

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

January, 2021

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

STAFF: Russell Bridges
Lynn Trabue
Savannah Martin
Billy Wooten`
John Leffler
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 **Mr. Mahoney** thanked the public for their patience and for attending the meeting. He discussed the agenda for the meeting and noted that a quorum was present as Ms. Rauers had recently tendered her resignation. Mr. Mahoney also commended elections staff for performing well in pandemic and with a hotly contested election.

Let the minutes show that Ms. Heimes was present on the call and able to hear audio, but was unable to connect to her mic early on. Ms. Heimes connected to a mic at 3:52.

MINUTES

December 14, 2021 Minutes

Motion by Mr. Lang, seconded by Ms. Hodge, that the Minutes of the December meeting be approved. Motion passed unanimously.

TREASURER’S REPORT **December 2020 Treasurers Report**

Mr. Bridges apologized for his lateness in sending out the Treasurer’s report as there was a problem with the county’s finance system. He presented the report to the Board.

Mr. Mahoney called for a motion to approve the Treasurer’s report and **Mr. Lang** made a motion. No second was made and **Mr. Mahoney** stated that the report could be tabled and returned to at the end of the meeting. **Ms. Hodge** indicated that she would like time to review the report and **Mr. Mahoney** asked if the meeting could move forward while she did so; she indicated that would be acceptable.

CORRESPONDENCE

Bloomington Qualification

Mr. Bridges reported that Charles Edwards, the City Administrator for Bloomington, had called him to discuss qualifying candidates in August for the November 2021 election. Mr. Edwards has asked that the Chatham County Board of Elections handle qualifying candidates for Bloomington, as he is currently employed in multiple roles for the city. **Mr. Mahoney** called for a vote to accept the responsibility of qualifying Bloomington’s candidates. **Motion by Ms. Hodge, seconded by Mr. Lang**, who also asked who is responsible for the cost and if Chatham County would receive part of the qualifying fees. **Mr. Bridges** responded that we bill municipalities when we run their elections, but he would have to research guidance on whether the county would turn over qualification fees to them and bill them after the fact as part of the election. **Mr. Mahoney** called for the vote; motion to handle Bloomington’s qualification carried unanimously.

Official Copy

January 5 Runoff

Mr. Mahoney confirmed that we are still in the process of completing the election and **Mr. Bridges** reminded the Board and the public that we have not certified and the staff is still balancing. Final uploads of the incomplete and unofficial results were completed on Friday evening and posted online. This is necessary to begin the process of reconciling and we are currently balanced in everything except Absentee, with only a small difference that is likely due to a double-scanned batch. **Mr. Bridges** also noted that more people in total voted in this Runoff than in the General Election.

Polls – Ms. Hamilton gave a brief report on the poll used in the Runoff; there was only one change from the November election, with Godley Station (replacing 7-11 Seventh Day Adventist Church) opting not to continue as a poll. They were replaced by the Marriot Courtyard banquet hall. She also noted that fewer locations had used SERVPRO than in previous elections – only 52, with the majority being churches.

Absentee – Ms. Martin reported on the progress of the absentee process. She stated that processing began on the 21st of December and completed all that Registrar had ready for them by the 23rd. The team returned after Christmas the following week and quickly worked through all that Registrar had at that time as well. **Ms. Martin** commented that the team was smaller this time, with 45 people total rather than the previous team of 75 people, but we still able to work quickly and efficiently.

Warehouse – Mr. Leffler reported that 386 Poll Pads, 542 BMDs, and 542 printers were prepared to be deployed to the polls on Election Day as well as a crate, manager bags, UPS power sources, scanners, and PPE bag sent out to each of the 92 polls. Out of all these machines, only 5 pieces of equipment malfunctioned during this election, with the only major malfunction being a scanner that had to be replaced. He noted that one Poll Pad failed to update and had to be pulled before the election, and two BMDs had not been correctly zeroed during the L&A process and were pulled from the field and quickly replaced with correctly L&A'ed BMDs. **Mr. Leffler** estimated that all background warehouse-based resolution would be completed within 24-48 hours.

