

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

**February, 2021**

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

**STAFF:** Russell Bridges  
Billy Wooten  
Caity Hamilton

**CALL TO ORDER** The meeting was called to order at 3:34 P.M. by **Tom Mahoney** who gave an Invocation and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

**CHAIR ADDRESS** **Mr. Mahoney** thanked those assembled for their patience with the virtual meetings as we try to keep everyone safe and noted that today's agenda was busy and included an Executive Session.

**MINUTES** **January 11, 2021 Regular Meeting**  
**Motion by Ms. Heimes, seconded by Ms. Hodge**, that the Minutes of the January 11, 2021 meeting be approved. **Ms. Heimes** asked about the letter referenced in the minutes to be sent to the Secretary of State and whether it had been sent. **Mr. Mahoney** clarified that the Board had passed a motion to draft and send a letter to the Secretary of State on the safety of poll workers and Elections staff during an election in reference to the increase in poll watchers, the public, and press present at processing centers. **Mr. Bridges** and **Mr. Mahoney** confirmed that the letter had not been drafted or sent and would be completed by staff. **Mr. Mahoney** called for the vote; motion passed unanimously and minutes were approved.

**January 14, 2021 Certification Meeting**  
**Motion by Ms. Heimes, seconded by Ms. Hodge**, that the Minutes of the January 14, 2021 meeting be approved. Motion passed.

**January 29, 2021 Special Meeting**  
**Motion by Ms. Heimes, seconded by Ms. Hodge**, that the Minutes of the January 29, 2021 meeting be approved. **Ms. Hodge** asked if this was the meeting with technical difficulties that caused the public to have trouble entering the meeting. **Mr. Bridges** clarified that the Certification meeting had technical issues, not the Special Meeting. **Mr. Mahoney** called for the vote; motion passed unanimously and minutes were approved.

**TREASURER'S REPORT** **January 2021**  
**Mr. Bridges** presented the January Treasurer's Report for information, noting that there were significant expenses on this report related to cleaning up the Jan. 5, 2021 election.  
**Motion by Ms. Heimes, seconded by Ms. Hodge**, that the January Treasurer's Report be accepted as information. There was no additional discussion. Motion passed.

**OLD BUSINESS** **Warehouse**  
**Mr. Bridges** reported that the updates to the new warehouse were being planned. The county has received two grants, one early in the election cycle to cover election and COVID-based expenses and another later on continuing coverage for those expenses. Within these grants, some warehouse expenses will be covered; there is about \$170,000 available. John Leffler and Brent Rose had done an analysis of what would be needed in the space in order to prepare it to permanently house equipment and the L&A process. They then worked with county engineering and an architect to determine what needed to be updated to become compliant with ADA laws and code. It was determined that the needed work would exceed the funds available; they will now pare down where possible and rework the layout to bring the analysis to within the funding threshold. **Mr. Bridges** told the Board that once he has studied the information he would produce a more detailed report and distribute it. He explained that there were a few changes he could report upfront, such as changes to the public observation space. While that area had worked well throughout this election cycle, the space would need to be recaptured for the

warehouse footprint and would be moved to another area with a separate access and restroom access. That area would need some alteration – a window would be converted to a door and made ADA compliant, and the existing restroom would be made ADA accessible. Another upfront change would be to the main area, including shelving and other proposed equipment. **Mr. Mahoney** asked what we would be using on temporary basis. **Mr. Bridges** responded that the small warehouse on the Elections office site was still being used as storage so that equipment could be deployed quickly if necessary. **Ms. Hodge** asked if we had received a guarantee from the county for how long they would be covering the costs of the warehouse; **Mr. Bridges** responded that it will be funded directly by the county and the money will be added to our budget for the next fiscal year. He added that they had committed to approving the money in the budget to ensure that the warehouse would be covered in the future.

#### **Special Election - March 16, 2021**

**Mr. Bridges** announced that the school board had met and voted to push their E-SPLOST to the Municipal General Election in November of this year, making that election countywide rather than just a municipality-based election.

#### **NEW BUSINESS**

#### **Restructure and/or Merger**

**Mr. Mahoney** stated that the topic of restructuring or merging the Board of Elections and the Board of Registrars had come up several times over the last few years and the BOE has always been interested in the possibility. The BOE does not have many permanent employees and is currently propped up by temporary workers; as such, there has been a focus on opening more permanent positions in the BOE and this would not change regardless of the potential change to structure. **Mr. Mahoney** added that a restructure or merger was not necessary as the BOE and Board of Registrars are both operating well separately, but that the local delegation is discussing the benefits and detractors. Chatham County is one of the only counties still left operating separately and is the only large county with a split Elections and Registrar; this does often result in confusion for the public, press, and even elected officials, but does allow for checks and balances between the two departments. **Mr. Bridges** noted that he has not yet been able to find any draft legislation but will continue to search. He noted that similar legislation had been voted on several times in his tenure and had not passed and would not “fix problems” but would put us in step with the other large counties. He complimented both departments on their professionalism and pointed out that Registrar has a very complicated and important job that they complete very skillfully. **Mr. Mahoney** opened discussion up to the Board.

