

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

Monitor Name: Cheryl Williams in person

Date & Time: September 12, 2023 5:00 PM

Names of Board Members Attending:

Jake Quinn, Chairman

Steven Aceto, Board Member

Glen Shults, Secretary

Mary Ann Braine, Board Member

Sally Stein: Board Member

Names of Buncombe Co Staff Attending: Corrine Duncan, Director
Neggy Fox, Deputy Director; Karen Rae, Elections Coordinator; Bria Baily,
Elections Technical Specialist; Devin Whitney, Elections Technical Specialist; and
Anna Katherine Moore, Administrative Coordinator and Clerk to the Board
remotely

Location of Meeting: 59 Woodfin Place, Asheville NC

Observers:

Seven observers including a few from the Democratic Party, 1 from a Community Association, and 1 from LWV

Agenda Items

I. **Minutes** from August 22 meeting approved unanimously

II. Office Updates: Corrine Duncan

- Brea Baily received her CERA certification
- The first or two rounds of interviews for Warehouse Coordinator for which they have several good candidates.
- The State Board of Elections has reviewed and approved the sample ballots for the municipal elections this fall. They will soon be available online.
- The DS 950 machines have been delivered and staff are currently working with ES&S staff on the software upgrades.
- On National Voter Registration Day, September 19, UNCA will host a lecture by Karen Brinson Bell, Director of the State Board of Elections at 7 pm.

- Discussion: Mr. Aceto asked whether the Board needed authorizing resolutions for absentee ballots passed by the municipalities within the statutorily required 60-day window prior to the elections (163.302). Ms. Duncan thought both the state and the county had received copies and she would provide them to Board members.

III. Voting Location Changes for 2023 Municipal Elections

- Section 163.128 allows a County Board of Elections to temporarily transfer voters to an adjacent precinct. Staff provided members with maps of the precincts under consideration. Specifically, staff requested approval to fold precinct 28.1 into 51.1 and 41.1 into 69.1. In this instance voter turnout in 2019 and 2021 in precincts 28.1 and 41.1 was close to zero and zero in one year, which makes it a questionable use of taxpayer money to send staff and machines to the low turn out precincts when they are geographically close to a precinct with good turnout as occurs at both 51.1 and 41.1.
- Mr. Quinn confirmed that each combined precinct would have two DS 950 machines to avoid the chance that ballots would be put into in incorrect machine.
- Mr. Quinn also expressed concerns about privacy when only a single person votes in a precinct. Ms. Duncan said the staff took measures to protect privacy in those situations.
- The Board approved the temporary transfer.

IV. Public Input Session for 2024 Primary Early Voting Plan (Neggy Fox)

- Ms. Fox said the survey of citizens opened on August 1, closed September 8, and received over 2000 views with 1900 responses and 800 comments provided.
- Elections Services surveyed citizens in 2022 for the first time. This was the second time. Staff plan to survey citizens again for the 2024 general election.
- The proposed Early Voting plan that citizens commented on included 11 sites across the county; weekend voting on 2/17, 2/24, and 2/25. Weekend hours are 10 to 3 which allows for a single shift. Weekdays with longer hours have 2 shifts to cover the 11.5 hours each site is open.
- The Buncombe Board decides the number of sites, hours for some weekend voting, and the State Board decides everything else. The county Board vote must be unanimous.

