

Meeting Minutes
Joint Board of Registrars/Board of Elections Meeting
May 22, 2019

The meeting was called to order at 12:05 p.m. and the Pledge of Allegiance of was recited. Board of Registrars members in attendance were Ms. Andrews, Chairman McRae, Mr. Norse, Mr. Pannell and Mr. Slay. Voter Registration staff in attendance were Ms. German, Mrs. Bostick and Mr. Pflager. Board of Elections members in attendance were Ms. Heimes, Ms. Hodge, Mr. Lang, Chairman Mahoney and Ms. Rauers. Elections staff present were Mr. Bridges, Ms. Trabue and Mr. Carney. Ms. Andrews made a motion to approve the minutes of the April 24, 2019 Board of Registrars meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Norse and carried unanimously.

Old Business:

State Election Board (SEB) Penalty

An issue arose with the improper redistricting of the Sweetwater Subdivision back during the November 2015 election. The issue was investigated and a Consent Order and penalty were issued. The County Attorney's office approved the Order and payment of penalty in 2016, but due to unknown reasons, the check for the penalty was not processed by the County Finance Department. Mr. McRae confirmed that paperwork accepting the Order and penalty were resubmitted and the payment was issued and accepted and the case is now closed. Mr. Norse inquired about whether there were any late payment or other extra fees. Ms. German indicated that there were not any additional fees that were paid.

New Business:

GA House Bill (HB) 316

Mr. McRae requested an update, if available, regarding the status of implementing new voting equipment called for by the prior passage of HB 316. Ms. German indicated that RFPs were due back on April 23rd to the Secretary of State's office. Per the most recent guidance from that office, a decision on which vendor will be selected for the new equipment will come in late June or July. Mr. Bridges indicated that, to his knowledge, there were four bids from vendors submitted.

A rollout plan is being discussed at the Secretary of State level but cannot be finalized until a vendor is selected and the features and operation of the chosen equipment are known. There will be training for County staff on the new equipment led by the vendor, but a schedule for that training has not been determined at this point. Mr. Bridges mentioned preliminary indications that Chatham County will receive an increased number of devices versus current inventory. This indication is based on a rough estimate and is not guaranteed.

Mr. Bridges also mentioned that Chatham County is not a pilot county to test the new equipment in November 2019 elections.

A member of the public wanted to know if the new type of voting machines we will be getting have been used in other states or jurisdictions. It is not known which exact type of machine that Chatham County will be using but Mr. Bridges did say that, to the best of his knowledge, several of the types under consideration had been used in other localities.

Voting Equipment Legal Challenge - Judge Totenberg

Ms. Heimes from the Board of Elections requested an opinion from Board of Registrars members who are attorneys about the present legal challenge to the current voting equipment before Judge Totenberg and how a ruling may affect conduct of the November 2019 election. Several members of the Board of Registrars indicated that a recent procedural step was completed but that this did not provide an overall indication of how Judge Totenberg may rule on the merits of the case. It was generally agreed that a ruling which may disqualify the current voting machines from use in the November 2019 elections would present major logistical challenges for both the Board of Registrars and the Board of Elections.

City of Pooler Poll Realignment

Mr. Bridges distributed maps outlining the potential realignment of polls in Pooler and addition of two new polling places. Mr. Bridges provided an overview of the process when realigning polling places. Mr. Bridges indicated that the Board of Elections is seeking to minimize the small pockets of voters when realigning. Additionally, realigning in the smartest way is complex because of potential further population growth and a resulting potential future imbalance of number of voters in newly aligned polls. An initial plan has been developed that will be presented to the Pooler City Council this summer for their input before realignment actually begins.

New advance voting site - Pooler City Hall

Ms. German indicated that, starting in November 2019, a new advance voting site will be placed at the Pooler City Hall. This new site will be opened for the final week of early voting only (i.e. the week directly before Election Day). Staff from the Board of Registrars office will operate the site.

Public Discussion

A member of the public inquired about training for the public on the new equipment. Mr. Bridges indicated that a public training plan will be developed by the Secretary of State's office that the Board of Elections may supplement. Since a new equipment vendor has not been selected at this time, however, additional details regarding the public training plan will be developed at a time later this year.

A member of the public asked about the interval for joint Board meetings and if the frequency of joint Board meetings could be increased. Mr. McRae indicated that it had been about a year since the last joint meeting had been held. Mr. McRae indicated that he would be happy to discuss more frequent joint meetings going forward with Mr. Mahoney, Chairman of the Board of Elections.

