

MINUTES

Erie County Council

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André R. Horton, Chair
 Chris Drexel, Vice Chair
 Charlie Bayle
 Rock Copeland
 Ellen Schauerman
 Terry M. Scutella
 Jim Winarski

BOARD OF ELECTIONS SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES 05/09/2024

Call to Order

Chair Horton called a Board of Elections Special meeting to order at 03:45PM.

Roll Call

Members Present: Chair Horton; Vice Chairman Drexel; Mr. Bayle; Mr. Copeland; Mr. Scutella; Mrs. Schauerman; Mr. Winarski
 - Zoom

Staff Present: Clerk Karen Chillcott; Deputy Clerk Megan Moore; Tonia Fernandez

Hearing of the Public

Approval of Minutes of Previous Meeting

03-12-24 Special Meeting

Schauerman moved to approve the minutes from the March 12, 2024, Meeting. This was seconded by Scutella and carried in a 7 - 0 vote.

Election Report

Chillcott provided the Elections report, detailing the Primary Election turnout of approximately 25%. The team deployed regular staff along with 984 additional workers. The estimated cost of the Election was \$279,562.06, funded primarily by the \$202,168 Election Integrity grant, with the county contributing \$77,393. The report highlighted efficient fund utilization and smooth operations at all polling sites. Tonia may have additional comments to share.

Tonia presented additional details to the Election report. To uphold election integrity, the team conducted a thorough reconciliation process for all 149 polling sites, comparing ballot counts with voter sign-ins. Every provisional ballot was accounted for, with 105 fully counted, 20 partially counted, and 31 rejected due to registration issues. In accordance with the Pennsylvania Election Code, a 2% statistical sample was conducted. Ballots from Erie 5-19, Lake City Borough, and Fairview District-3 were recounted, aligning with Election Day votes. Results were submitted to the Pennsylvania Department of State per Election Integrity Grant requirements. Additionally, the team participated in a statewide risk-limiting audit, submitting ballot manifests and candidate totals by batch, though Erie County wasn't selected for manual batch tallies. Pre- and post-election processes were diligently executed to ensure the accuracy of certified results.

Schauerman expressed gratitude for everyone's hard work, emphasizing the team's exceptional performance. She reiterated appreciation for the collective effort and acknowledged the team's continued success.

Chillcott shared insights on the new election reporting software, highlighting its versatility for accessing and visualizing data on both mobile and desktop platforms. She mentioned various export reports and visualization options available. Additionally, she provided statistics on mail-in ballots: 15,237 requested and 12,684 returned for the Democratic Party, and 4,672 requested and 3,504 returned for the Republican Party. She emphasized the importance of analyzing these figures to ensure unbiased procedures and accommodate any behavioral differences between parties effectively.

Bayle praised the smooth return process to the Courthouse post-election, noting improved efficiency and the positive demeanor of returning individuals, including judges and staff.

Schauerman emphasized the considerable improvement in speed compared to the prior courthouse navigation process. She noted that the previous wait times, which could extend up to an hour, were now significantly reduced, resulting in a safer and more efficient process for all involved.

Chair Horton noted the significant and positive change in the election process, with feedback from the approximately 970 deployed workers being overwhelmingly positive. This time, there were no complaints, indicating a noticeable improvement in both internal and external behavior.

Bayle praised the staff and process refinement during the election report discussion, expressing optimism for continued success. He appreciated their efforts and questioned how much closer they could get to perfection given their outstanding work.

Scutella agreed with previous comments and expressed frustration when negativity is directed towards the office. He requested a check in with the Asbury Nature Center due to concerns on Election Day and wished to know if there have been any complaints.

Chillcott reported that on Election Day, they operate a live help center where staff answer phone calls and text messages throughout the day. This service is available to anyone, including polling site personnel and voters. They are prepared to address any issues, whether technical or related to misunderstandings, such as parking or campaign signage. Chillcott emphasized their readiness to resolve issues promptly, though she was unaware of any incidents during the last election. She expressed a continual commitment to improving this process.

Chair emphasized accommodating voter preferences by providing various voting methods. While acknowledging the popularity of polling site voting, he highlighted the importance of offering alternative options. He expressed the commitment to continually enhance these alternatives.

Drexel described the event as impressive, expressing satisfaction with being part of it.

Chillcott concluded with gratitude for having the Board's support and highlighted the positive engagement from the community. She appreciated the Board's trust in implementing changes and acquiring necessary equipment. Chillcott commended the Board for being easy to work with, ultimately resulting in improvements for both voters and election workers.

New Business

Approval of the Purchase of Two Stackers for the AgilisFalcon™ Election Mail Sorting & Processing System from Runbeck Election Services, Inc.

Chair Horton remarked on the Approval of the Purchase of Two Stackers for the AgilisFalcon™ Election Mail Sorting & Processing System from Runbeck Election Services, Inc. This was moved by Bayle, seconded by Drexel and the Chair opened the floor for discussion.

Chillcott provided details on the possible approval before the Board for the purchase of two stackers, which would enhance the current stacker and sorter machine. These additional bins would enable the addition of a sorting mechanism, allowing sorting by district. Currently, in the event of a recount, ballots need to be rescanned without district separation, causing inefficiencies. With the new sorting capability, this process would be more streamlined.

Chillcott noted that this enhancement would be covered by the Election Integrity Grant, thus not incurring any cost to the county.

Roll call vote carried and passed 7-0.

Possible Certification of the 2024 Erie County General Primary Election Results

Chair Horton read in title only Possible Certification of the 2024 Erie County General Primary Election Results. This was moved by Scutella, seconded by Schauerman.

Schauerman questioned if the certification form was printed and available to sign?

Chair confirmed that upon adopting the election results, he would sign the document, and it would be circulated thereafter.

Roll call vote carried and passed 7-0.

Questions and Comments from the Board

Copeland brought up the topic of dropboxes, mentioning Kyle's recent email advocating for their implementation. He expressed his long-standing concern about the limited accessibility of dropboxes, particularly in rural areas.

Copeland highlighted the distance some voters must travel to reach the county's only dropbox and emphasized the importance of making voting more accessible. He noted ongoing discussions with Karen about utilizing the remaining election Integrity Grant funds for this purpose. Copeland acknowledged logistical concerns such as security and camera installation but proposed discussing potential solutions to overcome these barriers. He invited further exploration of the issue for potential implementation either this year or in the future.

Schauerman responded, noting that the State is currently reviewing the issue of dropboxes due to concerns about ballot security. The Election Board is responsible for preventing ballot stuffing, cameras must be installed, but there is uncertainty about ensuring their effectiveness. As a result, counties are advised against installing additional dropboxes until the State's decision is known.

Chair contributed to the discussion by recalling Erie County's decision to install a dropbox when the opportunity arose, despite previous discussions about having multiple dropboxes. Initially advocating for multiple dropboxes, he has since learned about legal issues surrounding them and has been involved in court proceedings regarding continuous footage of the dropboxes. Chair remains open to the idea of additional dropboxes but emphasizes the need to consider legal implications and costs. He suggests discussing the possibility of purchasing dropboxes while the Election Integrity Grant is still available. Chair appreciates the topic being raised for discussion but notes that it's not a decision to be settled immediately.

Adjournment

Scutella moved to adjourn at 04:05 PM.