

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

Monitor Name: Elaine Elam, George Elam, and Cheryl Williams in person

Date & Time: April 9, 2024 3:30 AM

Names of Board Members Attending:

Jake Quinn, Chairman

Mary Ann Braine, Board Member

Steven Aceto, Board Member

Glen Shults, Secretary

Sally Stein: Board Member

Names of Buncombe Co Staff Attending: Corrine Duncan, Director; Justin Tate, Absentee Coordinator; Anna Katherine Moore, Administrative Coordinator and Clerk to the Board; Karen Rae, Elections Coordinator; Victoria Pickens, Accounting Technician and Campaign Finance; and Bria Bailey, Elections Technical Specialist

Location of Meeting: 59 Woodfin Place, Asheville NC

Observers:

7 observers as follows: 2 Democrats, 1 Common Cause, 1 Republican, 3 LWVAB, 1 online.

Agenda Items

I. Agenda for this meeting approved by acclamation

II. Minutes – Minutes for March 14 and March 15 were approved by acclamation with the amendment to the 3/14 minutes to add names for the two petition candidates.

III. Office Updates – Corrine Duncan

- It's Second Primary time and staff have taken the following actions:
 - Sent out absentee ballots and gotten some back which will be reviewed at this meeting
 - Sent out election notices and buffer zone materials
 - Proofed and received Election Day ballots
 - Sample ballots are available online
- Congratulations to Steven Aceto who passed his certification exam
 - The exam he passed included essay questions for the first time
- BOE staff partnered with the Buncombe County Library for their books to action club that features books on topics such as the affordable housing. The next book will be about the opioid crisis. For this event the book was about voting.
 - The event was held in the Board meeting room
 - Karen Rae and Ryan Oliver assisted Ms. Duncan

- Activities included a mock election in which those who attended could “vote” using the Express Vote machines or a hand marked ballot and a hand eye “audit” which was very enlightening to the group particularly with regard to the two times they had to make a judgement as to the “voter’s” intent on the hand marked ballots
 - Cheryl and Elaine both attended the event
 - Mutt won the most popular dog and there were lots of write ins
 - Mr. Quinn asked whether they recruited anyone to be election workers and Ms. Duncan said one person was interested
- They conducted the second round of interview for the Candidate Coordinator position this week.
- The two petition candidates formally filed for office this week and so are now officially candidates.
- The NC State Board of Elections moved the deadline for finalizing Early Voting Plans for the November 2024 election from early August to May 7, a very tight schedule and without an approved budget.
 - She has talked with Neggy Fox about this and will have a meeting with Ms. Bell the Director of the State Board this Friday.
 - Ms. Duncan’s request for an exemption was denied
 - Ms. Duncan will gather more information, consult staff, and present the Board with a recommendation on how to move forward
 - Mr. Quinn asked Ms. Duncan to impress upon Ms. Bell that the folks in the field need to know exactly why changes such as this need to be made particularly in light of not having an approved budget and being in the midst of a second primary
- At the April 2 Board of Commissioners meeting, they approved the site for the affordable housing plan, which includes 50 Coxe Avenue that is currently the Elections Office warehouse.
 - The plan is in its infancy and may take several years to come to fruition
- Ms. Duncan said the Ms. Rae is working diligently to fill three positions for May 14, Second Primary Election Day, but many people say they are not available. Although election turnout will be low, we want the same people to return so that we have an increasingly experienced workforce. She has reached out to both parties to encourage them to encourage their nominees to turn out. It is an appointed position and the staff really want people to commit to the work.
- Karen Rae presented the results from a survey of 59 judges and 242 poll workers from the March 5 primary, with a 65 percent response rate
 - The point of the survey is to gather feedback to help ensure that the people who commit to these jobs will show up and return for future work. Their input is very important.
 - In general, respondents commit to this work largely because they believe it is a civic duty; they like the onboarding contractor’s staff but are not fond of the onboarding process, calling it “tedious, onerous, and irrelevant”.

- Despite the negative comments the legal team at the onboarding contractor (Spherion) said all the questions were legally required.
 - Almost all respondents said they agreed or strongly agreed that the training and training materials prepared them for working; most believed the precincts were adequately staffed, although one precinct had a worker sick on election day; over 80 percent gave the support from Elections Services 5 stars, although some did not have any contact with Elections Services staff; and almost all respondents said the experience gave them greater confidence in integrity of elections in Buncombe County.
- Ms. Stein asked whether such surveys were commonly used by other counties. Ms. Duncan said she did not know but said it was not required by the State Board.
- Mr. Aceto praised the staff for their efforts saying the questions were well selected and the responses well explained.

IV. Municipal Filing Dates Resolution (GS § 163-294.294(c)) – Victoria Pickens

- Biltmore Forest, Black Mountain, and Montreat will have municipal elections this year in accordance with a law passed by the General Assembly in 2023 that moves municipal elections from odd numbered years to even numbered years.
 - The law further states that the Board of Elections will notify the municipalities by May 1 of the statutory time line for candidate filing and elections notifications in July
 - Mr. Quinn consulted the statute and said that, while the Board could select a date of its choosing, it only made sense to follow the standard set by the statute.
 - Mr. Shults and Mr. Aceto thanked the Elections staff for bringing the matter to their attention and commented that in each municipality the town clerk should be tracking such things, but that office often changes staff.
 - Mr. Aceto further asked about what municipalities need to have a primary. Ms. Pickens reported that their town charters do not allow for primaries, only general elections.
- The resolution passed 5/0.

V. Early Voting Election Official Appointments for the Second Primary (GS § 163-166.35(a1), S.L. 2023-140, sec. 27 (c)) – Karen Rae

- Ms. Rae passed out a roster of officials for the two shifts at the one Early Voting site the County will staff.
 - The roster has the names of officials and two alternates

- The first shift is April 26 to May 1 and the second shift is from May 6 through May 11, the Saturday before the Second Primary
- Mr. Shults referred to the State Board Numbered Memo 2024 – 02 of March 14, 2024 on page 5 that states if a county only has Early Voting at its office, it does not need to appoint officials
 - Ms. Rae agreed but said the staff thought it was better to appoint officials
- Further it states that the Elections Office needs to designate two staff to serve as elections officials
 - Ms. Duncan said she thought that provision reflected the fact that some counties choose to use their staff to conduct Early Voting and Buncombe does not
- Mr. Shults asked whether the people on the roster had been nominated by the parties
 - Ms. Rae said they had been nominated by the parties but not specifically for the Second Primary
 - Mr. Aceto complimented the staff on involving the parties rather than using staff
- Ms. Stein asked whether it was an assumption that these people would be willing to work
 - Ms. Rae said they had all been contacted about working
- The appointments for officials for the Second Primary passed 5/0

VI. Absentee Ballot Review (GS §163-230.1(f)) – Justin Tate

- 538 Absentee Ballots were sent out, more even than the first Primary.
- Seven Absentee ballots were reviewed by the Board; 2 Overseas and 5 civilian mail-in absentee ballots, all 5 of which had photo ID copies (no exception forms).
 - All 7 were approved
 - Bria tabulated the ballots
 - The ballots and flash drive were sealed in plastic envelopes which were signed by all Board members

Ms. Stein asked when the Board would again discuss the budget because she had a couple of questions. Ms. Duncan said that although other departments had been asked to cut their budgets, Elections Services had not been so asked. She further said she expected to hear news soon and will report to the Board when she does.

VII. Next Meeting: Tuesday, April 16 at 3:30 pm
Location: 59 Woodfin Place