

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

August 17, 2020

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

STAFF: Russell Bridges
Lynn Trabue

MINUTES PREPARED BY: Russell Bridges
Caity Hamilton

CALL TO ORDER The meeting was called to order at 3:42 P.M. by **Tom Mahoney** who gave an Invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

CHAIR ADDRESS **Chairman Mahoney** thanked those assembled for appearing at the virtual meeting and noted that the agenda for the meeting was very full.

MINUTES **July 2020**

Motion by Mr. Lang, seconded by Ms. Hodge, that the Minutes of the July 2020 meeting be approved. Motion passed unanimously and minutes were approved.

August 5 – Special Meeting

Chairman Mahoney motioned to amend the minutes to reflect a motion that was overlooked and passed unopposed:

“**Ms. Hodge** motioned to seek collaboration with the County Attorney and Board Chair in composing a letter to outline the expectations for the future conduct of Board Members. **Ms. Heimes** seconded, and **Ms. Hodge, Ms. Heimes, Mr. Lang, and Chairman Mahoney** voted in favor; motion passed.”

Mr. Lang seconded the motion and **Ms. Hodge** made a motion to include notation that the Board of Elections reviewed Chatham County Human Resources’ findings regarding harassment of employees by Deborah Rauers. There was discussion amongst Board Members as to how much of an Executive Session could be made public. **Chairman Mahoney** suggested that a copy of the resolution that came out of the Executive Session be attached to the minutes. **Ms. Hodge** agreed to this. Motion was voted on and passed, with **Ms. Hodge, Ms. Heimes, and Mr. Lang** voting in favor and **Ms. Rauers** abstaining.

Ms. Hodge then made a motion to include language stating that video evidence was viewed by the Board Members regarding the above incident. **Ms. Heimes** seconded the motion and there was again discussion among the Board Members regarding the privacy of Executive Sessions. **Chairman Mahoney** asked the Board to consider that the resolution that was passed was already a matter of public record. **Ms. Hodge** withdrew her motion and made a new motion to include a copy of Human Resources’ findings, redacting any employee names within, as well as a copy of the resolution with the Special Meeting minutes. **Mr. Lang** seconded this motion and asked if these documents had already been made public. **Chairman Mahoney** clarified that only the resolution was public. **Mr. Lang** asked if these documents were available via open record and if these actions would make them accessible; **Chairman Mahoney** stated he was not sure if they were currently accessible via open record, but these actions would make them available. **Ms. Heimes** and **Ms. Rauers** both suggested checking with Human Resources to determine if there would be any precedent that would affect their ability to make these documents public. **Ms. Hodge** was amenable to this and amended her motion to hinge on advice from Human Resources. **Mr. Lang** asked if the Board would be bound by the decision made by Human Resources and **Chairman Mahoney** stated he could seek additional advice from the County Attorney. **Mr. Lang** then seconded the amended motion, which was passed with **Ms. Hodge, Ms. Heimes, and Mr. Lang** voting in favor and **Ms. Rauers** abstaining.

Ms. Hodge then made a motion to include that the Executive Session was documented by a court reporter. **Mr. Lang** seconded the motion and the motion passed with **Ms. Hodge, Ms. Heimes, and Mr. Lang** voting in favor and **Ms. Rauers** abstaining.

Chairman Mahoney called for a vote to approve the Special Meeting Minutes with the amendments. **Mr. Lang** made a motion to approve the changes and **Ms. Hodge** seconded the motion. **Ms. Rauers** asked for clarification on whether only Human Resources would be consulted or if legal advice would be sought, as Human Resources is not in a position to determine the governing of an Executive Session. **Chairman Mahoney** confirmed that Human Resources would be consulted only regarding disclosing the documents, not regarding the rules governing Executive Session. Motion passed with **Ms. Hodge, Ms. Heimes, and Mr. Lang** voting in favor and **Ms. Rauers** abstaining.

TREASURER'S REPORT

July 2020

Mr. Bridges gave a brief report explaining the fees attributed to Express employment services; the County recently transferred all temporary and seasonal employees over to this employment service and the Board of Elections is direct-billed for their wages. **Motion by Ms. Heimes, seconded by Mr. Lang**, that the July Treasurer's Report be accepted as information. **Ms. Hodge** asked if there was an itemized list of employees and their hours, and **Mr. Bridges** responded that there is and all employee hours are tracked with the service as well as in-house. **Ms. Rauers** stated that she had not yet received a report requested in the July meeting regarding Lee Wright's invoice and also requested a "wrap-up" of the cost of the June election. **Chairman Mahoney** directed **Mr. Bridges** to convey the invoices for Lee Wright to **Ms. Rauers** as soon as possible and noted that the additional costs had been reviewed in multiple previous meetings and were anticipated and done with knowledge of the Board. **Chairman Mahoney** then called for the vote and the motion passed with **Ms. Hodge, Ms. Heimes, and Mr. Lang** voting in favor and **Ms. Rauers** abstaining.

