

BOARD OF ELECTIONS  
AUGUSTA-RICHMOND COUNTY, GEORGIA  
REGULAR MONTHLY MEETING  
MEETING CONDUCTED VIA ZOOM  
September 14, 2020

Chair Tim McFalls called the meeting to order. Present were Board Members Terence Dicks, Bob Finnegan, Sherry Barnes and Marcia Brown. Also present were Executive Director Lynn Bailey, Assistant Director Travis Doss, and Board Attorney Rachel Mack.

Item #1 - Call the meeting to order

Chairman Tim McFalls called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.

Item #2 - Approval of Minutes

- *July 13, 2020 Regular Monthly Meeting -*
  - Ms. Barnes made a motion that the minutes be approved as disseminated. Mr. Finnegan seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.
- *August 3, 2020 Regular Monthly Meeting -*
  - Ms. Barnes made a motion that the minutes be approved as disseminated. Ms. Brown seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.
- *August 19, 2020 Election Certification Meeting -*
  - Ms. Barnes made a motion that the minutes be approved as disseminated. Mr. Finnegan seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Item #3 - Update on the November 3, 2020 General Election

Chairman McFalls called on Ms. Bailey to give the update, as follows:

- *Important Dates* - Board members received an updated Election Calendar outlining important election events leading up to the November 3, 2020 General Election
- *Absentee Ballots by Mail*
  - To date 22,300 absentee ballot requests have been received and processed. The office expects to mail between 40,000 and 45,000 ballots in total.
  - The initial batch of 20,000 ballots will be processed and mailed by September 19<sup>th</sup> using the vendor contracted by the State.
  - Counties have been given the option to opt in to a service being used by the State for mailing ballots during the time period covering September 20 - October 16 at a rate of \$1.40 per ballot mailed. The cost includes printing, packaging, and mailing the ballot. Richmond County will be using the service and reimbursing the State for costs following the election.

- Beginning October 17<sup>th</sup> through the deadline for mailing ballots on October 30<sup>th</sup>, all absentee ballots will be packaged and mailed by the Board of Elections Office.
- *Absentee ballot application portal* - the absentee ballot portal provided by the Georgia Secretary of State was up and running and working well. Voters submitting an application using the portal will receive email confirmation that their request has been submitted and information on ballot tracking using the Georgia's My Voter Page.
- *Verification of received absentee ballot applications and voted ballots*
  - The process of signature verification on absentee ballot applications and voted, returned absentee ballots is required in Georgia and is a long standing law
  - All signatures for absentee ballot applications are compared against the applicant's voter registration documents using a visual comparison
  - All signatures for a voted, returned absentee ballot are compared against the applicant's voter registration documents and the recently submitted application for an absentee ballots using a visual comparison
  - If doubts exist, the voter is immediately contacted and mailed information on steps they will need to take in order to cure their deficiency. Staff is required to also use telephone numbers and email addresses to contact the voter to the extent that information has been provided
  - Staff has received periodic training from the FBI, GBI, and/or State of GA investigators
- *Prefilled absentee ballot requests*
  - On Tuesday, September 8<sup>th</sup>, 107,000 registered voters were mailed prefilled absentee ballot applications by the Board of Elections for the November election. Completed applications begun to arrive in the office.
  - Staff uses 2 electronic envelope openers to assist with opening the daily mail including hundreds of absentee ballot applications each day.
  - Beginning Monday, September 14<sup>th</sup>, the office will use the Beazley Community Room as a secure absentee ballot processing center. Computers, scanners, envelope openers and staff will use this space to receive and verify applications, issue ballots and to receive and verify voted ballots. All returned, voted ballots will be stored in a secure location in the Municipal Building until such time as they are transported to the facility where they will be opened and processed for tabulation. Access to the Beazley Room will be limited to approved employees of the Board of Elections Office
- *Election Day Call Center*
  - We will have our standard phone bank in the Elections' Office and will be assisted by Augusta 311.
  - In addition to the traditional phone bank, we will have a additional phone bank consisting of 8 phone lines dedicated solely for poll officers to use when processing voters who have been issued an absentee ballot, but have changed their mind about voting it. We see this is the single biggest issue that we will have on Election Day.
- *Bell Auditorium project update*

- Voter outreach on the change in the downtown Advance Voting location will begin on October 1<sup>st</sup>.
- Security will be provided by the Marshal's Department each day of Advance Voting
- Hand sanitizing stations will be provided by the Coliseum Authority in multiple locations at the facility
- The Augusta Transit Department has agreed to place signage regarding the relocation of the Advance Voting center from the Municipal to the Bell for the November election in all City buses and transfer stations
- We are actively working with Lamar Advertising, Azalea Outdoor, and Be Still Outdoor Displays regarding pro bono advertising on vacant digital display boards
- We are working now to secure portable signs to use in the Municipal Building parking lot to give voters a heads up that the Advance Voting center has been relocated to the Bell Auditorium for the November election
- Utility bill inserts with information on election related hot topics and deadlines including voter registration, voting absentee by mail and Advance Voting are in the process of being included in billing statement for all 64,000 customers of the Augusta Utility Department.
- Walton Options for Independent Living will be contacted separately with information on voting changes so that they may inform their consumers
- *Poll worker training and recruitment*
  - 19 small 20-person training sessions will be held at the Warehouse for managers, assistant managers, and equipment workers. 278 potential workers have been notified of this training
  - 9 larger 40-person training sessions will be held in the Commission Chambers for clerks and high school students. 174 potential clerks and 110 high school students have been notified of this training
  - We have worked with the GA Cyber Center and Augusta University to have poll worker opportunities posted on their Handshake portal. The portal posts job opportunities for students. We have received several applications and these students have been scheduled for equipment training
  - The GA Secretary of State has developed an online portal for applying to work at the polls. In addition, our office has received many applications through our Website and over our counter. Currently, our reserve wait list for poll workers contains approximately 300 names.
- *Cares Act and grant funding*
  - Following the Board of Elections meeting on August 3, 2020 where the Board voted to submit a grant for funding under the CARES Act, the grant was submitted to and approved by the Augusta Commission for full funding, as requested
  - CEO of Facebook Mark Zuckerberg and his wife have donated \$300 million dollars to recruit and train poll workers and to ensure that election officials have the equipment they need to conduct a successful and safe election on November 3<sup>rd</sup>. Around the end of August, Fulton County applied for and received a 6.3 million dollar grant. Richmond County has

