

SPALDING COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS & REGISTRATION

Regular Meeting Minutes

April 9, 2024

The regular meeting of the Spalding County Board of Elections and Registration was held at the County Courthouse Annex, 109 East Solomon Street at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, April 9, 2024. Attending were: Chair, Ben Johnson, presiding; James Newland; Jim O'Brien; and Dexter Wimbish. Also present were Elections Supervisor Kim Slaughter, Attorney Stephanie Windham, and Teresa Watson to record minutes.

Call to Order – Chairman Johnson called the meeting to order.

Invocation/Moment of Silence - Invocation was given by James Newland.

Pledge to the Flag - Pledge was led by Dexter Wimbish.

Citizen Comment

No one was signed to speak.

Adoption of the Agenda

Motion/second to adopt the agenda as amended to include presentation of the recently revised Bylaws under New Business by Jim O'Brien/Dexter Wimbish carried unanimously.

Minutes

Dexter Wimbish noted that he was incorrectly shown as being in attendance at the March 26 Special Called Meeting. Motion/second to approve Minutes of the February 13, 2024, Regular Meeting and the March 26, 2024, Special Called Meeting as amended, by James Newland/Jim O'Brien carried unanimously.

**Special Note* following this meeting: The Election Supervisor confirmed with Board Member Dexter Wimbish that he was not at the March 26 Special Called Meeting but at the March 18th Regular Monthly meeting for the Certification as reflected in the March 18th, 2024 minutes. Therefore, the amendment of the minutes for the March 26th meeting minutes is unnecessary and the minutes as presented to the Board at the April 9, 2024 meeting are correct.*

Report of Elections Supervisor

Ms. Slaughter presented the monthly Registration Report prepared by Sandra Hardy, Voter Registration Coordinator. Ms. Slaughter reviewed current statistics, i.e., 51,810 registered voters, 1,002 DDA voter transactions, 242 transfers, 116 new voters, 152 address changes within the county, 30 name changes, 462 DDS updates with no change to registration, and 62 deceased voters. As for mail in/walk in, there were 13 new voters, 12 transfers, and 10 updates with no changes. There were 78 new voters online. *My Voter Page* registered 47 updates. The last report on felons from the Secretary of State's Office was February 24, 2024.

She also provided an update on the March 12 Presidential Preference Primary election and ensuing hand count, noting that it went very smoothly for the most part, but one issue was the ICP Scanner which exhibited some delay in operations. Other counties cited the same type of problem, and this is one issue we will observe closely in future elections.

She mentioned the updates for the upcoming May 21 election, noting that Logic and Accuracy testing will begin April 15. It will be advertised in the upcoming Friday, April 12, 2024 Griffin Daily News weekend edition.

Qualifying was reviewed for those candidates who qualified between March 4-March 8, 2024. Details were provided for the ongoing office renovations. A walk-through is scheduled for Thursday, April 18, 2024, from 9 to 11 a.m. Notice will advertise a possible quorum.

Poll Worker training will begin next week and continue for two weeks.

She reminded the Board that it voted to reschedule the May and June meetings for Certification of Election purposes to May 28 at 10 am and June 24 at 10 am respectively. These dates are posted on the website as well.

Precinct cards were received that affect all Spalding County voters due to the Court ordered Redistricting of State House lines. Distribution of the precinct cards began this week.

She then reviewed important dates for the election (May 21), registration deadline (April 22), advance voting dates/times (April 29-May 3, May 6-May 11, and May 13-May 17 from 9 am to 5 pm), absentee ballots applications received (May 10) and ballots mailed. She provided a list of candidates for all offices on the ballot for the May 21 General Primary/Non-Partisan Election.