OLD BUSINESS

Warehouse

Mr. Bridges reported that the lease on two buildings on Mall Terrace had been approved and a meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, August 18, to look at the site and start planning the needed upgrades. Among the upgrades needed are additions to the HVAC and electrical systems, communications systems (phones, private and public network), security cameras, and a security system. The warehouse will likely not move there prior to the November election, but they hope to be able to return equipment used in the election to this new warehouse rather than the current one. **Chairman Mahoney** stated that this will hopefully free up space for the absentee team in the back room at the office. **Mr. Bridges** agree that with the expanded staff expected for the November election he would like to make more space available. **Ms. Heimes** also agreed that the absentee team needs more space would like them to be kept in the current warehouse. **Ms. Rauers** asked about the size and cost of the warehouse. **Mr. Bridges** replied that it is 12,000 square feet and will be leased at \$9,600 per month.

Mr. Bridges also reported that Employability would be consolidating some of their locations and one of their buildings would be reverting to the County. While that does not mean it will benefit the Board of Elections, it is a potential opportunity.

Voting System

Mr. Bridges stated that he and the warehouse team are currently reviewing the equipment in-hand compared to what the State is requiring for each polling location; the plan is to deploy 100% of the equipment we have. **Mr. Bridges** pointed out that downloading all the data to the Poll Pads took 2.5 days, while the previous process with the old system took only half a day. This is because all counties are pulling at the same time from a central location maintained by the State; to mitigate some of the issues caused by this, the warehouse has scaled back the number of machines they update at once. **Mr. Bridges** also reported that the cash box had been tested in the warehouse last week and he requested a quote to either lease or purchase one and intends to have it in place and thoroughly tested well in advance of November to alleviate the slowness in downloading data to the Poll Pads. He also reported that due to projections for absentee ballots in November being anywhere from 60-100,000 ballots, he is looking into leasing additional scanners for the absentee team.

Chairman Mahoney paused to point out that the Board of Elections does not fulfill absentee requests in any way beyond counting marked absentee ballots received from Voter Registration

after they have processed them. We do not take requests or process them, nor do we send out ballots and receive them back.

Ms. Rauers stated that the voting equipment was not working in several locations during the August runoff and asked for clarification as to a batch of ballots she heard was found in the training room. **Chairman Mahoney** stated that he was not aware of what she was referencing and referred the question to **Mr. Bridges**. **Mr. Bridges** stated that **Mr. Bridges** he believes the box in question was a sealed box of unmarked ballots and was part of a quantity of emergency ballots that we are required by law to order to support the polls in case of emergency. He further explained that unused emergency ballots are held for 30 days and then destroyed. **Ms. Rauers** asked where these ballots were currently stored and if they had been destroyed. **Mr. Bridges** stated that they are stored at the Elections office and are scheduled for pick-up to be destroyed. **Chairman Mahoney** stated that we are looking forward to having the space we need to store such items easily, but until the new warehouse is prepared for use we will have to utilize space as best we can.

Mr. Lang expressed his concern for the malfunctions he saw with the Poll Pads on Election Day; **Chairman Mahoney** asked him to hold his question until **Mr. Bridges** reached this issue in his reports.

August 11, 2020 Runoff

Mr. Bridges reported that August went better than June, partly due to better training and partly due to the 60 Dominion techs that were distributed to our polls to provide support in addition to our 13 techs. Our techs had their typical broader duties, while the Dominion techs provided in-poll assistance with the machines only. We also had an influx of new absentee workers that were trained by the experienced workers as well as a Dominion-provided trainer. They were able to begin processing the Tuesday before the election and completed all available Early Voting and Absentee ballots by Thursday, about 5,200 ballots. The Monday immediately before the election they returned and processed another 2,000 and had completed over 8,000 ballots by 9pm on election night. By 10pm, staff had updated the live results to reflect all received ballots. However, certification is no longer on the agenda for today, as Voter Registration is still working to complete their processing.

