

ELECTION DEPARTMENT MEETING MINUTES

Date and Time: Tuesday, February 15, 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 3:00 PM.

A motion was made by Commissioner Biedak to accept the minutes of the meeting dated January 18, 2022. So voted unanimously.

COMMUNITY INPUT

Kathryn Cunningham, 135 Shores Street, Taunton was in attendance and inquired about how the voting boxes were transported to the Wards and Precincts. Chairman Barbour explained that in the early hours of the morning, the Building Department sets up all of the machines and essential items that the Wardens and the Clerks need for the day. Ms. Cunningham then inquired about who is responsible if the lever isn't working. Chairman Barbour explained that the Building Department properly sets up the machines and puts the lever down. The Director offered additional information by explaining that the bar in the back of the machine needs to be in the down position for it to accept ballots through the feeder. The Building Department traditionally put those bars down in the morning as part of the initial set up. A new procedure was implemented in November instructing the Wardens to confirm the bar is down prior to opening the polls as a checks and balance way of insuring that the machine is ready when the polls open.

Ms. Cunningham stated that we are getting ready for another election cycle, especially the Sherriff for Bristol County and stated that there appears to be some concerns about voting and inquired if this was going to turn into a "stop this steal campaign" if Sherriff Hodgson isn't happy with the results. Ms. Cunningham stated that we are more than likely going to have primary. Ms. Cunningham shared that she is hearing that it is already being set up that if he

doesn't like the results of the election, if he loses, we are going to turn this into a "Trump circus".

Commissioner Biedak inquired as to what was the meaning of "stop this steal campaign" and stated that he would be interested in learning where Ms. Cunningham was hearing these things. Ms. Cunningham replied that it was already "set in motion" and that someone had complained about the levers of the polling boxes and Ms. Cunningham didn't think poll workers were allowed to touch the boxes. Chairman Barbour clarified that Wardens are allowed to touch the lever. Ms. Cunningham argued that the word poll workers was stated. The Director clarified that technically Wardens are poll workers and that may be where her confusion was. Ms. Cunningham stated that she thought they were supposed to call the Director when there was anything wrong with the box. The Director explained that if a problem occurred that they are not trained to solve, they do contact the Director. Ms. Cunningham stated that she is getting her information from people that are familiar with the voting process. Chairman Barbour stated that there is a paid police officer at every polling location supervising the process and the boxes. Chairman Barbour stated that he was not sure the current conversation was on topic with the Sheriff comments, but reiterated that every precinct has a police officer presiding over the polls. Ms. Cunningham then indicated that she was talking about the results, and inquired if we were going to be prepared for an election that might not re-elect this man which might bring out the worst in local politics. Ms. Cunningham then directed the conversation to House and the Senate passing the Voting Bill and stated: "that means that you will have six options in which to vote: same day voting, same day registrations, early voting in person, absentee, mail, and I think there's six options for voters to vote coming up. There's a bill in the House, I forgot the numbers, and the House, and it's going to pass and we want them".

Ms. Cunningham then stated "You yourself has asked for transparency and we want to provide every opportunity for people in this community to vote and regardless, early voting in person was successful and people utilized it. You never want to remove an option to vote, but there's speculation that it might get ugly coming up because this Sherriff isn't".

Mr. Biedak stated it didn't matter to him or the Board who was running, who was on the ballot or who the incumbent was. His purpose and the purpose of his fellow Board members was to maintain the integrity of the election process.

Ms. Cunningham then accused the Board of "engaging in voter suppression when early voting in person was eliminated." Chairman Barbour interjected and warned Ms. Cunningham that she was out of line. Ms. Cunningham continued the conversation by talking over Chairman Barbour and continued questioning integrity and stated that she was exposing things. Chairman Barbour continued to interject and explained that the Board gives fair opportunity to address the Board. Chairman Barbour stated that it has been asked in the past that the comments not be attacks or personal in nature. He also stated that comments should be

limited to three minutes. Chairman Barbour stated that the discussion has gone off track, once again, talking about the Sheriff and the integrity of other people. Those things have nothing to do with this Board. Chairman Barbour stated that this is a competent group of people that will handle the election process fairly and transparently regardless of who the candidates are.

