

MINUTES

Erie County Council

View More at
www.eriecountypa.gov



BOARD OF ELECTIONS MINUTES 4/20/2023

Call to Order

Chairman Bayle called the meeting to order at 3:00pm.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited by Chairman Bayle.

Roll Call

Members present: Chairman Bayle, Vice Chair Winarski (via zoom), André Horton.

Others present: Julie Slomski, Tom Talarico, Tonia Fernandez, Megan Moore

Hearing of the Public

Chairman Bayle addressed the public and asked if anyone would like to speak.

Freda Tepfer

Freda Tepfer, Erie: Ms. Tepfer stated her experience as a Judge of Election in November was that she noticed a lot of people who showed up at her precinct. She noted that these people were unaware that their polling place had changed. She expressed that she felt like it should be looked at because the people who vote infrequently did not know the polling place had changed. She added that, luckily, they did not have to go far to reach their precinct.

Margaret Watts

Margaret Watts, Washington Township: Ms. Watts stated she observed a polling place in Edinboro and there were two entrances with a threshold, creating a problem with accommodating individuals in wheelchairs. She recommended this be taken care of before the election. She stated the signage in front of the fire hall was very minimal and caused confusion for the Poll Workers, especially the individuals who infrequently vote. She disclosed there was an individual who set up a bake sale table, without being scheduled and without informing anyone else. She proclaimed the signage was terrible, along with the handicap access. She mentioned she wasn't sure if all polling places had the same issue but that was what she had experienced.

Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting

Previous minutes were approved on a motion from Mr. Horton, seconded by Mr. Winarski, and carried 3-0.

March 10, 2023

February 17, 2023

December 15, 2022

December 6, 2022

November 23, 2022

Election Report

Mrs. Fernandez disclosed that Logic and Accuracy testing of all voting equipment used at the polls was in progress. She stated that the logic and accuracy testing of the central scanners used to scan mail-in, absentee, and provisional ballots, were now complete and all results had read 100% accurately. She explained that the last day to register to vote or make changes to an existing registration was May 1st and there were no questions on this year's primary ballot, meaning only Voters registered with the Democratic or Republican Parties were eligible to vote in the May 16th Primary Election. She expressed that they encouraged all Voters to check their Voter registration either online at vote.pa.gov or by calling the office. She stated there were currently 172,677 registered voters in Erie County. She explained that 80,780 of those voters were with the Democratic Party, 67,057 were registered with the Republican Party, and 24,840 voters were registered with various minor parties or were not affiliated with any party. She gave a huge thank you to the Board of Elections for purchasing the KNOWiNk electronic poll pads. She informed them that they had successfully trained Poll Workers in the 42 precincts that would use the electronic poll pads in the upcoming primary election. She added that by the end of training, Poll Workers were happy with the equipment and confident in their process. She stated that a poll pad was set up and available in the voter registration office for anyone who wanted to try it out. She mentioned that all other Poll Workers who signed up to work the polls in the upcoming election were trained during the week of April 10th, 2022. She expressed her thanks to the Poll Coordinator, Sue Sheffield, and their Warehouse Manager, Jim Czerpak, for all of their efforts in making sure everyone involved had a clear understanding of the processes, procedures, and best practices for successfully running an election poll. She disclosed that a total of 589 Poll Workers had been trained so far and additional training would be held at the Courthouse on May 2nd and 3rd. She stated the office had partnered with Election IQ, their new mail vendor, and they have had great success in their communications and process-building efforts to get the ballots delivered to the Erie County Voters that had requested their ballot by mail. She stated they had processed 16,051 mail-on ballot requests and 982 absentee ballot requests. She added that out of those numbers, 13,586 Voters registered with the Democratic party and 3,253 registered with the Republican party. She mentioned that if the ballot were approved today, Voters could visit the elections office on Monday, April 24th to participate in early in-person voting. She clarified that Ms. Slomski verified that the security cameras for both ballot boxes were fully operational and they planned to open the ballot boxes on Monday, April 24th as well. She expressed they were prepared for a free, fair, and transparent election.

Ms. Slomski expressed her thankfulness for the efforts of the entire team leading up to the May 16th Municipal Primary Election, especially Mrs. Fernandez, as this is her first election in her official capacity of Director of Elections. She added that their Warehouse Manager/Custodian of Machines, Jim Czerpak,

worked diligently to find a solution for Harborcreek 2 and this would be discussed under new business, prior to the vote on the change. She disclosed that they have 18 Constables that had been approved by the President Judge and are eligible to work at the polls in their peacekeeping capacity. She added that they would be able to provide coverage for 105 precincts throughout the County. She noted that candidates that were in need of poll watcher certificates could email a list of registered voters to Deputy Clerk Megan Moore at mmoore@eriecountypa.gov. She explained that the Department of State posted guidance from PENNDOT regarding signage and Mrs. Fernandez would add it to the webpage. She added that it listed the specifics of signage on PENNDOT property. She quoted PENNDOT's guidance as follows: *Political signs can be placed on private property, outside of the highway right-of-way, with the property owners' permission. Political signs are considered temporary and campaigns are responsible for removing them immediately after the election is over.* She touched base on election night reporting, stating that in their 2022 general recap, they talked about the possibility of moving to outsourcing their election night report. She added that after having a discussion with Chairman Bayle and Mrs. Fernandez, they felt the best plan would be to stay with their in-house plans as they had previously done.

