

# City of Richmond



JOHN N. AMBROSE  
CHAIRMAN

CHERLYN STARLET  
STEVENS VICE-CHAIR

JOYCE KING SMITH  
SECRETARY

## Electoral Board

Meeting Minutes

July 23rd, 2024

### CALL TO ORDER

Chairman John Ambrose called the meeting to order at 10:00am with Vice Chair Cherlyn Stevens and Secretary Joyce Smith in attendance.

### OFFICE OF ELECTIONS STAFF ATTENDANCE

Keith Balmer - Registrar, Jerry Richardson - Deputy Director, Katherin Cardozo-Robledo - Executive Assistant, Vanessa Floyd - Election Operations Manager.

### APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Chairman Ambrose corrected language regarding the correct date of the online webinar that ELECT was conducting on the new legislative changes from the recent General Assembly session. After the changes were made, all members of the Electoral Board approved the minutes from the last meeting that took place on May 15th, 2024.

### PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD FOR ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

Sandra Antoine, a member of the local NAACP, addressed the agenda items related to precinct locations and the early voting opportunities that the office will be providing. She urged the Electoral Board to consider the establishment of satellite offices during the early voting period and to explore alternative locations to City Hall. Ms. Antoine highlighted the ongoing parking challenges at City Hall, noting numerous complaints regarding limited parking and accessibility, particularly for individuals utilizing curbside voting. Additionally, she proposed Martin Luther King Jr. Middle School as a potential future precinct location.

## **BALLOT FOR NOVEMBER 2024**

General Registrar Keith Balmer reported that an email from our ballot vendor, PrintElect, recommended reformatting the ballot to improve clarity and save space. The proposed changes include consolidating the instructions in both English and Spanish into a single section at the top of the ballot, giving it a cleaner and more streamlined appearance.

Secretary Smith moved to approve the second ballot design provided by PrintElect, which combines the instructions and adds a reminder at the bottom for voters to vote on both sides of the ballot. Vice Chair Stevens seconded the motion, and **it passed, approving the new design for the November 2024 ballot.**

During this discussion, Mr. Balmer also addressed the order of candidates on the ballot for all of the local races. He explained that the order is determined by the date and time candidates complete their qualifications. Specifically, he mentioned an issue regarding the ninth district city council candidate Stephanie Starling, who will appear second on the ballot. Although Ms. Starling and her opponent, Nicole Jones, both qualified on the same day, Ms. Jones qualified first based on her 8:55 a.m. submission, whereas Ms. Starling qualified later in the day at 3:05 p.m. Ms. Starling believed she should have been listed first but did not submit her Statement of Organization promptly. She eventually mailed the form after realizing the oversight. Registrar Balmer clarified that had Ms. Starling chosen to submit the form online, she likely would have been first on the ballot. However, by mailing a paper application, her form was processed after Ms. Jones had already qualified.

Chairman Ambrose then inquired whether the Electoral Board has the authority to change the order of the ballot. Mr. Balmer confirmed that the board does have this authority. Vice Chair Stevens proposed a motion to alter the ballot order after hearing Ms. Starling's comments. **However, no member of the Electoral Board seconded the motion, so no changes will be made to the November 2024 ballot.**

## **TRAINING CALENDAR FOR NOVEMBER 2024**

Registrar Balmer initiated this agenda topic by announcing the introduction of two new training classes specifically designed for chiefs and assistant chiefs. The first class will focus on emergency procedures, and the second will address accessibility for individuals with disabilities. These classes will be offered on August 19th, August 21st, and twice on Saturday, August 24th. Registrar Balmer emphasized that these sessions are aimed at strengthening the office's training program, particularly in the areas of emergency response and accessibility.

Registrar Balmer then introduced Vanessa Floyd, Election Operations Manager, to discuss a new virtual Q&A session for new election officers. Ms. Floyd explained that approximately 400-500 new election officers will be participating in the online training course. Following their training, they may have questions or need further clarification. To address this, Ms. Floyd and a panel of three managers will be available to answer questions and provide additional information through a virtual Q&A session.

Additional dates discussed under the training calendar included those for L&A testing and future Electoral Board meetings. Chairman Ambrose proposed holding a regular board meeting on August 20th at 10:00 a.m., and another on September 17th at 10:00 a.m. Following the September 17th meeting, Mr. Ambrose suggested conducting L&A testing at the Laburnum location for early voting. Another L&A testing session was scheduled for September 27th at 10:00 a.m. for the satellite locations.