Ms. Cunningham interrupted and stated that voter suppression was a reality. Chairman Barbour reiterated that voter suppression did not occur under this Board. Ms. Cunningham continued to allege that the board engaged in voter suppression. Chairman Barbour stated again that Ms. Cunningham was out of order and was attacking the Board.

Ms. Cunningham then accused the Board of eliminating the option of early voting in person because the people that utilize it are people of color. Chairman Barbour vehemently stated that her allegation was not true. Ms. Cunningham then accused the Board of ignoring facts. Chairman Barbour told Ms. Cunningham that she was once again out of order and not recognized, and that if she wanted to submit additional comments in writing she may do so. The Board would read her concerns and respond accordingly.

Ms. Cunningham went on to further accuse the Board of shutting people down and stopping comments because “you don’t like what is being discussed”. Chairman Barbour stated that the discussion has veered completely off topic and was not relevant to the agenda.

Commissioner Roomes stated that he voted against the early voting in person for financial reasons, and that he is a person of color. He voted against it for the simple reason that voting was open to everyone, because of the pandemic, mail in voting with no questions asked was available to all. It was a financial reason that he voted against it. He didn’t want to see the City waste money.

Commissioner Biedak stated that they had been advised by the law department that community input be limited to 3 minutes. **Commissioner Biedak made a motion to move forward with the agenda. So voted unanimously.** Chairman Barbour explained to Ms. Cunningham that if she wanted to submit more comments in writing she was free to do so.

NEW BUSINESS

Update on City Census

The Director shared with the Board that the annual City Census was mailed that week and residents should be looking for it in their mailboxes soon. Each census form will have a buck slip included that gives notice of the upcoming Bristol Plymouth vote. The Director gave a friendly reminder of the importance of returning the annual census, even if no changes are

necessary. Returning the census allows for an accurate street listing and prevents voters from becoming inactive in status.

A small discussion ensued relative to the importance of returning of the census and where people may return the completed forms.

OLD BUSINESS

Update on Bristol-Plymouth Election

The Director shared that the special vote for the Bristol Plymouth project was Saturday, March the 5th, from 9:00 am to 3:00 pm. Absentee ballots are available for those who qualify. A small discussion ensued about how to obtain an absentee ballot. The Director also shared that while staffing needs were met at that time, the department is always looking to add to their list of poll-workers, and anyone interested may reach out to the Elections Department. The Chairman inquired where advertising usually occurs for this. The Director stated that it is run on two separate sections of the Elections Department webpage, posted on various bulletin boards in City Hall, and shared on social media during an election cycle.

Update on Re-precincting due to 2020 Federal Census

The Director shared that the office recently received the information from the Secretary of State for the new precinct lines and due to the small time frame between receipt and the BP vote, it would be impossible to accurately review the information and sign off on its accuracy to use for the BP vote. The old lines would be utilized for the BP vote. Many other member communities were doing the same. A small discussion ensued relative to who had the authority to make this decision. The Director stated that BP Legal Counsel had the authority to authorize this and that conversation had occurred with both the Secretary of State and the Law Department, and utilizing the old lines on this authority was appropriate.

Commissioner Biedak asked for clarification about what the different precinct lines meant for this vote. The Director explained that for the BP vote, everyone receives the exact same ballot, citywide. It is not a ballot where district lines provide different ballots for voters, everyone on March 5th will be voting on the same question. A small discussion ensued about the process of updating the precincts.

Next date for meeting was set for March 15, 2022 at 3:00pm.

Meeting adjourned at 3:17 pm

Respectfully submitted,
Carol Welch, Secretary