

MINUTES

Erie County Council

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Andre Horton, Chair
Chris Drexel, Vice Chair
Charlie Bayle
Rock Copeland
Ellen Schauerma
Terry Scutella
Jim Winarski

SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES 9-6-24

Call to Order

The meeting was called to order by Chair Andre Horton.

Roll Call

Members present: Rock Copeland, Terry Scutella
Members present via Zoom: Chair, Andre Horton; Vice Chair, Chris Drexel;
Charlie Bayle, Jim Winarski
Absent: Ellen Schauerma
Others Present: Karen Chillcott, Megan Moore, Tonia Fernandez

Hearing of the Public

There were no members of the public that spoke.

Election Report

Dates for Logic and Accuracy Testing

Ms. Chillcott stated that Logic and Accuracy would begin September 23 at 9:00am in the office and at the warehouse. The Chair stated this was done every election for the machines to go out. Mr. Copeland questioned if the ballot needed approval prior to the testing. Mrs. Fernandez said the poll pads would be tested on September 30, and asked if he wanted to know how long it would take? Mr. Copeland reiterated his question about if the Election Board would need to approve the ballots before the test decks were made for Logic and Accuracy. Ms. Fernandez stated the Board would approve the ballot after the Logic and Accuracy testing. Mr. Copeland started to question when Mail Ballots would be sent out. The Chair asked that questions be held until the end that were not directly about Logic and Accuracy.

New Business

Possible authorization of county funds to pay for postage on Mail In and Absentee ballots

Ms. Chillcott stated there was discussion with the public and some Board of Elections members about supplying pre-paid postage for the return Mail Ballot envelopes. She noted there were approximately 27,000 applications for Mail Ballots and the numbers would go up. She supplied an estimation of 40,000 Mail Ballots costing \$35,000, with a 100% return rate; she stated pre-paid postage was used during the pandemic in 2020, but has not been a continued practice. She noted continued discussion about other drop boxes for Mail Ballots, and how to make things easier for the public. She said this was one of the options, and because it was over \$25,000 and there were varying opinions on it, the Board of Elections should decide.

Questions and Comments from the Board

Mr. Copeland stated he had been one of the people discussing pre-paid postage, and felt very strongly about providing the best opportunity for all votes to count.

He offered this idea as bipartisan. He proposed that there was no cost on election day to vote and people should not incur the cost to vote by mail, and have needless restrictions put on their right to vote.

Mr. Scutella questioned where the funds would be allocated from to pay for the postage. Ms. Chillcott replied it would be paid out of the Elections Department budget, but there was money in the budget for it and no supplemental appropriation was needed. Mr. Scutella questioned what other locations were offered for ballot drop boxes and how they would be protected. Ms. Chillcott stated that magistrate's offices and the libraries were brought up. She said, for security purposes more time was needed to establish a plan.

Mr. Horton stated although Ms. Chillcott brought up the ballot drop boxes, he asked the Board members to stay on topic of pre-paid postage.

Mr. Scutella asked if the Elections Office had any thoughts on the pre-paid envelopes. Ms. Chillcott stated it was just a matter of the ballot going to print and knowing if it was pre-paid, and moving funds within the budget to pay for it.

Mr. Copeland probed if costs would only be incurred for returned ballots. Ms. Chillcott stated costs would be incurred by the number of returned ballots which was generally about 75% of requested ballots.

Mr. Copeland made a motion to approve pre-paid postage for return ballot envelopes. The motion was seconded by Mr. Scutella and carried 5-1.

Yea: Copeland, Drexel, Scutella, Winarski, Horton

Nay: Bayle

Mr. Horton suggested that Board members keep the idea of ballot drop boxes in their periphery to discuss at a later time.

Ms. Fernandez offered that the Mail Ballots would be sent in early October.

Mr. Horton thanked her for affirming that since the D.O.S. put out something about it happening by September 18th.

Adjournment

Mr. Horton adjourned the meeting on a motion from Mr. Scutella at 12:15pm.