

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

**Monitor Name:** Aiden Carson, Elaine Elam, George Elam, and Cheryl Williams

**Date & Time:** June 13, 2023 3:30 PM

**Names of Board Members Attending:**

Jake Quinn, Chairman

Linda Block, Board Member, Secretary

Glen Shults, Board Member

Absent: Bo Carpenter, Board Member

Virtual: Steven Aceto, Board Member

**Names of Staff Attending:** Corrine Duncan, Director

Karen Rae, Elections Coordinator, Devin Whitney, Elections Tech. Specialist

**Observers:**

At least 9 observers; 4 from LWV; 1 from Common Cause; at least 3 from Buncombe County Democrats, and at least 1 from the Buncombe County GOP Elections Integrity Committee

**Agenda Items**

**Minutes from 4/25/23 approved 3 to zero**

**Office Updates (Corrine Duncan):**

- The Elections Office has hired Justin Tate (or Kale), the former deputy director of elections in Avery County, as absentee specialist. He is already on board
- The Elections Office has hired Shannon Cole as Registration Specialist. She will start in July 2023.
- Bills to keep an eye on in the General Assembly:
  - S747 which proposes major changes to Early and Absentee Voting, among other things
  - S749 which changes the structure of state/county BOE and appointment procedures to put the legislature in charge
  - H66 which provides for partisan Board of Education elections for Catawba County, Hickory City, Newton-Conover City, and Polk County. Also for Buncombe County to establish electoral districts for 2024.
- Great progress in completing tasks such that 33 remain including
  - Training 100 precinct workers, lead by Karen Rae, which is dramatically more than the usual 40 or so attendees
- Next Tuesday (June 20) the Buncombe County Commissioners vote whether to accept the proposed budget, which contains the funds to purchase the Express Vote machines
- Dates to keep in mind:

- June 27, State Board of Elections announces new Board appointments
- July 7 filing begins for municipal elections in Woodfin and Weaverville
- July 18 the new Board meets to take the oath
- July 25 an all day (9 am to 4 pm) Board training
- August 1 Early voting plan released. Only one town has asked for an additional site
- August 13-15 Board members attend required training from the SBOE

### **Resolution on Director's Salary**

- Mr. Quinn reported that per NC statute 163.35 the Director's salary should be commensurate with those offered by similar counties. Mr. Quinn identified 4 similar counties that were similar to Buncombe in population and number of registered voters: Cumberland (Fayetteville), Durham, New Hanover (Wilmington) and Union (south of Mecklenburg). He used the following data sources:
  - Worldpopulationreview.com
  - number of registered voters per State Board of Elections data summary as of April 8, 2023
  - historic salaries base on a survey from the UNC School of Government
- The average salary for Elections Directors in those 4 counties was just above \$95,000 in 2020, just below \$100,000 in 2021, \$111,000 in 2022, and \$114,000 in 2023
- After a review of the data and the law, a salary of \$107,186.13 was proposed for 2023 which, when combined with a county increase of 7.29 percent and a cost-of-living adjustment resulted in a figure of \$115,000
- Mr. Quinn used the language in last year's resolution to craft the current one and offered it as a motion.
- Ms. Block asked whether the value of benefits was included in the analysis. Mr. Quinn said the law doesn't mention benefits and that benefits packages vary widely across counties on such matters as annual and holidays. However, benefits would be uniform across employees in each county even though not across counties
- Mr. Quinn reported that compared to salaries for other department heads in counties, the salaries for Directors of Elections were at the low end of the range.
- Ms. Block then asked whether years of experience was included in the analysis. Mr. Quinn reported that the UNC survey includes data on the years the person has held the position. Ms. Duncan began her tenure in 2020.
- Mr. Quinn then offered the experience in Durham County where the same person had been Director and received \$106,000 in 2020; \$100,000 in 2021; \$140,000 in 2022; and \$163,000 in 2023. He verified these numbers with the Human Resources director in Durham
- He also reported that Cumberland County has had the same Director for several years.
- Mr. Shults commented that the statute sets a floor, not a ceiling
- Mr. Aceto commented that, while he didn't have the statute in front of him, he agreed with the language drafted by Mr. Quinn and the comments from Mr. Shults. Further, he said that, like many elections statutes, it mentions neither floor nor ceiling. It lacks a "bright line". He thought Mr. Quinn did well to select an average. The idea behind the

statute, he thought, is to prevent the appearance of either punishing or rewarding an elections director. Lastly, he seconded Mr. Quinn's motion.

- Ms. Block said how she appreciated the work and analysis Mr. Quinn put into the resolution but asked how performance fit into the suggested salary. Mr. Quinn complimented her question and said the statute only directs the Board to set the salary and that the salaries of all other department heads as well as performance reviews are conducted by the County Human Resources department consistent with County policy.
- Ms. Block wondered whether the salary set by the Board would be likely to affect the decisions of the County Human Resources department. Mr. Quinn thought not. He shared his entire process with Sharon Burke, Buncombe County Director of Human Resources, who complimented his choice of data sources. He further speculated that, should Ms. Burke have any questions, she would likely discuss them with Ms. Duncan. Moreover, the statute directs the Board to set the salary but does not require that the salary be compared to those of other county employees.
- Ms. Block said she thinks very highly of Ms. Duncan's performance but that she is not a human resources specialist. She asked about what performance reviews Ms. Duncan received. Mr. Quinn deferred to Ms. Duncan for comment. Ms. Duncan reported that, although the County is changing its procedures, the policy has been to have annual reviews. Mr. Quinn thought it might be good to have the opportunity to provide input to Ms. Duncan's reviews.
- Ms. Block said she would still like to know more about the process.
- Mr. Aceto opined that there was much wisdom in election laws. Such as, it recognizes that Directors of Elections are different from other employees. It should not appear that a salary is a reward or a punishment for a particular outcome. It should preserve the independence when Directors of Elections are compensated differently from all others.
- The resolution to set Ms. Duncan's salary at \$115,000 passed, 4-0.

**Public comment:**

An observer noted that the State Board of Elections was currently involved in rulemaking about voter ID and comments could be provided until June 23. Further he noted that the rules were temporary due to a shortened comment period. Mr. Quinn thanked him for the comment. Another observer asked whether voter ID implementation would be an agenda item in August. Mr. Quinn responded that the Buncombe County Board could not comment in advance of guidance from the State Board.

**Meeting adjourned at 4:12 pm**

**Next Meeting Date: August 1 at 3:30**

**Location: 59 Woodfin Place**