Poll Workers – Mr. Wooten reported that poll workers' outlooks on the runoff was overall positive, as they mostly reported feeling prepared and confident. Many of them stated that they things they had worried about did not come to fruition; however, one unexpected problem was in the large number of poll watchers, which did cause some concern. These interactions were largely manageable save for three instances in particular.

There were six new poll managers in the field and their evaluation was good; **Mr. Wooten** stated that with more training he hoped to see their continued success in the manager pool. The communication between Mr. Leffler, Mr. Wooten, Ms. Martin, and Ms. Hamilton was successful in managing issues between polls, techs, and the office. Two polls were delayed in opening slightly, one because a city employee did not arrive on time to open the poll, and both polls extended their hours slightly with no issues. Dominion provided 21 techs to our polls this election; Mr. Wooten's contact was very accessible, easy to communicate with, and willing to take Mr. Wooten's opinions into account.

Mr. Mahoney noted that training between an election and a runoff is not required nor a typical practice and for the benefit of the public if we had provided training to workers despite this. **Mr. Wooten** confirmed that we typically do not provide training under this circumstance, but in December he required the chief manager of each poll to attend one class and made it available for assistant managers would wanted a refresher, many of whom took advantage and attended a class. Their focus was on changes and weaknesses from the November election, namely personal safety, protests, and campaigning. **Mr. Mahoney** pointed out that this went above and beyond what is required by state law and how difficult it was due to the short period of time and the holidays interfering. **Mr. Wooten** discussed Check-In post-election; there were no glitches, all polls turned in their memory cards and paperwork. There was a poll watcher present at Check-in and **Mr. Wooten** stated that he was able to walk through with him and show him the process. **Mr. Wooten** noted that he had expected to be there past midnight, but they had completed the process for all polls by 10:15pm.

Mr. Bridges reported that staff finished processing around 10pm on election night and expected between 3 and 4 thousand more ballots to arrive no earlier than midnight. As the absentee processing team had arrived that morning at 7:30, he contacted the State to decide the best course of action. The State elected to send all staff home and have them return at 8am the next morning, rather than have them wait for the next wave and process until 5 or 6 in the morning. While we have received pushback from the public for not processing throughout the night, **Mr. Bridges** made a point that he stands by his and the State's decision and reiterated that all received ballots had been processed at the time and that Voter Registration was confident that they would not have any more completed and ready for processing until at least midnight. Staff returned fresh at 8am the next morning to begin on the new batches. **Mr. Bridges**

Mr. Bridges stated that he had made several trips to polls himself on Election Day and experienced firsthand some of the problems Mr. Wooten had seen regarding poll watchers. Staff received several reports of watchers speaking to workers, making assumptions about the process and about what they were seeing, and interrupting the process altogether. **Mr. Bridges** was informed of an ongoing issue with one watcher and drove to the location to intervene; the watcher was stopping the process and interrupting voters in line whenever an absentee ballot was brought into the poll to be cancelled. After he intervened the poll was allowed to continue as normal, but **Mr. Bridges** advised the Board that this watcher had later sent a complaint to the State regarding the processing of absentee ballots, which he had himself witnessed to be correct per state law. **Mr. Bridges** stated that he hoped for new legislation requiring standardized guidelines and training for all Georgia poll watchers, as he believes the role of a poll watcher is necessary and a positive influence in elections when they are well-informed and well-trained. **Mr. Mahoney** agreed and suggested that since poll workers are required to undergo training, watchers should be as well and that could possibly be supplied by the BOE. He added that the Board of Elections welcomes poll watchers as necessary and lawful part of the process of accountability and welcome the opportunity to see that are trained to know what they are watching.

