

# **Buncombe County Board of Elections**

## **Asheville/Buncombe County Board of Elections**

**Monitor Name:** George Elam and Aiden Carson

**Date & Time:** January 17, 2023 4:30 PM

### **Names of Board Members Attending:**

Jake Quinn, Chairman

Steven Aceto, Board Member

Robert (Bo) Carpenter, Board Member

Linda Block, Board Member, Secretary

Glen Shults, Board Member – via Zoom

### **Names of Staff Attending**

Corinne Duncan, Director

Anna Katherine Moore, Clerk to the Board

Victoria Pickens, Accounting Technician II and Campaign Finance

### **Agenda Items**

**Minutes** from 12/13 approved 4-0 (Carpenter not voting because he didn't attend)

### **Office Updates (Corinne Duncan):**

- Archiving of voting data for 22 months has been completed.
- Search for ADA compliant sites for the next election has begun.
- List maintenance: voters inactive for more than 4 years have been removed, and 8373 voters inactive for less than 4 years have been sent a contact card.
- Plans are underway for a voter outreach program, to include a high school program.
- The student assistant program went well. Students 17 and older work as poll assistants.
- Election Services is asking for another position in the budget for a trainer/recruiter. \$60 thousand for the position. One function would be to recruit student assistants.

### **Budget Review (Victoria Pickens)**

- Today is the initial presentation of the proposed budget. Will be presented to the Assistant County Manager on Friday, then the BOE will take it up at the next meeting on January 24, and it will be presented again to the Assistant County Manager on February 3. After that a presentation will be made to the County Manager.
- Victoria presented a Power Point but it could not be seen by observers because of its size.

- The budget includes 4 parts:
  1. Operating Budget (includes temporary staff)
  2. Personnel Budget (includes permanent staff)
  3. Capital Budget
  4. Nondiscretionary Budget (a shared county fund for all departments)
- The initial budget proposal is for \$2.7 million, which constitutes just .5% of the County's budget.
- The largest increase will be for the purchase of 140 Express Vote machines for \$984,225. They would be used primarily for Early Voting and distributed among 14 possible sites as needed.
- The second largest capital expenditure is for replacement of two DS850 tabulators with the expected NCSBOE approval of the new DS950s.
- In the personnel budget, the BOE is requesting another position so they can divide campaign management from financial management
- Director Duncan and Jake discussed the difficulty of monitoring campaign committees, campaign finances, and verification of information for candidates. Election Services is supposed to complete each audit in 30 days but usually cannot accomplish that in time. The additional position will help with that.
- Mr. Aceto asked for more information on the functions of candidate management. Mr. Quinn suggested developing a dashboard for that which would also be available to the community.
- The county is looking to hire a Public Information Officer to help with information requests from the public. This is expected to take a big load off of election staff.

## **Express Vote Proposal**

- 11 North Carolina counties currently use Express Vote for marking ballots, including Henderson, Transylvania, Haywood, and Jackson.
- Buncombe currently uses it only for curbside voting ADA compliance.
- It was repeated many times that there would still be a paper ballot for voters to see after they voted, and the ballot could be verified by inserting it into any of the Express Vote machines.
- The machines would only be used for Early Voting. Election Day voting would be unchanged.
- Pros listed by Director Duncan:
  - Easy to use touchscreen
  - Shorter wait time at the polls
  - Eliminate undervoting/undervoting
  - No need to flip the ballot over (many people miss voting for items on the back)
  - Easy to correct marking mistakes (no need to have the ballot spoiled and a new one issued)
  - Larger text, easier to read

- Simpler system than the Ballot on Demand printers currently in use, easier for poll workers to set up
  - More machines available at each site
  - Longer lifespan than current hardware
  - Less consumables needed – no need for toner as thermal paper is used. The paper used is much heavier than that typically used for retail sales slips and is not expected to fade under controlled conditions.
  - Cost per ballot is about 14 cents. Current cost is about 40 cents.
  - All machines are ADA compliant.
  - Able to accommodate foreign languages, headphones available.
  - Reduces the use of the DS850s.
  - No 30-day sort wait. The current system requires a lengthy rescan in order to provide voting data sorted by precinct, which is anxiously awaited by the parties. The new system makes that data available automatically.
- Cons listed by Director Duncan:
    - This is a big change and will require much voter outreach & education
    - The new system cannot print the Early Voting Application number on the ballot and until the vendor provides that capability, the number will have to be manually written on the ballot. That number is used to tie the individual voter to the ballot in the occasional cases when that needs to be traced.
    - That would require training poll workers and open the possibility of user error.
- Use during the next municipal elections would constitute a pilot test.
  - The machines are not connected to the internet and are used for marking ballots only.
  - They do not count votes.
  - They print the voter's selections on a big card about 4 ½ inches wide and 14 inches long (or longer if needed)
  - They also encode the voter's selections into a barcode printed at the top of the ballot. That barcode is read when the ballot is inserted by the voter into the scanner (counting machine).
  - Some members of the public expressed opposition to the large expenditure and distrust of the process. The barcode is a big sticking point. The system currently in use has coded information around the edges of the paper ballot which tell the scanner where to look on the page for filled-in circles. The new system puts all the information in barcodes which humans cannot read.
  - Mr. Aceto read the applicable statutes (163-165.4 and 163-165.7) and the new machines meet the requirements of the law.

**Express Vote Demo (by agent of the vendor Michelle)**

Michelle demonstrated use of the touch screen device to mark and print ballots. The public present had an opportunity to try it out.

**Next Meeting Date: Tuesday January 24 at 4:30**