In conclusion, Ms. Slaughter brought forward a recommendation to remove the mandated hand count for the upcoming May Election implemented by the Board in 2023. While she desires transparency and accountability to ensure integrity in the process, she must also deal with the reality that it is challenging to acquire and retain Poll Workers needed for the process and require additional long hours on top of what the Staff presently work. She stated that she cannot risk losing any poll workers or staff due to long hours and exhaustive workloads. Additionally, the short turnaround time frame between the May election and the probable June runoff is very problematic if we do hand counts, considering we must also do Logic and Accuracy testing, as well. Results of the two hand counts performed to date have not identified serious issues, reflecting that the text on the ballot coincides with that of the results loaded into the Election Management System on election night. Her main concern lies with the QR Code, which represents the ballot style for votes. We have found a few errors at different times within the electronic ballot delivery, which is the responsibility of the Secretary of State's Office. The SOS Office was notified of these discrepancies.

Extensive discussion followed. It was noted that the Secretary of State Risk Limit Audit may increase in the future. Everyone is awaiting further information. A change in legislation may require more than what is required now. Mr. Newland noted the QR Code elimination passed but has not been signed yet. Ms. Slaughter shared the process of the Audit Hand Count. There are four audit teams of 2 each for the hand counts. Follow-ups were conducted by different teams than those originally involved. More than 6000 ballots were in the March election. Hand counts impact cost, time, scope, staff, and volunteers.

Chairman Johnson said he had the utmost confidence in staff and procedures, but he wanted to show the public we are doing everything we can to ensure public trust and a feeling of system integrity. There are only four board members present tonight, and he wondered if they could postpone to a time with a full board. Time constraints will make that difficult. Some recommended doing a random audit – choosing ballots at random for checking. Some mentioned performing a hand count on a percentage of voter participation.

Ms. Slaughter said that in the Secretary of State Risk Limit Audit in the last election, we were asked to do one race in early voting on a typical day. Early voting is necessarily considered its own precinct. Mr.

Wimbish felt we should not try to hamstring staff and poll workers with something that is not legally required.

Stephanie Windham said we could choose a contest out of a hat for each Election. Kim Slaughter said she understands public concern and respects and understands this concern, but there are physical realities with performing hand counts as we have done. If we feel it is essential to continue with the practice, perhaps we can randomly check races. Chairman Johnson said for him there is a need to validate the process without question. To him there are four choices: 1) do nothing, 2) eliminate hand counts altogether, 3) perform hand counts for a certain percentage, and 4) perform random selection audits. Whatever they decide, it could be considered temporary.

Jim O'Brien moved to forego the hand counts for the May and June elections. Dexter Wimbish seconded. The vote was 2-2 with Member. Johnson and Newland opposing.

More discussion followed, noting that staff morale could be adversely impacted with no relief. They have already worked five Saturdays in a row.

After further discussion, Dexter Wimbish moved to suspend all hand counts except for state court and non-partisan races. We could suspend for these two elections only and then reintroduce. Mr. Newland hesitated to call out any specific race. Perhaps we could take Commissioner and School Board races and select two random audits without announcing who we are going to count. Dexter withdrew prior motion and instead amended it to pertain to just all non-partisan races, and not mention any particular race. Jim O'Brien seconded. Audits extend to hand counts in all except non-countywide elections. Random selections can be pulled from these races. The vote carried 3-1 with Chairman Johnson opposing.

Kim Slaughter will notify the Board when hand counts are conducted at the office in case Board members desire to attend.

Old Business

None

New Business

- (a) Jim O'Brien noted the Board previously voted unanimously to revise the Bylaws that required five board member signatures, and he wondered about the best way to get these signatures. Attorney Wyndham and others relayed that the document had been signed after approval of the Bylaws. It will be posted to the website, and Ms. Slaughter will follow up. Ms. Windham advised that even if they were not placed on the website, the minutes of that meeting reflect that it was unanimously approved.

Board Comments

Roy McClain Absent

Dexter Wimbish No comment

James Newland No comment

Jim O'Brien He counted it a privilege to attend election day and praised staff and poll workers. This was a high-performance team doing great work.

Ben Johnson He, too, commended staff and poll workers.

Adjournment

Motion/second to adjourn at 6:49 p.m. by James Newland/Dexter Wimbish carried unanimously.

Ben Johnson, Chair

Teresa A. Watson, Recording Secretary