Ms. Hodge reiterated that we welcome and embrace the poll watchers, but we need to provide some guidelines for their behavior and a better pathway for reporting to avoid the type of situation described by Mr. Bridges and Mr. Wooten. **Ms. Hodge** also suggested a better outlined schedule for the absentee process and education on what that process looks like. She stated that she personally fielded phone calls on election night from the public asking why we had stopped processing ballots and that a certain point the staff can no longer field these questions as they are the ones responsible for completing the process itself. **Ms. Hodge** pointed out that during the November election the public was demanding that we stop counting, and this election they demanded that we continue; our responsibility is not to cater to them but to keep them informed and let them know why we're doing what we're doing.

Mr. Mahoney responded that the main point of misunderstanding was that we stopped counting because we did not have anything left to count. We increased the resources and number of staff working on the absentee process as well as improved our process, which increased our efficiency and allowed us to complete all received ballots by 10pm on election night after a 14-hour day. Waiting to receive more ballots and continuing to process would have stretched it into a 24-hour day. **Mr. Mahoney** repeated that there was nothing left in our possession to be processed. **Ms. Hodge** agreed and stated that the general public does not have that understanding nor the knowledge that because every part of the process has to be auditable the process takes longer than it has in the past.

Mr. Wooten responded to the reference made to poll watcher training and informed the Board that the poll worker training information includes a pamphlet on the duties and limitations of poll watchers. He made copies for leaders in both parties to share with their poll watchers and even reviewed it with a poll watcher for the Republican party. There is also an educational video posted on the SOS's public website for poll workers (Poll Worker Training Resources) that details the duties and restrictions of poll watchers while they are in a poll.

Ms. Heimes added that she spent a lot of time at the Annex observing the poll watchers from each party and noted that they often disagreed with one another openly on processes. She

suggested there should be a standard training for all poll watchers and suggested that Mr. Wooten's team take on that training on a future date. This would help eliminate problems, as currently we don't know what training they are receiving from their respective parties. **Mr. Mahoney** stated that is a dialogue they could have with the parties and the Secretary of State's office.

Ms. Heimes then brought up a letter that she had requested in the last meeting. The letter was meant to be drafted and sent with Board approval to the Secretary of State regarding the safety of election workers during an election as the public, press, and poll watchers come and go from public and private spaces. **Mr. Bridges** responded that the letter had not yet been drafted and would be a focus before the next meeting. **Ms. Heimes** then asked about the luncheon discussed for the absentee workers at the last meeting, which **Mr. Bridges** and **Mr. Wooten** have been planning. **Mr. Wooten** stated that they had been looking at the 22nd at 12pm at the Annex with a tentative list of 50 people.

NEW BUSINESS

3/16/2021 Special Election

Mr. Bridges received a call from Lee Holiday that the school board is discussing having an E-SPLOST election to renew their E-SPLOST before it runs out in January 2022. It can only be held with the March special election date or with the November election date this year. Their goal is to have it in March because if it fails they would be able to bring it up again shortly after it runs out, but they wait until November and if it fails they will have to wait a full year to bring it up again. **Mr. Bridges** stated that we expect to receive a request by the end of the week and we are preparing to run an election until we know otherwise. **Mr. Mahoney** asked the Board if they would bring a motion to give approval to hold the election in anticipation of receiving a request. **Mr. Lang** made a motion and **Ms. Hodge** stated that she would feel more comfortable waiting until the request was made before scheduling a special meeting to approve it. **Mr. Mahoney** asked if **Mr. Lang** wanted to withdraw his motion or continue, and **Mr. Lang** chose to withdraw. **Mr. Lang** then stated that he had heard from a few members of the school board who seemed confused about who pays for the election. **Mr. Bridges** responded that the county pays for the election, not the school board. **Mr. Lang** asked if something could be written and sent to the school board to clarify and **Mr. Mahoney** said that we would ask the county attorney to look into the matter and contact the school board attorney.

