

**THE BOARD OF ELECTIONS OF CHATHAM COUNTY
MINUTES**

September, 2020

BOARD MEMBERS: Thomas J. Mahoney - Chairman
Malinda Hodge – Vice Chair
Marianne Heimes
Antwan Lang
Debbie Rauers (arrived late)

STAFF: Russell Bridges
Lynn Trabue
Caity Hamilton

CALL TO ORDER The meeting was called to order at 3:35 P.M. by **Tom Mahoney** who gave an Invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

CHAIR ADDRESS **Mr. Mahoney** thanked those assembled for appearing at the meeting. He announced that Savannah State University had offered their location as a poll but noted that since it is past the 90-day requirement to change a polling place location without an emergency, we will likely not be able to accept their offer at this time. **Ms. Hodge** requested that staff look into the number of registered voters on campus, as it is her belief that they intend to make their location a precinct rather than a poll. **Mr. Lang** added that their intention is actually to replace New Covenant Seventh Day Adventist Church as the polling place for that precinct. **Mr. Mahoney** asked **Mr. Bridges** whether there had been issues with New Covenant that would warrant changing the poll as this time. **Mr. Bridges** stated that there are no problems that he knows of at this time. **Mr. Mahoney** stated again that we cannot legally move the polling place within this timeframe, but directed staff to look into the possibility of moving it in the future.

MINUTES

August 2020

Motion by Ms. Heimes, seconded by Ms. Hodge, that the Minutes of the August 2020 regular meeting be approved. **Ms. Heimes, Ms. Hodge, and Mr. Lang** voted in favor. **Ms. Rauers abstained, stating that the attachments received in the email to the Board had not transmitted correctly and she had not been able to review the minutes.** Motion passed.

August 20 Special

Motion by Mr. Lang, seconded by Ms. Heimes, that the Minutes of the August 20 Special Meeting be approved. **Ms. Heimes, Ms. Hodge, and Mr. Lang** voted in favor. **Ms. Rauers abstained.**

TREASURER'S REPORT

August 2020

Mr. Bridges presented the August Treasurer's Report for information.

Motion by Ms. Rauers to table the Treasurer's Report, as they were received the day of the board meeting. Motion seconded by Ms. Hodge; Ms. Heimes and Mr. Lang voted in favor and the August Treasurer's Report was tabled until the next meeting.

OLD BUSINESS

House 163 Recount

Review: Mr. Bridges reminded the Board that this was the first hand recount in the state of Georgia with the new voting machines, meaning there was no guideline to follow outside of an SEB rule regarding general hand counts. This SEB rule outlined the number of ballots to be counter per batch and having equal representation on the recount teams; these were followed by limiting batches to groups of 30 ballots and creating teams of 4 people with 2 of them being Board of Elections employees and the other 2 representatives appointed through the local Democratic committee by each campaign group. We also chose to have the vote choices announced by the candidates' representatives to ensure fairness. **Mr. Bridges** went on to describe the recount process in detail, including how the appropriate ballots were chosen, batched, counted, and verified. He then explained how it was discovered that about 1,000 ballots had not yet been counted after the recount was thought to be complete. When the original report was run to filter the ballots with the correct race it did not include all the batches in Absentee. A second report was run, the remaining ballots were pulled for counting and the teams were all called back to resume counting. The recount teams completed the remaining ballots that day and the results came to a one-vote difference. **Mr. Bridges** then presented the UNOFFICIAL AND INCOMPLETE Recap that serves as an SOVC, as a typical SOVC can only be produced from a machine count.