- 70 percent of respondents approved the plan as presented; 23 percent approved of it with minor changes; 4 percent don't approve of it; and 3 percent approve of it with significant changes. Some respondents don't want any Early Voting at all.
- Things people really liked include voting hours in the evening and on week days, voting on Saturday and Sunday, and voting locations spread out across the county.
- Things respondents wanted but that were not proposed include more weekend hours, more Sunday voting, and earlier opening times.
 - Hours of operation are set by the state and uniform across all counties.
 - Extending weekend hours does not allow time off for poll workers, who work 11.5-hour days for 16 of the 17-day long period and need time off.
 - Having the first weekend off for poll workers allows Elections staff to get caught up and provide feedback on performance.
 - Extended Sunday hours are not justified in light of the decline in turnout after 3 pm on Sundays.
- Suggested additional sites included Stein Mart (10), North Asheville Library (27), UNCA (25) which has a lot of ongoing construction now that should be completed by the time Early Voting opens, the Shiloh Community Center (5), and Sweeten Creek Road (6).
 - Ms. Fox stressed that this is the proposed plan for Early Voting, not the General Election.
- The suggested second South Asheville site will be the Friendship Center which has been used before and is close to the Shiloh Community Center. Signage can be placed both at Sweeten Creek Road and Hendersonville Road. It has great parking and a large room. It is not as extensively used for after school clubs, recreation, and other uses as the Community Center. The Friendship Center is a private, not a public, property.
 - Ms. Judy Williamson of the Shiloh Community Association asked to present a statement from the Association strongly endorsing the use of the Friendship Center.
- The only proposed change was in second South Asheville site. Staff are still looking for a North Asheville site.
 - Mr. Shults asked where voting had taken place at UNCA. Staff responded that voting had occurred in various locations around the campus. He also asked about parking, given that so many lots are permit only. Ms. Fox said staff give UNCA parameters that include

parking and curbside locations, and UNCA staff figure out how to make it work. He also asked whether we had figures on the number of UNCA students who voted here as compared to their home locations. Those data aren't collected but UNCA is consistently a high-turnout precinct because more than students use the site.

- In 2008 UNCA had 3438 primary voters; 2558 in 2012; 3592 in 2016; and 4872 in 2020. Turnout for primary elections is lower than general elections.
- Other North Asheville sites include the old Rite Aid, Stein Mart and Sun Trust sites but realtors or other property managers do not seem inclined to let the sites be used for elections, even though some of them have been vacant since 2016.
- Reynolds Mountain was used in 2022 but its disadvantages are that they limit campaign signs, it's on a hill, parking can be a challenge, and the County would have to pay to use it.
- The renovated Wesley Center is a downtown location in lieu of the Elections Services Office. It is within a mile of the office.
- Mr. Quinn and staff discussed the advantages of using a site consistently which allows voters to become familiar with it that in turn increases voter participation.
- No vote was required to conclude the discussion but the Board elected to have a straw poll to which all members praised the time and effort staff put into the plan and survey.
 - Ms. Stein asked whether we had a way to communicate back to the public about why the Board decided it the way it did so as let the public know their input was considered. Ms. Duncan said yes, they would.
 - Some decisions are mandated, not discretionary, and the solution to other concerns would require additional poll workers which was not included in the budget.

V. Renewal of Director Delegation

- In Buncombe County the Board's delegation of authority to the Director typically occurs when a new Director is hired, which has only happened twice in the last 30 years. Several changes have occurred since 2020 when Ms. Duncan was hired including the addition of a Deputy Director and changes to job descriptions.
- Ms. Duncan has gathered copies of delegations from other counties, including ones that have a Deputy Director like Buncombe County

and has asked the attorney, Curt Euler, to draft a resolution for the Board's consideration.

- She asked for specific ideas that the Board would like included. Mr. Quinn responded that the Board would like a copy of the current delegation to be sent to members for their review.
- The law (163.33 and 163.35) gives certain authority to the Board included the option to delegate some, but not all, authority to the Director. Mr. Shults asked whether the delegations tracked closely to the statutes or were more general. Ms. Duncan said they tended to be general but she like the idea of better tracking to the law. Mr. Shults agreed.
- Mr. Quinn brought the more speculative discussion to an end pending a review of the current delegation and the draft from Mr. Euler. Mr. Aceto stated that the point of the delegation is provide guidance when something goes wrong which often rests on what authority an official had for the actions they took.
- Ms. Duncan said that in her opinion delegation by the Board to the Deputy Director is only needed in an emergency when there is an interim director because the Director is indisposed. Otherwise, the law seems clear about the Director's ability to delegate to the Deputy.

Meeting adjourned at 6:55 pm

**VI. Next Meeting Date:
October 10 at 3:30 pm - first Absentee Meeting**

**Location: 59 Woodfin Place initially then adjourn and relocate to 50
Coxe**