

MINUTES

Erie County Council

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BOARD OF ELECTIONS MEETING MINUTES

Call to Order

Chairman Bayle called the meeting to order at 10:07am.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was led by Chairman Bayle.

Roll Call

Members present: Chairman Bayle, Vice Chair Winarski (via Zoom), Andre Horton (via Zoom)
Others present: Julie Slomski, Megan Moore, Jill Pennsy, Tonia Fernandez, Jim Czerpak

Hearing of the Public

There were no members of the public who wished to be heard.

Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting

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

November 3, 2022

November 7, 2022

April 20, 2023

Election Report

Mr. Czerpak stated a characteristic of a good company was the ability to respond to and handle change and the Election Department had a lot of changes within the past few years. He explained that they implemented new technology, such as the poll pads, and how it went over really well. He added that all of the inspectors that attended training left feeling good about the technology. He acknowledged the interdepartmental cooperation between the Election Department and the IT Department. He mentioned that they set up new technology and Wi-Fi capabilities that the poll pads needed to work correctly. He disclosed that they made improvements to the Machine Operator Manual and it was evident on Election Day with less calls and more technical competence. He added that they also made improvements to their supply and packing list outline that detailed every document, every supply, and where those items could be found. He stated they had gotten good feedback from the poll workers regarding that document.

Mrs. Pennsy gave an update on the CourtFund pay cards. She stated that during the election, they had issued 850 pay cards to poll workers, Constables, Roamers, and Pre-Canvass workers. She stated the majority of the cards were given out

during poll worker training. She added that those that did not attend had their cards placed in the Judge of Elections bag for them to grab at their precincts. She disclosed that the method worked better than mailing the cards, like they did last election. She noted a bonus was the money they saved on postage. She added that they changed the way they issued the cards. She stated that they created an excel spreadsheet with all the pertinent data they needed during the last election and this time they used Airtable, which contained the poll worker database the Election team uses, allowing them to have access to all the pertinent data that was needed. She explained that they would then assign each poll worker an account number that would be saved to their file in Airtable and then they were able to create the form to upload the funds. She stated another change that was made was to the pay plan at the end of the night. She disclosed that during the last election, her and Chairman Bayle were set up at a table in the hallway with laptops and internet problems. She stated that the poll workers would make their way to them with their pay sheets in order to be paid. She stated that during the most recent election, Councilman Winarski brought the pay sheets to her office, where she was able to use her desktop and had no internet issues to deal with. She noted they found that the system to work much better and quicker. She stated she had a lot of positive feedback on the cards again.

Ms. Moore stated the Pre-Canvassing went very well. She mentioned they had a lot of people who worked previously come back, so they had the general knowledge already. She explained that they took out the manual portion they did last time and just used the extractors, along with unfolding. She added that they previously used the manual letter openers. She disclosed they were able to take out a section of machinery and people that they did not need for that Election to see how it worked with the extractors alone. She stated they felt the Election was a good one to use to gauge how many they could get done on the extractors and how long it would take. She mentioned they had 12 workers, one being a per diem who runs the pre-canvass workers, and they were done opening the mail-in ballots at 2:30pm. She added they had a second shift that started opening ballots that were dropped off that day at 8pm and they were approximately done by 10:25pm. She disclosed they had a small problem with some of the envelopes being cut to close to the beginning but they were able to adjust. She added that any ballot that did not get read or had issues were put in by hand.. She stated they seemed interested in coming back and they hoped they would. She mentioned if they have a bigger election, they may have to reach out to the public for more people, but that would have to be played by ear. She added the only problem she saw going forward with a big election and mail-in ballots was space. She stated the pre-canvass workers did a great job and she was always impressed with the pre-canvassers.

Mrs. Fernandez stated that overall, the election was a huge success. She stated that in 2021 Primary, they had a 29.32% turnout and for the 2023 Primary, they had a 24.28% turnout, so it was a quiet day in the Elections Office. She mentioned part of that could have been because of the precincts having electronic poll pads and noted that they had 44 polls with electronic poll pads. She disclosed that the majority of phone calls they receive on election day were from

poll workers asking where some voters should be voting but with the electronic poll pads, they had that information at their fingertips. She stated they had 782 poll workers during the election. She noted they usually have 891 but they had a lot of call offs, which is normal. She explained that they usually have a lot of call offs every election and they do what they can to fill those spots. She stated they had enough poll workers but some polls were working with one less poll worker. She disclosed that they signed a contract with Election IQ and she could not say enough good things about them. She stated their services had made a big difference. She explained that they would work over the weekends to make sure the Elections Office had what they needed and were able to get 18,000 mail-in ballots out to voters within one week. She stated a big difference she saw with them was that they did not send out the mail-in ballots in segments, they instead sent them out in one load. She stated they would wonder where the ballots were and what was sent, so when Dan from Election IQ sent her a picture of all the ballots at the post office, it made her day. She added that they usually get calls from voters wondering where their ballots were and they did not receive any calls like that. She stated Election IQ was familiar with all of their processes, they knew how elections worked, and she was just impressed overall with them. She explained that she did not have a full report that morning because she was completing the 2% audit. She clarified that the audit was done last week but she was just putting the finishing touches on and getting the report ready to send to the Department of State. She added that the 2% audit matched everything that was put in the final report. She stated the team conducted reconciliation days after the election, where they went through and made sure that the number of people who signed in at the poll matched the number of ballots cast and they found that to be successful. She stated the team completed the adjudication process. She explained that they went in and resolved write-in votes and determined ambiguous marks on ballots. She noted what they generally see were voters putting an x over the oval, rather than filling it in, and they have to go in and create that vote. She stated she and her team had gone over the results many times. She declared she truly believed that the results given to the Election Board to approve were true and accurate. She added she believed that the 2023 Municipal Primary was a free, fair, transparent, and accessible election.