Recertify: **Mr. Mahoney** put forth a motion to recertify the results with the one vote difference. **Ms. Hodge** asked if the variance had changed Mr. Mallow's total and where the vote came from. **Mr. Bridges** confirmed that it was a vote for Mr. Mallow and it was from a precinct. He added that it had not changed the outcome of the race. **Mr. Lang** made a motion to recertify the House District 163 race and **Ms. Hodge** and **Ms. Heimes** simultaneously seconded. **Ms. Rauers** asked if the tally sheets had been distributed during the recount, if a recap had been given Friday, and if there had been a meeting on Friday. **Mr. Bridges** stated the results had been reviewed with the candidates on Wednesday at the close of the hand recount and touched on again on Friday. **Ms. Rauers** again asked if there had been a meeting. Both **Mr. Mahoney** and **Mr. Bridges** confirmed that a meeting did place. **Ms. Rauers** asked if all absentee ballots had been recounted when the 1000 were found. **Mr. Bridges** stated that there was no need to recount the ballots that had already been counted, as they had been verified already, and pointed that the 1000 ballots were not "found" as the physical ballots were never lost but instead not included in the original report and therefore never pulled for counting. **Ms. Rauers** asked the total number of ballots; **Mr. Bridges** stated that in total for absentee there were 2303 ballots that were part of the race.

Ms. Hodge stated that her impression was that the meeting on Friday was not formal and candidates did not feel that it was a true meeting. She asked who was present and **Mr. Mahoney** stated that he was at the meeting and could verify its occurrence, but some present wanted more information to have been relayed. The results of the recount and the process were explained and copies given, not only to the candidates, but to all present. Staff then worked to publish the results and the tally sheets on the website and it has been published since Friday. He added that it was attended by himself, **Ms. Heimes**, **Mr. Bridges**, both candidates, their representatives, and the county attorney. **Mr. Mahoney** stated that county attorney was present because the Board of Elections is in litigation with one of the candidates. **Ms. Rauers** asked the state of the litigation and **Mr. Mahoney** replied that he expected the case would be dismissed as the recount has been completed and all codes and rules had been complied with. **Ms. Heimes** stated that she had watched both the absentee counting for the August election and the recount and the counting process has improved by miles; the team was dedicated and made great suggestions to improve the process. **Mr. Mahoney** agreed that process and results of the recount proved that the accusations were groundless and both the recount and the original results were accurate.

Mr. Mahoney called for the House District 163 race to be recertified and all voted in favor except **Ms. Rauers**, who voted against. **The House District 163 race was recertified.**

11/03 General Election

Mr. Bridges reported that despite the time carved out to dedicate to the recount, the processes of confirming polling locations and filling the polls with workers had been begun right after the August election and had continued through the recount. Since the August election we have trained 106 new poll workers, have 50 more scheduled, and 125 that are being processed. The influx of new workers was too much for front desk staff to handle and a temporary worker was brought in to take over processing. **Mr. Bridges** also thanked the Live Oak Public Library system and specifically the Southwest Library for their help and confirmed that training classes had been moved to a new space that was recently acquired. We have been able to set up a mock poll to train in and can keep it in place, rather than dismantling and rebuilding frequently as we would have had to do in the library. He added that we hope to have 800-900 poll workers in the November election.

Ms. Hamilton gave a report on the current state of polling locations, listing those that had been changed due to closures from COVID-19, those that had opened back up for use, and one name change. **Mr. Bridges** added that we will be publishing press to broadcast these changes and will be able to send out poll location change postcards early for this election. We will also work to correct address errors that we saw in the last mailout. Typically we send postcards about two weeks before the election to catch late registrants, but having most of our changes made to the state's database early will mean that those late registrants will be given the correct polling location when they register, eliminating the need for a late mailout.

Mr. Lang asked about the deficit in poll workers, techs, and absentee workers. **Mr. Bridges** stated that a report on that is forthcoming, but was still being developed by staff; when an accurate number is received the report will be distributed to the Board. **Mr. Lang** also expressed his concern about the job descriptions for all three positions, especially tech, stating that he was reluctant to send over interested parties due to the information not being readily available on the

website. **Mr. Bridges** stated that anyone the Board knows of wanting to work for Elections could be sent over to the office and would be used in some capacity, particularly those wanting to work as techs. He offered to meet directly with anyone wanting to become a tech. **Mr. Bridges** also encouraged anyone who was qualified to work as poll worker, but wanting to contribute a different way could work as an absentee counter; there is need for a larger absentee team to begin processing ballots two weeks ahead of the election and the team would be retained through the election and beyond as ballots will be received up to three days after the election. He also added that in August, 100% of the absentee ballots, about 8000, that had been received by election night were processed by 9pm, but the continued receipt until the following Friday is what took so long to close the election. We can expect this to happen again on a much larger scale with the November election.