Resignation of Debbie Rauers

Mr. Mahoney said the Board would already be aware of Ms. Rauers' resignation due to an email she sent at 3am on Thursday, Jan 8, as well as the disturbing allegations that have been made against her. **Mr. Mahoney** stated that he wants to transmit a letter notifying Gov. Kemp of her resignation in order to begin the process of having a new member appointed by the Republican party. At the same time he would like to initiate an investigation into the recent allegation against her. **Mr. Lang** made a motion seconded by **Ms. Heimes**, to transmit the resignation to Gov. Kemp as well as retain an investigator to investigate and report on Ms. Rauers' conduct. **Ms. Hodge** made a motion to amend, stating that she would like the investigation widened in scope to include all of Ms. Rauers' tenure on the Board. **Mr. Mahoney** added that he has received many other complaints and allegations and that he is aware the Mr. Bridges is in possession of several complaints that he has not yet seen. **Mr. Mahoney** asked the Board if they would accept the change in scope to make the investigation comprehensive. **Mr. Lang** and **Ms. Heimes** accepted the change. **Ms. Hodge** indicated her concern with Ms. Rauers' level of continued contact with and potential threat to office staff. **Mr. Mahoney** responded that the Board may need legal advice regarding this and suggested it be discussed in the planned Executive session. **Mr. Mahoney** called for the vote; the motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Mahoney stated that the public agenda was complete but the Executive Session was now scheduled to begin and members of the public would be sent to the waiting room. He informed the public that the meeting would be reconvened and they would be readmitted, either to make a motion and take a vote, or simply to just adjourn the meeting. **Mr. Mahoney** called for the vote to enter the Executive Session. **Mr. Lang** made a motion seconded by **Ms. Heimes**, which passed unanimously, and the Board entered an Executive Session at 4:45pm.

The Board reentered the regular meeting at 6:24pm and readmitted the public from the waiting room.

Mr. Mahoney asked the members to affirm that no votes were taken in the Executive Session.
Motion by Mr. Lang, seconded by Ms. Heimes. Motion passed unanimously.

Settlement Agreement and General Release – Scott Case

Motion by **Ms. Heimes** to accept and move forward, **seconded by Mr. Lang.** Motion passed unanimously.

Adopt Resolution – Scott Case

Motion by **Ms. Heimes** to accept and move forward, **seconded by Mr. Lang.** Motion passed unanimously.

Adopt the Poll Worker Application – Scott Case

Motion by **Mr. Lang** to accept and move forward, **seconded by Ms. Heimes.** Motion passed unanimously.

Motion by Mr. Lang, seconded by Ms. Heimes, that the December Treasurer's Report be accepted. Motion passed.

ADJOURNMENT:

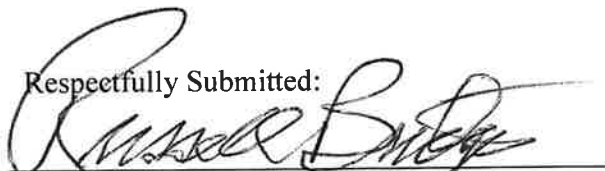
Motion by Mr. Lang, to adjourn the meeting.

ALL APPROVED.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:30 PM.

Official Copy

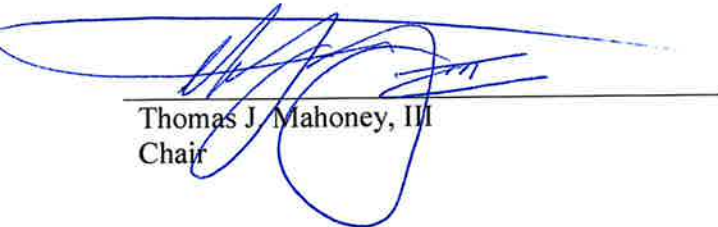
Respectfully Submitted:



Russell Bridges
Supervisor, Secretary to the Board

2/8/2020

Date Approved



Thomas J. Mahoney, III
Chair

2/26/21

Notary Signature

Robert S. Carney

Date Notarized

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

Official Copy