Additionally, Mr. Ambrose proposed a board meeting on October 15th, 2024, at 10:00 a.m., followed by L&A testing of the DS-300 voting machines in preparation for the November 5th General Election.

Regarding the provisional ballot meeting, Registrar Balmer proposed beginning the meeting on Friday, November 8th at 12:00 p.m., to accommodate individuals who may need to provide ID in person. The Electoral Board will review as many provisional ballots as possible on Friday, with a more in-depth review starting on Monday, November 11th at 9:00 a.m.

### **PAGE PROGRAM**

Registrar Balmer began the discussion by outlining the Election Day PAGE program, which is designed for high school students and aims to provide an engaging and educational experience that honors and preserves the electoral process. This program offers civic-minded and responsible high school students the opportunity to support the electoral process.

Mr. Balmer explained that the local Electoral Board or its general registrar may conduct an Election Day PAGE program in designated locations as determined by the Electoral Board or general registrar. Students will be selected for the program through collaboration between our office and local high school authorities. The program aims to stimulate students' interest in elections and voter registration, assist the Office of Elections, and ensure the safe entry and exit of elderly and disabled voters at polling places.

This initiative is open exclusively to high school students in the city aged 16 to 17 years. Mr. Balmer announced that Operadella Williams, chief of Precinct 311, will take the lead on the PAGE program and will work alongside him to implement this initiative for the upcoming presidential election.

### **RISK-LIMITING AUDIT**

Registrar Balmer initiated this discussion by presenting a YouTube video that explains the concept of a Risk-Limiting Audit (RLA) for those in the public who may be unfamiliar with the process. He explained that a Risk-Limiting Audit is a statistical analysis that allows election officials to review a sample of ballots from an election to verify the accuracy of the results.

Registrar Balmer noted that in Virginia, Risk-Limiting Audits are required at least once every four years, with the last audit in the City of Richmond conducted in February 2021. He mentioned that the State Board of Elections has informed election officials to prepare for an upcoming audit of the U.S. Senate race between Tim Kaine and Hung Cao, following the November 5th election. The election results will be certified by November 15th, and the audit is expected to take place on November 21st and 22nd at the Clerk of the Courts office.

Registrar Balmer explained that the process involves the state providing instructions on which specific ballots to pull from the total ballots cast, which he anticipates will exceed 120,000. Election officials will then retrieve the designated ballots from the boxes that were sealed on election night. These ballots will be audited, and the results will be entered into a software that reports back to the Department of Elections, thereby confirming the accuracy of the election results.

He also mentioned that the office will need to purchase scales to assist in accurately identifying and retrieving the specific ballots required for the audit. To minimize costs, the Office of Elections staff will be utilized to conduct the audit.

## **DATES FOR L&A, EARLY VOTING, SATELLITE LOCATIONS, DROPBOX POLICY, PRECINCT UPDATE**

Chairman Ambrose recommended that early voting at the satellite locations begin on October 7th, 2024. Vice-Chair Stevens moved to open the satellite locations on Monday, October 7th, with voting hours set for Monday through Friday, from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Secretary Smith seconded the motion. **The motion passed unanimously, and early voting at the satellite locations will commence on Monday, October 7th.**

Regarding the drop box policy, drop boxes will be available at the Office of Elections starting on Friday, September 20th, the first day of early voting. The procedure will involve staff members securing the drop boxes daily at 5:00 p.m. The drop boxes will remain available until the polls close at 7:00 p.m. on Election Day, November 5th. For the satellite locations, drop boxes will be accessible when they open on Monday, October 7th. Each satellite location, including Hickory Hill Community Center and City Hall, will have one drop box, which will be available until the last day of early voting on Saturday, November 2nd. After this date, the drop boxes will be physically sealed, and signs will be posted directing voters to the Office of Elections at Laburnum if they attempt to use the satellite drop boxes after November 2nd.

As for precinct updates, Precinct 606 will remain at Overby-Sheppard Elementary School due to ongoing renovations at its original location. Precinct 810 will be relocated to Metropolitan African American Baptist Church on Warwick Road, as the original precinct location is no longer available as a polling place. Voters will receive mailed notices to prevent any confusion regarding their precinct on Election Day. Registrar Balmer also mentioned that he is collaborating with the city's GIS department to identify voters who have moved from one district to another and will send them updated mailing information regarding these changes.

