Secretary and passed unanimously.

Sunday Early Voting

The option of scheduling one or more Sunday early voting opportunities was discussed at length. With the recognition that in other states that allow Sunday voting the impetus has come largely from religious organizations, the Board undertook outreach to local congregations to assess the level of community interest. While some interest was noted, there was scant enthusiasm for undertaking the level of promotion required to generate sufficient turnout to make Sunday voting worthwhile for this election.

The Democratic Party and League of Women Voters representatives spoke enthusiastically in favor of a Sunday voting trial, but Ms. Yowell and the Board members expressed concerns about the impact on staff members already working six days a week during the runup to the election. The conversation then shifted to alternatives that might expand voting opportunities while limiting adverse impacts on the staff. A consensus quickly developed in support of extending voting hours on Thursday evenings until 7:00 p.m. The Vice Chair moved to expand Thursday early voting hours to 7:00 p.m. for the entire early voting period. The Secretary seconded the motion, which then passed unanimously.

Additional Discussion Items

About redrawing precinct lines to reduce the size of precincts exceeding 4000 voters, the Vice Chair reported that nothing will happen until after the November election. Before undertaking the difficult and costly task of changing precinct boundaries we need additional guidance from the Department of Elections and likely a ruling from the office of the Attorney General on how the trend to expanded early voting impacts the enforcement of rules on size limits for precincts.

Concerning the FOIA request for ballot images and/or copies of the digital memory devices from the ballot scanners used in the November 2020 general election, Ms. Yowell reported that the City Attorney has received a ruling from the Department of Elections that these are not subject to release under the Virginia FOIA. Furthermore, according to the Department of Elections, Virginia election law does not allow for the removal of the ballots from the courthouse for inspection.

And, lastly, the Board members agreed to initiate the hiring process for a new General Registrar. The Board will complete the review and update of the job description for the position and request the City HR Department to post the job for a thirty-day period starting on September 15.

The next meeting will be held in the office of the Charlottesville General Registrar starting at 11:00 a.m. on Monday, September 13.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:43 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

James Nix, Secretary

Jon Bright, Chair

Anne Hemenway, Vice Chair