Mr. Bridges then addressed **Mr. Lang's** earlier question regarding the Poll Pad malfunction. He reported that the confusion came at the polls from the Poll Pad reporting that voters had already voted; this was due to changes made by the State that were intended to track who had requested an absentee ballot but not turned one in voted. In the polls they would be flagged as "absentee", meaning they may have voted early or by mail, but may have not returned their by-mail ballot. The State finalized these changes the Saturday before the election, making it impossible to train workers on the changes, and it marked voters initially as "voted" and added new statuses. **Mr. Lang** asked for clarification, as the issue is difficult to understand. **Mr. Bridges** further clarified that the flagged status would bring up several options for why they were flagged that were meant to clarify to the poll workers why the voter would be under this status. **Mr. Lang** asked if this is something that voters should expect to see in November. **Chairman Mahoney** requested that **Mr. Lang** move on from this question, as two other Board Members had been waiting ask questions for several minutes. **Mr. Lang** relinquished the floor to **Ms. Hodge**, who asked if they needed to speak to Registrar's office to cure this, as the office is often very difficult to reach on Election Day. **Mr. Bridges** replied that this was the State's attempt to simplify and minimize the need to call on Registrar; if they had their absentee ballot with them to spoil, it was an easy fix, but this solution was meant to explain why they were flagged so the call would not have to be made. **Chairman Mahoney** stated that a significant impact is made by voters not bringing their absentee ballots to their polls when they decide to vote in person instead. **Ms. Heimes** expressed that it must be frustrating to a voter to be told that they voted when they haven't and she hopes the State makes further changes much earlier ahead of the next election so that workers can be trained on the changes. **Ms. Heimes** and **Ms. Rauers** then both stated the need for more signage and more accessible information regarding poll changes, with an emphasis on My Voter Page. **Chairman Mahoney** pointed out that he did give multiple interviews plugging My Voter Page and that it is linked prominently on the website as it is one of the most important and effective tools. He also stated that he is open to ideas and suggestions. **Ms. Heimes** addressed the problem on Tybee Island regarding the use of the Guardhouse rather the Court House, noting that it was the second election in which the Court House had not been used so residents of Tybee should have been informed; however it may demonstrate a need for signage to remain at an unused site

for three elections. **Chairman Mahoney** agreed, stating that with a higher turnout and the tendency for some voters to only vote in a poll during a Presidential election, there may be some need for more signage at past locations. He also stated that we have a history now of having to use temporary polls and there was signage at those polls.

Mr. Lang clarified that the Board would not be voting to certify the August 11 Runoff and **Mr. Bridges** reported that due to Voter Registration's need to correct a 2-3 ballot variance in their numbers, they would be unable to certify at this meeting. He further stated that Voter Registration had concluded that our numbers were correct and were attempting to validate their numbers to ours and he was hoping they would finish on Tuesday and they could reschedule a special meeting for certification. **Mr. Lang** expressed his belief that this is a prime example of when the public needs to be informed of what is happening behind the scenes to keep processes transparent.

Exploratory Committee on Restructuring and Expanding

Ms. Hodge presented her proposed plan of action for the Exploratory Committee regarding mission, members, and plan of progression.

Ms. Heimes stated that it might be wise to keep the findings of this committee confidential until completed, as things may change quickly throughout the process and change the outcome frequently. **Ms. Hodge** agreed and suggested working with the County Attorney to draft a non-disclosure form for the members to sign. **Mr. Lang** expressed support for the committee and **Ms. Rauers** suggested we look into the Board of Election bylaws to advise on choosing members.

Mr. Lang made a motion to approve the Exploratory Committee on Restructuring and Expanding, which was seconded by **Ms. Heimes**. The motion passed with **Ms. Hodge**, **Ms. Heimes**, and **Mr. Lang** voting in favor and **Ms. Rauers** voting against.

NEW BUSINESS

Advisory Council

Mr. Lang presented his proposed plan for a Voter Education Advisory Council, to be named after John R. Lewis. His report covered the proposed plan, objective, and organizational structure of the Council.

Mr. Lang motioned to adopt the proposed plan; **Ms. Hodge** seconded. **Ms. Heimes** expressed a concern that the plan was outside the purview of the Board of Elections and worried about the terms of the members of the Council surpassing the terms of the elected Board. She further stated that she felt the parameters were too large and staff and the Board were not currently equipped to manage an agency free-standing on its own. **Ms. Heimes** agreed that education is needed and the plan is well thought out, but the Board and staff need to focus on the upcoming November election and she requested the matter be tabled until after the election. **Mr. Lang** replied that the plan does not necessarily need to be implemented prior to November, and that he does not believe there is anything that should prevent the Board from committing to and following through with the plan.