submitted a grant proposal covering much of the same items submitted in the CARES Act grant. If the Zuckerberg grant is approved, some of the funding requested by the Board of Elections through the CARES Act grant for the November election can be redirected to other needs existing in the City.

- *Space assessment*
  - Because we will not be using the Beazley Room for Advance Voting it has been converted to an absentee ballot processing center where applications are verified and scanned. We will also use this space to verify and process voted, returned absentee ballots. The room is secure with limited and controllable access.
  - All blank and voted ballots are stored in a separate secure space in the Municipal Building.
  - We will soon be relocating all of our voting equipment to a space owned by the Board of Education located on the Butler High School campus. The building is large and was completely renovated by the Board of Education approximately 5 years ago. It has a robust security system, new HVAC system, new roof, and multiple exterior doors which will make the deployment of equipment more efficient. The space is large enough to permit ample spacing for equipment testing. The Board of Education has made the space available to the Board of Elections until such time as a suitable building can be located or built for the storage of voting equipment.
  - For the time being, the existing Warehouse will still be used for training, for ballot tabulation including the early processing of absentee ballots and for other purposes as needed.
  - The Board of Elections will be responsible for utilities and minor maintenance at the Board of Education building. Heavy maintenance including major problems with the roof, HVAC, exterior walls, etc. will be taken care of by the Board of Education. Our 2021 Budget has been adjusted to add \$20,000 to cover utilities and minor repairs.
  - Chairman McFalls expressed his gratitude to Superintendent Bradshaw, the Board of Education members and Facilities Director Benton Starks their willing assistance in identifying temporary space for the Board of Elections.
- *Pre-certification Audit of ballots cast*
  - Required beginning with the November 2020 General Election
  - Training is ongoing
  - Pre-certification has been defined by the Secretary of State as the State certification deadline and not the County certification deadline meaning that counties may conduct their audit either before or after the deadline for counties to certify, but must complete the audit prior to the State's certification deadline.

By consensus, the Board accepted the Update as information.

Item #4 - Discussion of the new State Election Board Rules

- *Early Processing of Absentee Ballots*
  - An amendment to a previously adopted rule permits the opening and early processing of mail in absentee ballots beginning the third Monday prior to Election Day.
  - Early processing in Richmond County will begin on Monday, October 19<sup>th</sup> through Friday, October 30<sup>th</sup> weekdays as deemed necessary during the hours between 10AM and 4 PM at the Board of Elections Warehouse.
  - Six teams of three people each will work opening envelopes and preparing ballots for scanning
  - The team members are primarily made up of political party appointees who work with Board of Elections staff to prepare the ballots for counting
  - The process is open to public observers who will have limited access and to political party monitors who will generally have unfettered access
  - In an effort to build efficiency into the process, electronic envelope openers have been procured and will be used during the early processing period
  - The amended Rule upheld all of the pre-existing chain of custody, accountability, security, and transparency requirements of the previously adopted Rule.
- *Absentee Ballot Drop Boxes*
  - An opportunity for purchasing an additional drop box funded through a grant from the GA Secretary of State's Office has become available. The Augusta Utilities Department is amenable towards installing the drop box at the Southside Service Center located at 3463 Peach Orchard Road at the corner of Rosier and Peach Orchard Roads. This location is secure and houses very large and well utilized offices of the Augusta Utilities Department and Tax Commissioner's Office.
    - Mr. Dicks made a motion that Staff be authorized to procure and install an additional drop box as outlined. Mr. Finnegan seconded the motion, which carried unanimously
  - The drop boxes were previously advertised to open beginning Monday, September 28<sup>th</sup>. Staff recommended that the time period for opening the boxes be moved up to September 21<sup>st</sup> to allow more time and to be consistent with the practice of most other larger counties in the State.
    - Mrs. Barnes made a motion that the time period for opening the absentee ballot drop boxes be adjusted to begin on Monday, September 21<sup>st</sup>. Mrs. Brown seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.
  - Ballots drop boxes are permanently affixed at their respective locations and are monitored by security camera 24/7.
  - Ballot drop boxes will be emptied daily beginning September 28<sup>th</sup>
  - The strong chain of custody built into the Rule that permits using absentee ballot drop boxes remains firmly in place for November

Item #5 - Old Business

In light of recently released information regarding ongoing investigations on 1,000 possible double voters in the State of Georgia during the conduct of the June primary, Board member Dicks inquired whether or not the Board of Elections Office had received notice of any occurrences in Richmond County. Ms. Bailey stated that she had no first hand knowledge of this occurring in Richmond County, but the investigations were ongoing.

Item #6 - New Business

Ms. Bailey reminded the Board of the next upcoming Board meeting on October 12, 2020.

There being no further business to come before the Board, Mrs. Barnes made a motion that the meeting be adjourned. Ms. Brown seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Respectfully Submitted,



Marcia Brown, Secretary for the Board

Approved:



Timothy McFalls, Chair