

ELECTION DEPARTMENT MEETING MINUTES

Date and Time: Tuesday, January 18, 2022, 3:00 PM

Place: City Hall, 15 Summer Street
2nd Floor Conference Room

Attendees:

- Dan Barbour
- Frank Biedak
- Jason Roomes
- Carol Welch
- Pamela Menconi
- Jeanette Berrios

The meeting was called to order at 3:02 PM.

A motion was made by Commissioner Biedak to accept the minutes of the meeting dated November 16, 2021. So voted unanimously.

COMMUNITY INPUT

Kathryn Cunningham, 135 Shores Street, Taunton was in attendance and inquired about November minutes and reprecincting. Chairman Barbour explained that all minutes that have already been approved are on line and a discussion would follow about reprecincting.

NEW BUSINESS

Re-precincting due to 2020 Federal Census

The Director provided information relative to the reprecincting required because of the Federal Census that is conducted every ten years. She explained that the City Engineer drew the new lines to conform with the regulations. Although the changes look substantial, the amount would be less than those changes from 2010. The Director advised that although the new lines were approved, the office was still waiting on the changes to be reflected on the VRIS state computer. This is something that the Secretary of State is responsible for. Once the changes are made, notifications to those households that are affected by the change will be mailed notifications.

Commissioner Biedak inquired if the reprecincting was specific to just State and Federal elections. The Director explained that any change of precinct was for all elections moving

forward, for the next 10 years. The Director explained that some precincts acquired sub-precincts, which would apply to state and federal election.

Commissioner Roomes inquired about polling locations. Chairman Barbour explained that all polling locations are the same, but that some of the addresses may be shifted into a different precinct. Different precincts vote in different polling locations. The Director explained that Taunton did not have any additional polling locations. Commissioner Biedak asked how the voters would find out about the changes. The Director explained that mailings would go out once the information was updated in the system. The Director explained that there was no action necessary from the Commission and this discussion was for informational purposes.

OLD BUSINESS

Update on Bristol-Plymouth Election

The Chairman discussed that he, Commissioner Roomes and the Director attended a BP presentation to the Council relative to the project and that he was disappointed with the School Committees decision to keep the election in the winter. The Chairman indicated the hours were increased to 9-3 pm, however those hours are still less than what is customarily used for elections.

The Director provided an update as well and explained that she and Commissioner Roomes attended the BP school committee meeting at the end of December when a new vote was taken to conduct the election on March the 5th. The Director indicated that she continued to request that the maximum amount of hours (8) was utilized. The statute did not allow for any more than eight hours. The Director explained that other member communities wanted 4 hours for voting and as a compromise, 6 hours was decided on.

The Director clarified that the polls would be open from 9:00 am – 3:00 pm and that these hours are universal for all member communities.

A discussion ensued about the BP presentation/meeting held with the City Council. Chairman Barbour expressed his displeasure that no members of the School Committee attended this meeting to answer questions about these decisions, noting that School Committee member Estele Borges was ill. He stated that the members of project team did point out that the Director from Taunton was the only community who continually advocated for the maximum amount of hours to be used.

A small discussion ensued about the complications with an election being held in March. The Chairman expressed his displeasure with the members of the school committee and the inability to be express these concerns during that presentation due to no member being in

attendance. The Chairman stated that while 6 hours in March is better than the 4 hours in January, the new date and time was still problematic in his opinion.

The Director stated that included with the agenda was written correspondence between her and the members of the BP project team. This correspondence was included in the packet at the request of the Chairman.

The Director clarified that the legislation allowing vote by mail and early voting in person had expired on December 15 and that neither she nor the commission had any control over that. The Director explained that absentee ballots are still an option for voting for those that qualify. All ballots have been ordered, and once absentee ballots are available, that information will be posted on the Election Department web page.

Commissioner Biedak inquired about the letters that had been sent to BP requesting the eight hour window. Commissioner Biedak explained that during the previous meeting he had not voted to recommend the 8 hour window as he felt he did not have enough information to make any recommendation. The Director clarified that the letters that had been sent were not from the Commission. The letters were sent by her as the Director, as the local election officials were asked to outline their concerns with a winter election.

Commissioner Roomes inquired about how voters would be notified and made aware that there is a special election on March 5. The Director explained that caution should be utilized in how notification was made to ensure transparency and neutrality. She indicated that the website would be updated with ballot information, and the specifics of Election Day. A link would also be provided to detailed information about the project from BP. The Director explained that there was currently a discussion about providing notification with the census simply notifying residents of the upcoming election. If the language was approved by Legal, it is the intention to send out notification of the election with the annual city census.

Chairman Barbour inquired about the large highway signs typically used for notifications. The Director indicated that although she didn't want to speak for the Mayor's office, she believed that it was their intention to utilize those signs. The Director also indicated that the updates and important election information would be shared at Council meetings. The Director also explained that notification of the election would be printed in the newspaper as well, as is past practice. The Chairman wanted to go on the record to send something to the Mayor's office to ensure that every opportunity was afforded to give notice about the elections. **Motion made by Commissioner Roomes to send correspondence as such to the Mayor's office.** On discussion, Commissioner Biedak inquired about the role of the commission. A small discussion ensued about the actual duties of the Commission and what would be considered appropriate action. Although it is in the scope of the Department to provide notice of elections and fact based information regarding the times, location of polling places and voting options, the need to be

fair and equal to all when distributing notifications or information was reiterated by the Director. Chairman Barbour explained that BP was not sending any notifications out so Taunton should be following their standard protocols. The Director explained that every measure that is typically used to advertise elections are being used this time as well. In addition to those measures, a buck slip notification of the election would be provided in every census form mailed, if approval from the Legal Department and OCPF is obtained. The Director indicated that she has had conversations with her vendor regarding this and they are able to provide this if approval is given.

Commissioner Welch clarified that the election is still on a Saturday, March 5.

Commissioner Biedak inquired if the vault was all set. Chairman Barbour indicated that it was completed.

Next date for meeting February 15, 2022 at 3:00pm

Meeting adjourned at 3:23

Respectfully submitted,
Carol Welch, Secretary