Ms. Hodge asked if there was flexibility to the plan, if for example the Board determined the scope of the Council should not include a grant. **Mr. Lang** stated that it is flexible and if at any point an aspect is not feasible it can be reviewed and removed. **Ms. Rauers** agreed that the grant aspect should be put aside initially, as the budget is stretched, and recommended that it be removed. **Mr. Lang** replied that the goal would be to revisit the grant when it comes time to begin the new budget.

Chairman Mahoney stated that he feels the proposal is outside the Board's responsibilities and would take away from the Board's mission. He also said he is concerned with the detail within the proposal being in writing and the lack of a consensus among Board members and asked **Mr. Lang** if the matter could be tabled until 2021. **Mr. Lang** replied that he feels the Council falls under what was discussed at the Board Retreat regarding creating education opportunities. **Ms. Hodge** added that while she believes the Council would have long-term benefits, she shares the concerns regarding the timeline and resources. She stated that while she wants to show voters that an effort is being made, she wishes this had been proposed at a more ideal time and asked for clarification as to how members would be appointed. **Mr. Lang** specified that members could not be paid members of a political party in order to keep the Council non-partisan. **Ms. Hodge** recommended modifying the verbiage to reflect that members can still belong to a political party. **Mr. Lang** agreed and added that he intended the proposal to be a living

document and asked for it to be passed today so it could be perfected in coming months.

Chairman Mahoney called for a vote; motion passed with **Ms. Hodge, Ms. Rauers,** and **Mr. Lang** voting in favor. It should be noted that **Ms. Heimes** was unable to cast her vote due to audio issues.

November 3, 2020 General Election

Mr. Bridges asked Ms. Hamilton to give a brief report on the status of polling locations. **Ms. Hamilton** reported that she had already begun confirming sites for the November election, starting with some of the polls that had been difficult to reach or dropped out previously. She reported that the biggest problem currently was still Pooler, where only two of the usual polls were available as Oaks at Pooler and Legacy at Savannah Quarters were still closed and Pooler Municipal Building and City Hall had just been pulled from the election. Several members of the Board asked for the remaining polls: **Ms. Hamilton** replied that we were granted use of the Pooler Rec gym by the City and would be able to use Rothwell Baptist and Pooler Church.

Mr. Bridges reported that the cache box previously discussed would be brought online before November in order to speed up download data to Poll Pads. He will also acquire more voting equipment to minimize issues at the polls and stated that while public education is very important and would be a focus, the main focus would be on preparing for the election and the expected high turnout.

It should be noted that at this point (6:05pm) **Ms. Heimes** was dropped from the meeting due to connection issues.

Chairman Mahoney asked how many ballot faces there would be for the November election; **Mr. Bridges** replied that there could potentially be about 100. **Chairman Mahoney** then encouraged the public to visit My Voter Page to view their individual sample ballot, as we would not be able to provide sample ballots of every style for the public. He also recommended that staff find new ways of reaching out to the public to inform them that polling locations were needed and to ask for their assistance.

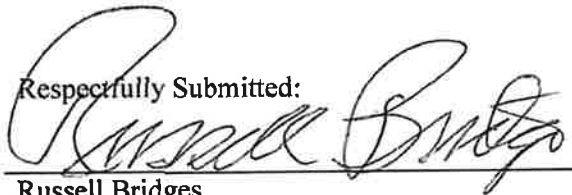
PUBLIC COMMENT

Members of the public were encouraged to attend the virtual meeting and to email their questions to the Elections office prior to the meeting.

ADJOURNMENT:

Motion by Mr. Lang, seconded by Ms. Rauers, to adjourn the meeting.
The meeting was adjourned at 6:12 PM.

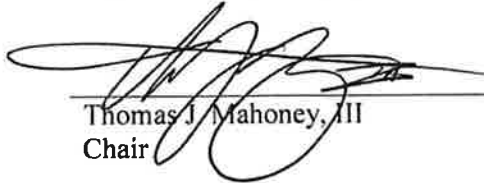
Respectfully Submitted:



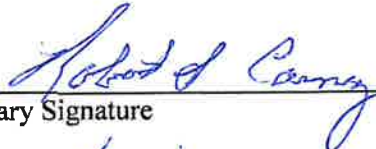
Russell Bridges
Supervisor, Secretary to the Board



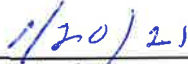
Date Approved



Thomas J. Mahoney, III
Chair



Notary Signature



Date Notarized

ROBERT S. CARNEY
Notary Public, Chatham County GA
My Commission Expires 5/1/23

Official Copy