Mr. Lang asked when job descriptions would be available online and **Mr. Bridges** directed the Board and public to the Poll Worker landing page on the Board of Elections website; he asked for feedback on the page and confirmed that all related info would be found there as it is updated.

Ms. Hodge brought up the issue of voters leaving the polls without having cast their ballots and asked if there would be a dedicated poll worker for the exit station to ensure this did not happen. **Mr. Mahoney** agreed and stated that he wanted to take the opportunity to entreat the public listening to broadcast the fact that a vote does not count unless it has been scanned. **Mr. Bridges** agreed that the important of this could not be understated and said that they had specifically increased the number of workers in each poll by a minimum of 2 for this purpose. Extra people will be dedicated to focusing on flow with in the poll, the exit station, and assisting voters at the review station where their ballot can be reviewed before it is cast without blocking access to a machine for other voters. He further stated that it is critical the exit station be manned at all times and reported that **Ms. Trabue** is reaching out to large polls for feedback.

Ms. Hodge requested the My Voter Page be publicized more. **Mr. Lang** asked for copies of the upcoming training schedule, which **Mr. Bridges** agreed to send out. **Ms. Heimes** asked if a plan had been made for election security, and **Mr. Mahoney** responded that Sheriff Wilcher was committed to supporting the election and would have his deputies cycling through the areas for all 92 polling places. Savannah PD would also be supporting us and both would be available for early voting, early counting, and absentee counting. **Ms. Hodge** also requested that there needs to be more regular updates on absentee ballot processing in the next election. **Mr. Bridges** replied that a system was being worked out with Voter Registration on taking better stock of what had been received and tracking it from the beginning rather than just reporting what is finally brought to our office to be processed.

Mr. Bridges continued his report, saying that ballot proofs had been signed off on. **Mr. Mahoney** requested an explanation of the process. **Mr. Bridges** said that the proofs go through several checks and balances at the State level before being sent to the counties for approval; once approved at the county level the become official ballots. In this election there are 33 different ballot faces, which totals to 150 different types of ballots. The ballots is 18" long and will feature 3 questions, which will publicized as soon as possible. He encouraged the public to visit MVP and print, mark, and bring their sample to the polls to assist in voting. **Mr. Bridges** also reminded the public and the Board that they cannot be mass distributed, as they are extremely specific to each voter's location. **Mr. Mahoney** stated that he wanted to highlight the fact that there are 150 different ballot types and neighbors may not have the same ballot, let alone a church congregation.

Mr. Bridges reported that ballot mailing would begin at the end of the week and UOCAVA mailing would begin on September 15. The State has contracted with Runbeck again for ballot mailing, and we have signed on with the State to have them do our ballot mailing. Voters should start receiving their ballots next week.

Ms. Rauers asked if anything was done differently this time for proofing the ballots that would prevent a candidate being switched to another district like in June. **Mr. Bridges** responded that the State has introduced extra ballot proofing reports and measures to assist with this, as we were among several other counties in Georgia with that issue in the same election. He also added that the proofing team had worked for 3 days to ensure the ballots were correct. **Ms. Rauers** asked for the names of the team members, which **Mr. Bridges** listed. **Ms. Rauers** then cited changes made in 2018 by Judge Totenberg and asked if there were similar changes made this election. **Mr. Bridges** stated that the changes she referenced were relevant to Voter Registration's

purview only and said the only changes made were to the guidelines that clarify was is considered an official vote. **Ms. Hodge** asked if the ballots were proofed on the August results before recount. **Mr. Bridges** replied that they were and the State was aware that recount could change the ballot if the outcome was different. However, the outcome did not change and Mr. Mallow's name was on the proofs and remains there.

