

MINUTES

Erie County Council

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2-13-24 Board of Election MEETING MINUTES

Call to Order

Vice Chair Drexel called the meeting to order at 3:30PM.

Roll Call

Members Present: Charlie Bayle, Rock Copeland, Chris Drexel, Ellen Schauerman (Via Zoom), Jim Winarski (Via Phone), and Andre Horton (Via Zoom) and Terry Scutella (Arrived late)
Others Present: Karen Chillcott, Solicitor Jay Stranahan, Megan Moore, and Tonia Fernandez

Hearing of the Public

Hugh McCartney, a poll worker: Hugh suggested inviting politicians, especially those questioning the election process, to observe and understand the tight procedures. He mentioned his experience as a poll worker, highlighting the complexity of the process. Hugh emphasized the importance of inviting these individuals to witness the training and procedures firsthand, suggesting that filming and making it public would provide transparency. He concluded by stating that this could help dispel any misinformation about the process.

Freda Tepfer, City of Erie: Freda Tepfer, a judge of elections in the 6th Ward 17th District, expressed concerns as a poll worker regarding rumors about potential changes to mail-in ballot procedures. She mentioned a proposal by the County and an ongoing lawsuit related to mail-in ballots. Freda mentioned the idea of allowing voters to turn in their mail-in ballots at polling places and expressed some resistance to change. She highlighted the challenges poll workers face with managing additional materials and procedures, especially during poll closure. Freda requested that the County thoroughly consider and plan any changes to mail-in ballot collection at polling places before implementation.

Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting

Horton moved to approve the minutes from the meetings in June, September, September & November 2023, and January 2024. This was seconded by Copeland and carried in a 6 - 0 vote. (Scutella absent)

June 5, 2023

September 15, 2023

September 22, 2023

November 27, 2023

January 17, 2024

Election Report

Election Reporting

Mrs. Fernandez reported that as of the date of the meeting, there were 173,439 registered voters in Erie County. Of those, 80,014 were registered with the Democratic Party and 67,898 are Republican. In preparation for the upcoming Presidential Primary, the office has processed 14,565 applications. That day marked the last day for the office to receive nomination petitions for local Republican committee members to be placed on the ballot. The ballot Lottery was scheduled for February 21st at 9:00 a.m. in room 114a. Additionally, Logic and Accuracy Testing of voting equipment was scheduled for March 18th. Once the ballots were tested and approved, mailing would commence, with the expectation of ballots reaching mailboxes in the first week of April. Poll-worker training was set for the week of March 25th. Mrs. Fernandez expressed anticipation about including qualified student poll workers throughout the County and assured the attendees that she would keep everyone informed.

Mr. Horton raised a question and observation for Karen and Tonia. He noted that April 8th was the last day to register to vote for the primary, coinciding with the day of the Solar Eclipse. He expressed uncertainty about whether there was a need for an extension or if guidance should be sought.

Karen Chillcott reported on her discussion with Jonathan Marks from the Department of State regarding Mr. Horton's concern about the voter registration deadline coinciding with the Solar Eclipse on April 8th. Karen informed the attendees that Mr. Marks had put the matter forward to the Secretary of the State and their legal counsel to determine whether there should be an extension for voter registration or if the day would remain open for people to report to the courthouse. She noted that, at that point, there was to be no security at the courthouse and the Sheriff's Department is to not be available on April 8th. Karen highlighted potential traffic and emergency concerns due to congestion in the city on that day. To address these concerns, Karen mentioned that she had reached out to PEMA (Pennsylvania Emergency Management Agency) for any directives. She expressed hope that she would receive more information soon and would provide updates as they became available.

Mr. Horton thanked Ms. Chillcott for the update.

Ms. Chillcott reported that software options had been reviewed for election night reporting, and Scytl, which had extensive experience in this area and served high-profile clients nationwide, had been the top choice. The IT Department would assist with election night reporting, as usual. It would be a three-year contract with Scytl, which would not be covered by Act 88 funds, but could be allocated from other resources. The software provided a clear overview of election results on computers and offered a mobile version for easy access on election night.

Equipment Upgrades

Chillcott stated with regard to equipment upgrades, the plan was to utilize ACT 88 funds for the purchase of two new scanners. This purchase, including service contracts, would amount to approximately \$60,000 for both scanners. The two older scanners would then serve as redundancy for recounts, as different models were required for recount processes. All equipment would undergo Logic and Accuracy testing. This upgrade would facilitate the processing of the increasing volume of mail-in ballots, expediting the election night procedures.

Warehouse Storage

Chillcott stated the planned improvements to warehouse storage due to limited space with the increasing number of scanners, ballot marking devices, and other items currently housed there. Times were discussed for a tour of the area.

Student Poll Worker Program

Chillcott reported that the Student Poll Worker Program had been launched. The projected cost associated with the program was estimated at approximately \$23,000 if operated at full capacity. However, the Integrity Grant was also available to cover these expenses. It was not expected to reach full capacity in the program's first year, but there was hope for strong engagement at this level.

Other**Questions and Comments from the Board**

3:43p.m. Copeland made the motion to move to the Executive Session, seconded by Bayle.

4:22p.m. Copeland made the motion to return from the Executive Session, seconded by Scutella.

Adjournment

4:23p.m. Copeland made a motion to adjourn the meeting.