### **NEW BUSINESS**

Under new business, Registrar Balmer addressed the projected need for election officers in the upcoming presidential election. Referring to a spreadsheet, he highlighted that, based on historical data, an 80% voter turnout is expected. With 161,000 registered voters in the City of Richmond, this would equate to approximately 129,000 ballots cast. Given these projections, Registrar Balmer estimated that over 1,000 election officers would be required. Currently, according to Ms. Floyd's data, the office has about 700 election officers, leaving a shortfall of approximately 300.

Mr. Balmer also noted that certain precincts are expected to experience particularly high voter turnout. To manage this effectively, additional electronic poll books will be necessary to ensure a steady flow of traffic. He requested the electoral board's approval to purchase an additional 54 electronic poll books to meet this need, noting that each poll book would cost around \$1,000. He also mentioned that he would explore the possibility of renting the poll books as an alternative.

The next item of discussion was the need for Provisional Ballot Officers. Registrar Balmer emphasized the importance of additional resources to support provisional voters at precincts, particularly given the demands of a presidential election. He proposed that assistant chiefs serve as provisional ballot officers. In cases where more than one provisional ballot officer is required, such as at Precinct 214, a team of four will be assembled, with the assistant chief leading the effort. This team will focus exclusively on handling provisional ballots.

The final item under New Business was a review of the General Registrar's accomplishments over the past year. Registrar Balmer highlighted that six elections had been conducted in the last 18 months without major issues. He also mentioned several new projects and resources introduced to the office and the public. These initiatives include the implementation of a text alert system called TextMyGov, the introduction of the new DS-300s, a partnership with VCU Votes, the launch of an internship program, the creation of a code of conduct for election officers, the development of an online candidate class, the launch of Integra, the first-ever "I Voted" sticker contest, the creation of the Elections Operations Department, increased pay for election officers, expanded outreach initiatives, the Canvass Extension Bill, the Voter Registration Protection Bill, a new Voter Guide Brochure, an activity book for the Civics Tab, the first-ever training manual for election officers, and the launch of a new YouTube channel.

**PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD FOR ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA**

No members of the public signed up to address items not on the agenda.

**CLOSED SESSION**

The Board entered a closed session to discuss the annual security plan for the Office of Elections.

**CLOSED SESSION**

The Board entered a closed session to discuss the annual evaluation of the General Registrar.

**MEETING ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned by Chairman John N. Ambrose

Meeting Minutes

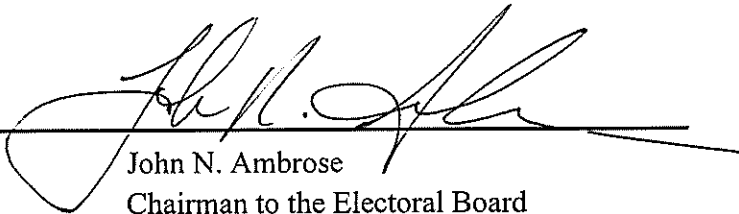
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**NEXT MEETING DATE**

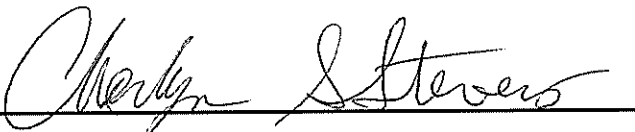
The next electoral board meeting date will take place on Tuesday, August 20th at 10:00am.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.



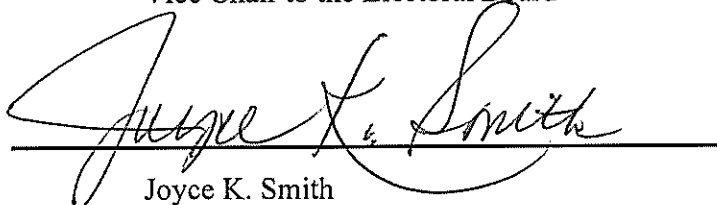
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John N. Ambrose  
Chairman to the Electoral Board



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Cherlyn S. Stevens  
Vice Chair to the Electoral Board



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Joyce K. Smith  
Secretary to the Electoral Board