Ms. Slomski stated there were a total of 27,715 votes cast on Election day, along with 14,213 mail-in ballots and 71 provisional ballots, making a grand total of 41,999 ballots cast during the election. She added that there were 173,012 voters and 24.28% turnout. She gave kudos to the team for their efforts and kudos to the previous Board for allowing them to obtain the ballot sorter, the electronic poll pads, and change the adjudication process. She stated they set a lot of groundwork last year to get ready for the 2023 elections. She explained they were excited about the poll pads having the ability to text voters their polling location, only to find out the phone lines were down for several hours on Election day. She stated she worked with the Operations team who corrected the mistake and it should not happen again going forward. She added that the internet then went down unexpectedly. She explained they were working with IT and Operations to have universal power systems installed to help them with a quick back up and to make sure everything was connected to the generator to

avoid that happening again. She mentioned there was a new individual handling the phone systems and was unaware of the process. She stated she went to the office twice to work with them to figure everything out and she gave them credit for their efforts. She stated the phone system did come back up and, per the guidance of Chairman Bayle, a notification was placed on the website with guidance on how to reach one of the clerks. She gave a shout out to Deputy Clerk Moore for her efforts with the prec canvassing. She noted they were required by law to open the ballots at 7am continuously until they were done and again at 8pm for anything that came in after. She stated Ms. Moore did a great job of making sure they were on track, opening the ballots, and having them ready. She stated they had 16 Constables, who were on call and ready to help, that covered 110 precincts. She noted they had gotten lots of compliments from poll workers who were thankful that they had someone to reach out to if anything were to happen. She added that there were no major issues to report, just lots of compliments. She stated she had the opportunity to visit 10 precincts and it was a treat from her perspective. She stated she touched base with the poll workers who had double precincts that came together with the poll pads and check in table. She added a sweet spot for her was Millcreek 22 and Millcreek 23 because she had worked directly with the Judges there. She stated it was great to see the seamless process at such important precincts in Millcreek. She stated there were lots of compliments regarding the poll worker training and compliments regarding how they streamlined the process of making life easier. She added that she heard numerous times that they loved the poll cards and how easy it was going to be when they came in at the end of the night. She noted she was thankful for all the positive feedback from the precincts. She stated they had 11 valets helping at the end of the night. She explained that it was something that the previous Clerk, Mr. Smith, had started years ago by emailing County employees to see if they knew anyone willing to work on election night. She stated they did have some returnees and some new valets who seemed to enjoy the process. She noted that Vice-Chair Winarski was also thankful for that extra support and they had done a great job working with the Sheriff's team. She gave kudo's to the Sheriff's team, who kept communications going for the entire day. She touched base on Mr. Winarski's concerns regarding the results and process of releasing the information, stating that they could talk about it further as it goes along in preparation for the General Election.

Summarization of 2023 Municipal Primary Election

Questions and Comments from the Board

Chairman Bayle stated thank you was not enough for them because he knew what work everyone put in and he appreciated the cooperation between the Council's office, the Elections office, IT, and Operations. He stated he believed it was a testament that even though they lost phones and the internet, that they had enough procedures and policies in place that people still felt comfortable doing their job without calling. He added that it showed that they were well trained and had the supplies that they needed. He stated he stopped at a few precincts himself and it was important to show their faces. He stated the Constables were great because they gave a sense of security and order to the precincts. He added he was

glad that the new equipment that the previous Board voted on had shown so much promise and took a burden off of the staff and people they had brought in to work. He touched base on the costs and noted that with record inflation, costs were going to go up from postage, gas, and pay. He stated in 2021, the total that was spent was \$364,913.20 and in 2023, even with inflation, it went down to \$283,422.79. He stated he was glad they could refine policies and make things smoother, more effective, and more transparent. He stated he appreciated the work and hoped they would continue to work on that process to make sure that by the time fall rolls around, the mechanism of refining was perfect and stayed perfect.

Mr. Horton stated they appreciated all the hard work and effort from everyone involved and most of all, they appreciated the cost savings.

Mr. Winarski stated he appreciated the effort and commitment by everyone. He stated that everyone did a great job and money was saved. He stated Ms. Slomski mentioned the results and what he meant was people like to hear results sooner than they're even counted. He noted everyone did an awesome job on Election night and he looked forward to doing it again.

Mr. Bayle added that he was upfront and everyone that came in was in a good mood, which was impressive. He noted it was all smiles and compliments. He stated he was not looking forward to another night of what they experienced last election but he could not get over how many people wanted to thank them.

Ms. Slomski stated she was thankful for the opportunity to work with Election IQ and there was less stress and more savings. She stated they started them off with huge savings and helped out from the taxpayer's perspective. She added she wanted to make sure she paid homage to them.

Mrs. Fernandez stated that since the 2020 election, the introduction of Act 77, and the mail-in ballots, their office was responsible for a whole lot more. She added now that they had the ballot sorter and poll pads, there were even more responsibilities, especially with getting the ballot sorter ready every day. She stated she would have a proposal ready for the Board of Elections in the upcoming weeks to strengthen their processes.

Chairman Bayle stated it was understandable and he knew the workload drastically increased with the mail in ballots. He added it had not gone unnoticed and he knew that even though the new machinery took up some of the slack, there was still a need for restructuring and additional hires possibly. He stated these were things they would discuss before the next election cycle.

Certification of the 2023 Municipal Primary Results

Mr. Horton made a motion to approve the election results as reported by the Election staff and to certify the results of the 2023 Primary Election, was seconded by Mr. Winarski, and passed 3-0.

Adjournment

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Mr. Horton at 10:32am.

