

City of Richmond



JOHN N. AMBROSE
CHAIRMAN
CHERLYN STARLET STEVENS
VICE-CHAIR
JOYCE KING SMITH
SECRETARY

Electoral Board Meeting Minutes September 19th, 2024

CALL TO ORDER

Vice-Chair Cherlyn Stevens, who filled in for Chairman Ambrose, called the meeting to order at 2:15pm with Secretary Joyce Smith in attendance.

OFFICE OF ELECTIONS STAFF ATTENDANCE

Keith Balmer - Registrar, Katherin Cardozo-Robledo - Executive Assistant, Vanessa Floyd - Election Operations Department Manager, TaShawna Johnson - Absentee Coordinator.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD FOR ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

Wendy Sydnor, Election Integrity Coordinator for the Richmond City Republican Committee, addressed the identification, training, and placement of election officers for the 2024 General Election on behalf of Kristen Cannon, Chair of the Richmond GOP. Ms. Sydnor began by expressing her gratitude to the Registrar and his staff for providing a detailed list of election officers who will serve in the upcoming election.

She emphasized the importance of receiving further updates, specifically regarding the names, party affiliations, Election Day assignments, titles, and precinct locations of election officers. This information, she noted, is essential to the Richmond GOP's ongoing efforts to recruit more Republicans to serve as election officers, with the goal of achieving greater party parity, as permitted under Section 24.2-115 of the Code of Virginia.

Ms. Sydnor explained that the Richmond GOP will focus on identifying areas with insufficient representation and will recommend Republican election officers for those precincts. Additionally, they plan to supplement these precincts with poll watchers to ensure balanced oversight.

Finally, Ms. Sydnor mentioned that the list of potential election officer assignments she received did not include party affiliations, and she raised questions about this omission.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

Secretary Smith makes a motion to approve the minutes from August 20th, 2024. Vice-Chair Stevens seconds, all were in favor and the motion passes to approve the previous meeting minutes.

APPOINTMENT OF NEW ELECTION OFFICERS

Vanessa Floyd took the lead on this discussion, stating that she currently has 186 individuals on the list provided to the Electoral Board. In response to Ms. Sydnor's earlier comment, Ms. Floyd clarified that the list of potential election officer assignments did not include party affiliations because the information was condensed to fit on a single page. She further explained that all precinct chiefs and assistant chiefs have access to the Integra system, where they can view their full election officer roster, including party affiliations and other relevant details.

Ms. Floyd then requested the Electoral Board's approval of the 186 individuals on the list so that she can proceed with precinct assignments and ensure all positions are filled. Secretary Smith made a motion to approve the list, which was seconded by Vice-Chair Stevens. **The motion passed, and the list of 186 election officers was approved for the 2024 General Election.**

REVIEW OF UPCOMING MEETINGS

Chairman Ambrose was not present in the electoral board meeting so this topic of the agenda was not discussed.

POLLING PLACE LETTER TO VOTERS

Registrar Balmer began by discussing a request from Richmond Public Schools during the June Republican primary, where they asked if the Office of Elections could move voting locations from schools serving as summer school sites. Mr. Balmer explained that his office complied with the request and sent out notices to affected voters, as required by law. He further noted that the notice, generated by the state's VERIS system, only informs voters of the new polling location without explaining the reason for the change. This lack of explanation, he said, often causes confusion among voters.

To address this, Mr. Balmer decided to send a customized letter to voters, clearly explaining the reasons for the temporary polling place changes. This letter was sent to approximately 9,000 voters across eight polling locations impacted by the temporary move during the June election. He shared an example of the letter with the Electoral Board and mentioned receiving a thank-you letter from a voter, expressing appreciation for the clarity.

Mr. Balmer then provided an update on precinct locations. Precinct 910, formerly located at G.H. Elementary School, has been permanently moved to River City Middle School on Hull Street following approval by the City Council. Additionally, precinct 911, which has been relocated twice in the past year, will also be moved to River City Middle School. However, it is scheduled to return to its original location at the community center on Old Warwick Road in 2025 once renovations are completed.

UPDATE ON ABSENTEE VOTING

Registrar Keith Balmer opened the discussion by announcing that the City of Richmond has finalized a new contract with Print Elect, the company responsible for sending out absentee ballots for many years. This year, Mr. Balmer explained, he sought to formalize the relationship by establishing a two-year contract with the company. Under this agreement, Print Elect is legally required to mail out absentee ballots on the 45th day before each election, which coincides with the start of early voting—set to begin tomorrow.

With the contract now in place, Print Elect will mail the first batch of absentee ballots, approximately 8,500, to registered voters. TaShawna Johnson, the Absentee Coordinator, added that a second batch of around 750 absentee ballots will be sent out on Monday, September 23rd.

BALLOT ORDER FOR THE ELECTION

Registrar Balmer led the discussion by first asking the Electoral Board if they had any questions regarding the sample ballots. He then explained that there are 11 different ballot styles for this election, with one ballot style for each district. This is due to the presence of local races, including city council and school board elections, meaning that the type of ballot a voter receives depends on the district in which they are registered.