New Voting System

Mr. Bridges stated that this election would be the big test of the new system and reported that warehouse staff is reviewing our number of voters compared to our equipment and he intends to reach out to the vendor for extra machines where needed. Some Adjudication systems will be swapped for Elections systems as the Elections system includes all management software but can also adjudicate. He also reported that he had received a quote for the cache box and is checking with the county on how to purchase it; this is necessary to speed up the process of downloading to the Poll Pads and keep preparation for the election moving at a steady pace.

Buildings

Mr. Bridges reported that he recently received the keys to the new warehouse and offered the Board to come take a tour of the new space. This warehouse will house equipment and the lease is co-signed with the county. He also reported that a building next to our office had been freed up when Employability consolidated to another building. Training had already moved there and is much larger and more convenient than using the space at the library. **Mr. Lang** asked if it would be possible to have the media visit the warehouse to publicize the new space; **Mr. Mahoney** and **Mr. Bridges** both agreed.

NEW BUSINESS

Voter Education Outreach

Ms. Heimes presented a proposal to have Cecelia Russo Consulting take over press relations through November 2020. Ms. Russo's firm would be responsible for publicizing things like MVP and sample ballots, handling press releases, and would work directly with the county PIO. **Ms. Heimes** made a motion to retain the firm through November 2020, which was seconded by **Ms. Hodge**. **Ms. Hodge** then asked if the proposal had been distributed. **Mr. Bridges** replied that he was not able to circulate it in time due to last minutes changes made by Russo to the proposal. **Ms. Heimes** clarified that the original proposal had been \$3000, which assumed that videography would be done by the county PIO, but when the PIO informed Ms. Russo that they would be unable to take on that work due to the volume of work from other county departments, Ms. Russo amended her proposal to include another \$1200 for videography, bringing the total to \$4200. **Ms. Hodge** asked if the Board would arrive at a collective consensus to determine what we need from the firm; **Ms. Heimes** replied that she hoped for input from all the Board members before moving forward. **Mr. Bridges** then distributed the proposal via email to all Board members.

Ms. Rauers stated that she felt the work needed to be bid out and the cost shared with the Board of Registrars. **Ms. Hodge** answered that other Board members had looked into P.R. firms before as this had long been desired by the Board, and she herself had not found another firm willing to do this scope of work in such a short period of time for a fee as little as what was being proposed. She added that it is important that we begin to control the narrative of the November election as soon as possible and she feels it is an urgent need. **Ms. Rauers** asked who would oversee the firm; **Ms. Heimes** stated the Board would oversee them.

Mr. Lang pointed out to the Board and the public that the total fee of \$4200 was well below the threshold of what needed to be bid out and voted on by the Board and stated that since no bid was needed, coming before the Board with the proposal was a formality and a courtesy as Mr. Bridges would have the authority to hire the firm outright at that fee and the funds are already approved in the budget.

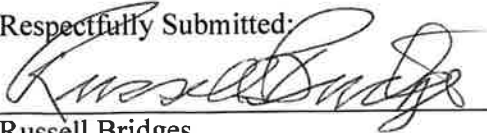
Mr. Mahoney called for the vote and **Mr. Lang**, **Ms. Heimes**, and **Ms. Hodge** voted in favor. **Ms. Rauers** dissented. **The motion passed.**

Ms. Hodge requested that the minutes reflect that the Board did not deny a poll location request, but asked staff to look into using the location at a later date.

ADJOURNMENT:

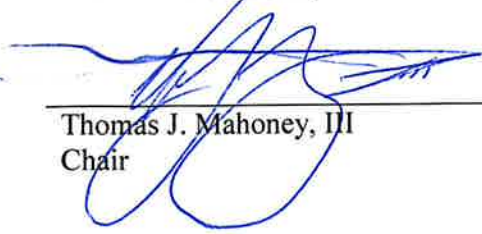
Motion by Mr. Lang to adjourn the meeting.
The meeting was adjourned at 5:30 PM.

Respectfully Submitted:



Russell Bridges
Supervisor, Secretary to the Board

10/12/2020
Date Approved



Thomas J. Mahoney, III
Chair

Robert A. Conway
Notary Signature

2/2/21
Date Notarized