**Ms. Heimes** asked how many boards had been added since the BOE’s enabling act about 47 years ago. **Mr. Bridges** responded that boards had actually been dwindling and in fact several split boards were merged and then unmerged either to operate separately again or to be dissolved and reverted to the probate judge, as is provided for by law when there is no elections board for a county. He noted that there are currently only three other dual boards. **Ms. Heimes** noted that it would be interesting to see what Representative Buddy Carter had proposed the last time this legislation was brought forward, and **Mr. Mahoney** replied that he would be able to pull up that language and distribute it to the Board. **Ms. Heimes** pointed out that we have gone from a quiet operation to being very busy. **Ms. Hodge** agreed and stated that she wants us to play an active role in determining what happens next. She also said that she is concerned with the possibility of regressing our progress with a merger and wants to ensure that decisions are not made out of a lack of knowledge of our process. There are many things the Board has said they would like to see happen, such as a larger staff and budget as well as voting centers instead of polls, and she would hate to see a loss of priorities and competition for resources as a result of a merger. **Ms. Heimes** stated that she believes the timing would be better in May of 2022 when their terms were up for election, as it will be easier to transition the boards to a united appointed board if necessary. She asked who would appoint the new board and what that appointment would be based on. **Mr. Mahoney** agreed and said that is one of the biggest issues, as appointment could become a “political football”, especially at a time when there has been criticism of the Board being elected. He would like this to be discussed with the local delegation and the community. **Ms. Hodge** agreed and added that she thinks an elected board is valuable, as they can speak to the election process with inside knowledge; not only are they a part of the process, they are subject to it. **Mr. Mahoney** said he would reach out to the local delegation and request a meeting; he suggested that the Board assemble some ideas and come up with staff and Board

recommendations.

**EXECUTIVE SESSION:** **Mr. Mahoney** called for a vote to certify that no votes and no action would be taken in the Executive Session and that the public would be allowed back into the regular meeting as soon as the Executive Session was over where they would hear any actions or votes being taken publicly. **Ms. Hodge made a motion, seconded by Ms. Heimes. Motion passed and the Board entered Executive Session at 4:20pm.**

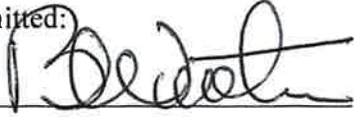
**The Board returned from Executive Session at 5:20pm.** The public was readmitted. **Mr. Lang** made a motion that no votes and no actions were taken in the Executive Session, seconded by **Ms. Heimes.**

**Ms. Hodge** made a motion to approve Russell Bridges' consultation plan with terms as pursuant to the letter reviewed in the Executive Session. **Ms. Heimes seconded. Vote was taken: Ms. Hodge and Ms. Heimes approved, Mr. Lang dissented. Motion passed.**

**ADJOURNMENT:** **Motion by Mr. Lang** to adjourn the meeting.  
**ALL APPROVED.**  
The meeting was adjourned at 5:23 PM.

**Official Copy**

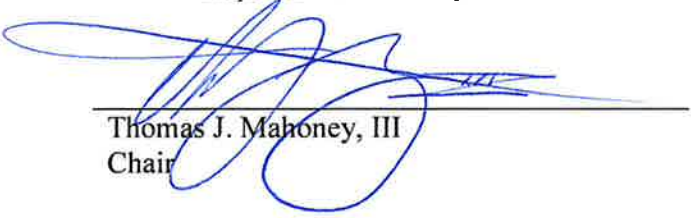
Respectfully Submitted:



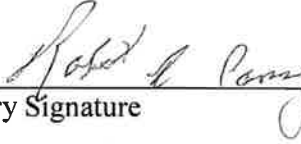
Billy Wooten  
Interim Supervisor, Secretary to the Board

4-7-21

Date Approved



Thomas J. Mahoney, III  
Chair



Notary Signature

4/7/21

Date Notarized

**ROBERT S. CARNEY**  
Notary Public, Chatham County GA  
My Commission Expires 4/7/23

**Official Copy**