Mr. Balmer also mentioned the federal-only ballot, available during this federal election. This option is for overseas or military voters who vote in person. Additionally, he discussed the rarely used presidential-only ballot, which is available to voters who have moved out of state within 30 days of Election Day but are still eligible to vote in the presidential election.

CANDIDATE COMPLIANT

Mr. Balmer began the discussion by mentioning that a candidate named Emmett "EJ" Jafari is running for the Eighth District School Board seat. Mr. Balmer shared that he received an email from the Department of Elections (ELECT), which asked him to inform the Electoral Board and consult with the City Attorney's Office about a particular situation involving Mr. Jafari and his opponent, Patrick Sherman. The issue concerns Mr. Sherman's response on the Certificate of Candidate Qualification form.

One of the required questions on the form asks, "Have you ever been convicted of a felony or any crime that would preclude you from holding office?" Mr. Sherman answered yes, but for the restoration date, he only provided the year 1995, rather than a full date. This raised concerns for Mr. Jafari, who questioned whether such an incomplete answer was acceptable.

In response, Mr. Balmer reached out to ELECT for guidance, particularly because the deadline to submit additional documentation had already passed. He clarified to the Board that, when Mr. Sherman initially registered to vote in Chesterfield County, one of the eligibility requirements was that he could not have an active felony conviction. Therefore, since Mr. Sherman was already a registered voter, he is eligible to run for office, provided he is a registered voter in the Eighth District, which he is.

Despite this clarification, Mr. Jafari disagreed with the explanation and submitted a formal letter of complaint to the Department of Elections, expressing his dissatisfaction with the guidance provided by both ELECT and the Registrar's Office. Mr. Balmer further noted that Mr. Sherman has since submitted the complete date of his restoration of rights.

MOU FOR (NON-CITY) POLLING PLACES

Mr. Balmer explained that prior to each election, the City of Richmond enters into a lease agreement with Richmond Public Schools for the use of their facilities. He expressed interest in establishing a similar agreement with non-city facilities used as polling locations to ensure liability coverage and address any unforeseen issues. To achieve this, he has requested the City Attorney's Office to draft a memorandum of understanding between the City of Richmond and these non-city-affiliated locations.

Mr. Balmer's goal is to require non-city facilities to provide at least six months' notice if they no longer wish to serve as polling locations. This advance notice would prevent last-minute cancellations, which would otherwise force the Office of Elections to scramble for replacement sites.

NEW BUSINESS

For the first item of new business, Mr. Balmer presented the new College Student Voter Guide. This guide is especially valuable on Election Day, as college students casting provisional ballots for same-day registration will be able to access it for assistance in properly filling out their mailing address. The guide includes detailed information about dormitory addresses, helping students avoid the common mistake of listing their dorm name instead of the correct residential address. This resource is expected to significantly reduce errors made by students during the registration process.

The second item of new business concerned upcoming key dates. Early voting begins tomorrow, September 20th, with the next Logic and Accuracy testing for satellite locations scheduled for September 27th. Additionally, the next Electoral Board meeting will be held on October 15th, during which Vanessa, the Election Operations Manager, will present a list of election officers for the Board's approval.

The final item of new business focused on ADA compliance. Mr. Balmer confirmed that all 72 polling locations meet ADA requirements. He noted that the Department of Elections has requested written confirmation of this compliance, and there is a document that requires Secretary Smith's signature to certify that all polling locations are ADA-compliant.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD FOR ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA

Jane Newell, a member of the local League of Women Voters, raised a concern regarding a mailing she received earlier this week from an organization called the Center for Voter Information. The mailing included a pre-filled absentee ballot application form, which listed the Registrar's office as the return address, but with an incorrect zip code. Ms. Newell expressed her concern that this could cause confusion among voters and lead to complications. She also noted that the return address on the mailing was listed as the Hampton Inn downtown, further adding to the confusion.

Ms. Newell requested that the Electoral Board consider issuing a public announcement to raise awareness of this misleading mailing. In response, Mr. Balmer stated that he would release a statement clarifying that the mailing did not originate from the Office of Elections and would address the broader issue of third-party mailings to voters.

MEETING ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned by Vice-Chair Stevens.

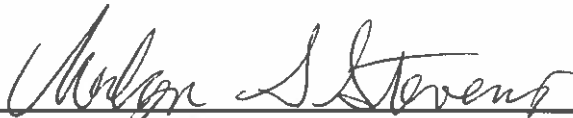
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NEXT MEETING DATE

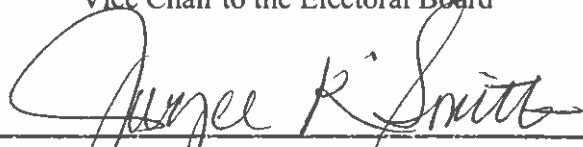
The next electoral board meeting date will take place on Wednesday, October 23rd at 2:00pm.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.

John N. Ambrose
Chairman to the Electoral Board



Cherlyn S. Stevens
Vice Chair to the Electoral Board



Joyce K. Smith
Secretary to the Electoral Board