

MINUTES
Wicomico County Board of Elections
345 Snow Hill Road, Salisbury, MD 21804
Monday, September 21, 2020

ATTENDEES: Brad Bellacicco, Board President, Republican Member, present in office
Katrina Purnell, Board Secretary, Democratic Member, present in office
Joseph Collins, Republican Member, present in office
Catherine Keim, Republican Member, present in office
Sharon Morris, Democratic Member, via phone
Peter Golba, Board Attorney, via phone
Anthony Gutierrez, Election Director, present in office
Dionne Church, Deputy Director, via phone

ABSENT: None

GUESTS: None

The Wicomico County Board of Elections met for a special meeting on Monday, September 21, 2020 at 9:00 a.m.

Brad Bellacicco, Board President, called the meeting to order, conducting a roll call of the Board members, and declared that there was a quorum present.

Brad Bellacicco voluntarily led the Pledge of Allegiance and the Board chose to recite The Lord's Prayer.

BOARD ATTORNEY'S REPORT:

None.

NEW BUSINESS:

The Board resumed discussion regarding the addition of two more voting centers to cover the east and west sides of the County.

Much discussion centered on the availability of equipment and carts for the proposed number of vote centers, and whether there was a possibility of adding even more locations. The Election Director reports that the Wicomico Civic Center (Early Voting) will require 10 carts with equipment, PPE and ballots, and all other voting centers will require 5 carts with equipment, PPE and ballots. It is recommended to have backup equipment held in case of the need for emergency deployment. For the proposed number of locations, the total required would be 50 carts. With 58 carts in our possession, this leaves 8 carts available for emergencies. Also discussed were memory sticks needed for voting locations, as well as for canvassing and pre-processing mail-in ballots as well as for Logic and Accuracy testing. SBE has said they have a limited number of memory sticks available.

The Election Director reported that he has alerted the transportation company that there will be additional carts to transport. He will confirm this with them following this meeting.

Joseph Collins stated that SBE has created a situation whereby a larger number of people will be concentrated into fewer locations, which could create a safety issue with regards to COVID. He is also concerned about the possible disenfranchisement of some voters. He asked what is preventing us from holding a normal election with all regular polling places?

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Sharon Morris cited that SBE has not indicated a definitive limit on the number of voting locations a county can open.

Brad Bellacicco stated that if we were to conduct a process different from other counties (regular assigned polling places vs. vote centers available to any voter regardless of where they live) it would potentially create confusion.

Joseph Collins reiterated his concerns of concentrating voters in fewer voting location, and feels that this is a mistake. He asked what would be necessary to open as many locations as possible, and reiterated that SBE is responsible for this situation.

The Election Director stated that, in his opinion, and in an effort to limit possible risks, we could manage 9 vote centers.

Brad Bellacicco surmised that having vote centers in which voters may vote at any location they wish could potentially increase voter turnout.

Joseph Collins highlighted the need to ensure that all carts with equipment are sealed. The Election Director stated that this is standard procedure. Delivery of equipment carts will be Thursday prior to Election Day.

Katrina Purnell raised concerns regarding the surveillance of voting locations and drop box locations, including the schools while the equipment carts are stored there. The Election Director will request that the Sheriff's Office provide surveillance of voting locations and drop box locations; and provide traffic control on Election Day.

Sharon Morris asked how long it will take to have the signs printed once the voting locations are confirmed. The Election Director stated that one company's turnaround is approximately one week.

Joseph Collins wished to clarify his concern that, should one of the drop boxes be stolen, those individuals could effectively disenfranchise another group.

Regarding the schools where the equipment carts are to be delivered, Brad Bellacicco stated that the Election Director should inquire if the closets or halls where they will be locked are under some type of video surveillance.

Katrina Purnell asked if, since he schools are currently closed, can the Sheriff's officers be reallocated for this purpose?

After much debate, Sharon Morris made a motion that this Board approve 2 additional voting locations: Willards Elementary School and Westside Intermediate School in Hebron; seconded by Sharon Morris, passed unanimously. Sharon Morris agreed that this Board has been placed in a compromised position, understanding that the limit was intended to reduce the spread of COVID.

Joseph Collins made a motion to reconstitute his motion from the previous meeting, to open all regular polling places, and wishes to have his name removed from this current motion; seconded by Catherine Keim.

Catherine Keim expressed concern regarding continually changing. Katrina Purnell said that prior to the August Board meeting, the Governor directed local boards to utilize high schools, and that there was a lack of information.

The motion to rescind the aforementioned motion regarding the additional 2 vote centers was called to question, with a vote of 2 in favor, 3 against. The motion, therefore did not carry.

Sharon Morris asked whether we have the capacity to perform a normal election.

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Brad Bellacicco stated that a great deal would be required to make this happen, and that, should cases of COVID spike significantly, all plans would be for naught.

The Deputy Director stated that opening all regular polling places at this point would have disastrous effect, highlighting, in addition to all other considerations, a new Election Judge Coordinator and a very recently hired Acting IT Coordinator, who is currently out of the office due to illness.

Katrina Purnell inquired as to the maximum number of voting centers we can manage.

The Deputy Director stated that the state recommended counties utilize high schools in addition to the Early Voting Center.

Brad Bellacicco reiterated that, subsequent to this, we added 2 more vote centers, and now we want to add more; following this the State indicated to do as many as we are able. Mr. Bellacicco indicated that he approves of the existing plan of 9 total vote centers.

Sharon Morris made a motion to confirm the current 7 vote centers, with the addition of Willards Elementary School and Westside Elementary School in Hebron; seconded by Catherine Keim, passed with four votes in favor, and one, Joseph Collins, against.

Sharon Morris stated she agrees that this process should have been handled differently and will be addressed at a later time.

Brad Bellacicco stated that this situation has not been of our choice, and we need to go forward.

The Board discussed having the Election Director create a press release to include a statement to this effect: To better serve our community and doing the best we can in a constantly changing situation, and to conduct a safe and open election... then listing the various options for voting. Brad Bellacicco said that he will create a draft of the press release and email to the Board this week.

Catherine Keim reiterated the need for the postcard mailing and signs in order to inform voters.

The Election Director indicated that SBE should approve the 2 additional vote centers at their meeting on Thursday.

MISCELLANEOUS:

None.

MEMBERS TIME:

None.

CLOSED SESSION:

None.

ADJOURNMENT:

A motion was made by Sharon Morris to adjourn this meeting; seconded by Katrina Purnell, passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 10:20 a.m.

The next regular meeting will be Wednesday October 21, 2020 at 9:00 a.m., unless a special meeting is required prior to that date. The meeting will be conducted at the local board office unless County directives become more stringent as to preclude an in-person meeting.

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Respectfully Submitted

 10-21-2020
Brad Bellacicco, Board President Date

 10/21/20
Bill Blockston, Recorder Date