Members of the public expressed concerned about not having enough sample ballots at polling places particularly in Pooler. The Board of Elections indicated that they will work to have more sample ballots available at polling places in the future. Mr. McRae mentioned that part of the concern about long lines in November 2018 was partially due to the length of the ballot and citizens not having consulted a sample ballot before arriving at the polling place.

A member of the public requested confirmation that the present DRE voting machines cannot be reused between Advance Voting and Election Day polling. Mr. Bridges indicated that that was correct based on both the Elections Code and SEB Rules. Both of those prohibit reusing machines (which are tabulation devices as well) in another part of the same election and machines can also not be reused due to a testing requirement which must be completed at least 72 hours prior to the start of an election. Mr. Bridges further clarified that the new ballot-marking devices we will be receiving due to the passage of HB 316 are not a tabulation device themselves, it may be possible to reuse those machines in future elections but that it will depends on new rules that the SEB has yet to draft or implement. It was indicated further that Express Polls can be reprogrammed but that Advance Voting Express Polls and Election Day Express Polls differ in their functionality. The Advance Voting Express Polls have district, precinct and combo keys for each ballot style and therefore anyone, no matter the district or precinct, can vote at an Advance Voting site. Express Polls that are used on Election Day only have keys for the precinct where the Express Poll is being used as well as an electronic electors list for that precinct only.

A member of the public expressed concern that other areas besides Pooler would benefit from additional Advance Voting sites but that this has not been considered by the Board of Registrars. The Board responded that they would take this request into consideration but that no requests for additional Advance Voting sites had been received at this time.

A member of the public requested the Board of Registrars meeting information. The Board meets on the fourth Wednesday of each month at 12:00 P.M. at the Board of Registrars office.

A member of the public inquired about re-registration of felons who had served their sentence. Felons who have completed all aspects of their sentence can re-register to vote. It was indicated that information about this requirement may be available through the Probation or Parole office.

A member of the public also asked about what information is provided to the schools regarding voter registration. Ms. German indicated that letters are sent to each school advising them of April as Voter Registration Month for students and that training for school officials is also provided by the Board of Registrars each year. In addition, Deputy Registrar/Third Party training is offered on the first Friday of each month at 10:00 a.m. at the Board of Registrars office.

Processing of Absentee Ballots

The Board of Elections requested that the Board of Registrars and staff work with them on developing a plan to ensure that their Absentee Ballot team members can begin processing absentee ballots earlier on Election Day. The staffs of each office agreed to work together on this matter. Additionally, Ms. Rauers from the Board of Elections requested that staff provide more communication on the deadlines for voters to return their absentee ballots. Ms. Heimes suggested that boxes be placed at all Post Office locations for absentee ballots. Ms. German indicated that this was not possible as the County would have to pay for a PO Box at each location. A member of the public asked a related question about concerns from the November 2018 election on completing the back of the absentee ballot outer envelope. Ms. German indicated that the information on the back of the envelope is being revised but that the revision has not been published yet.

Board of Registrars/Board of Elections Coordination

To further cooperation, it was highlighted that the 2020 Registrars/Elections Conference will be held December 8th-11th at the Savannah Marriott Riverfront. More information to be published later.

New Board Terms

Mr. McRae stated that nominations are being accepted for two seats on the Board of Registrars with four year terms beginning July 1, 2019. Nominations are due June 4, 2019 due to District Attorney Meg Heap with a copy to Ms. German. Nominations will be presented to Grand Jury on June 5 for consideration

Voter Totals

Mr. Pannell assumed control of the meeting and requested updated totals on the number of registered voters. Ms. German indicated 197,264 active voters, 12,479 inactive voters and 2,627 pending voters. Pending voters are individuals who have completed a registration application but whose application had missing information or information that could not be verified.

Challenges/Deletions

Mr. Pannell requested the challenge/deletion report. Ms. German stated that there were 41 deceased voters, 2 moved out of county/state voters and 19 voters who simply requested deletion of their name from the voter rolls. Ms. German indicated that these voters were notified of their challenge and provided an opportunity to attend or submit information disputing their challenged status. None of these voters were in attendance or submitted documentation to dispute. Mr. Norse made a motion to approve deletion of the voters outlined by Ms. German. Mr. Slay seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

The Board of Registrars meeting adjourned at 1:53 p.m.