Chairman Bayle echoed the comments regarding how great the Team was and stated he had the opportunity to see them first hand, first in the office and then in the warehouse. He stated the machine was well rounded, impressive and he was confident in the process. He thanked everyone for their dedication, stating they did a great job and he could not give them enough credit. He questioned if there were any issues with USPS and Mrs. Fernandez replied there currently was not.

Mr. Horton stated the Election Office must be above reproach and it has been. He stated the machine was a fine oiled machine, but just like any other machine, hiccups do occur sometimes. He acknowledged that he was grateful and wanted to take the time to recognize Director Fernandez. He stated though she was just recently given the title, she had long done the work and without her, the office would not be anywhere near where it was now. He gave kudos to her and her entire team. He acknowledged the loss of a fellow coworker's spouse and offered his condolences.

Vice-Chairman Winarski stated on behalf of the Board, he appreciated the effort put forth by everyone in the Election Department. He recommended they keep up the good work but trusts they were all doing a great job.

Mr. Bayle thanked the media for being respectful of the Employees down at the warehouse and in the elections office. He recognized the fact the recent elections had been a little turbulent but he expressed his thanks to the media for coming down, covering the process, giving the Employees their anonymity, and not exposing them.

Old Business

Chairman Bayle announced there was no old business to be discussed at that time.

New Business

Mr. Bayle asked Mr. Talarico if there was a possible resolution regarding the guidance from The Department of State, relative to how they would follow it.

Mr. Talarico stated it was a resource for several county Election Boards throughout the state. He noted some follow it, some do not, and sometimes it's strictly political. He disclosed he was defending lawsuits involving actions against all of the Board of Elections and it had to do with the interpretation of the Secretary of State with regard to counting ballots and dating. He stated he noticed over the years that the decisions they had made locally were very much like the decisions of the Secretary of State. He stated that because the last two elections had been turbulent with regard to some of the issues, guidance was necessary. He added that they follow most of the guidance from the Secretary of State. He explained that they adopted their guidance when it came to County ballots and things like that, though he did not believe they were necessary this year. He stated that right now it was controlled by a court decision when it came to the ballots, regardless of the Secretary of State. He added that he was not aware of anything that had come down from the Secretary of State in the form of guidance that they had not already adopted in the past years.

Ms. Slomski questioned if they were following everything they had done previously before.

Mr. Horton stated they were following the court order.

Mr. Talarico stated that the court order went back to October of last year, but in that decision, the Supreme Court split, which meant they were not allowed to count undated and incorrectly dated ballots. He disclosed that back then, they had originally put out a 2 page decision and now they have a 40 page opinion, that was released in late March. He stated there was a lot of reasoning for it but, in the end, the result was pretty much the same. He noted the issue with the ballots being appropriately filled out and the ability to cure was still being fought in Commonwealth Court and Federal District Court. He stated that he had reviewed this with Mrs. Fernandez and they were on the same page.

Ms. Slomski questioned how they were going to handle someone who had not signed their envelope or misdated their ballot.

Mr. Horton and Mr. Talarico agreed that they would handle them the same way as they had before.

Mr. Horton stated they just wanted to make sure they followed their Solicitors and were in line with the court order, so they would do the same process as they did previously.

Approval of Ballot Layout and Offices for 2023 Erie

Mr. Horton made a motion to accept the ballots as done by the Elections Office, seconded by Mr. Winarski, and carried 3-0.

County General Primary Election

Polling Location Change: Harborcreek 2nd District moving from Fairfield Hose Company(4896 East Lake Rd) to Faith Lutheran Church(5414 East Lake Rd)

Ms. Slomski presented the sign that was posted at the previous and the new polling location to advertise the meeting for potential location change. She explained that Fairfield Hose is going through construction at the present time and apologized for having to move. She stated that Mr. Czerpak worked with the pastor at Faith Lutheran Church, which currently housed Harborcreek 1. She added that they would make sure there was a separate entrance and everything was clearly marked. She explained that Mr. Czerpak would post signage to let voters know where the correct location was and Mrs. Fernandez would work with her team to send out notifications via USPS, so even people who were receiving the mail-in ballot would still receive notification. She expressed her thanks to Faith Lutheran Church, for allowing them to add an additional location there. She also expressed her gratefulness to Mr. Czerpak for his diligence in getting everything situated before Election Day.

Mr. Bayle questioned if the electronic poll pads would be there with all of the unforeseen changes.

Mrs. Fernandez answered they would not be. She mentioned that there would be two different entrances, one for the new polling location and the other for the former location.

Mr. Horton stated the precinct was only six blocks down the street from Fairfield Hose and he believed Faith Lutheran Church should be more than adequate to address the ADA and ADA concerns. He stated there were some concerns regarding the visual impaired being able to vote with assistance but also privacy.

Mrs. Fernandez stated that Mr. Czerpak had been on top of that, so he revised the machine operator manual, making sure the Machine Operators were aware of how to utilize the ADA components on the voting machines. She added that he had also talked about it in training. She noted she reached out to the Judge of Elections at two precincts that had issues in the past, to make sure they were comfortable using the ADA components moving forward.

Mr. Horton made a motion to accept the polling location change, seconded by Mr. Winarski, and carried 3-0.

Adjournment

Mr. Horton made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 3:30pm.