

**BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
JULY 20, 2021 – 12:00 PM  
REGULAR MEETING**

The Rockingham County Board of Elections met Tuesday, July 20, 2021 at 12:00 pm in the Commissioners Chambers.

Board Members Present: Ophelia Wright, Chair; Tom Schoolfield, Secretary; Nelson Cole, Member; Thurman Hampton, Member; and Sarah Totten, Member.

Staff Members Present: Paula Seamster, Director

**ITEM #1 – MEETING CALLED TO ORDER**

The Board meeting is called to order at 12:00 pm by Chair Wright. Member present: Ophelia Wright, Chair; Nelson Cole, Secretary; and Toni Reece, Member. Chair Wright welcomed those in attendance who came to witness the Swearing In of the new members of the Board of Elections and to wish a farewell to the old members of the Board of Elections.

**ITEM #2 – PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Pledge of Allegiance was led by Member Toni Reece.

**ITEM #3 – INVOCATION**

Invocation was given by Pastor Eddie McClure with Grace Baptist Church in Madison.

**ITEM #4 – OATH OF OFFICE FOR 2021 – 2023 BOARD MEMBERS**

Chair Wright asked the new Board of Elections Members: Edward Nelson Cole, Thurman Bruce Hampton, Ophelia Wright, Thomas R. Schoolfield, III, and Sarah Jones Totten to come up front.

Mr. J Mark Pegram, Clerk of Superior Court administered the Oaths of Office to Mr. Edward Nelson Cole, Mr. Thurman Bruce Hampton and Ms. Ophelia Wright.

Mr. Benjamin J. Curtis, Register of Deeds administered the Oaths of Office to Mr. Thomas R. Schoolfield, III and Sarah Jones Totten.

(The Oaths of Office are on file in the Director's Office)

Chair Wright welcomed the new Board of Elections Board Members. Chair Wright stated that a quorum of the old Board of Elections Board Members was present to start the Board of Elections meeting today.

**ITEM #5 – ORGANIZATION OF BOARD – NOMINATION OF SECRETARY**

**Member Cole moved, seconded by Member Hampton to nominate Tom Schoolfield as Secretary. The motion carried unanimously.**

Chair Wright welcomed Tom Schoolfield as the Secretary of the Board of Elections. Secretary Schoolfield delegated the duty of taking the Board Minutes to the Director.

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**ITEM #6 – APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA**

**Member Totten moved, seconded by Member Cole to approve the agenda. The motion carried unanimously.**

**ITEM #7 – APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**Member Cole moved, seconded by Member Hampton to approve the June 15, 2021 Regular Meeting Minutes. The motion carried unanimously.**

**ITEM #8 – PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Chair Wright asked the Director to read the Public Comments Rules.

Ms. Seamster read the Public Comments Rules.

Bonnie Purgason –

“Thank you Madam Chair and Board Members. I’m Bonnie Purgason, I live at 183 LeGrande Drive, Eden. On June 15, 2021, Mr. Malcolm Allen of Eden spoke to the Rockingham County Board of Elections and said “I encourage this Board to pursue a path of democracy, transparency, and integrity, not political...” What a wonderful and powerful statement that was, your first duty on this Board was to be sworn in to pursue that path. All five of you chose the most partisan act you possibly could when you had to have a member of your own party to swear you in, how disappointing to me and I am sure to Mr. Allen and to the citizens of this great county, what a travesty. The citizens of this county played no role in your appointment but please know the decisions you make affects every citizens’ voting rights and they do have a say if you fail to fulfill your oath. May God bless each one of you and may God bless this county.”

Ron Price –

“Good afternoon, I’m Ron Price, I live at 218 Cedar Run in Reidsville, NC. I congratulate you on being appointed and elected to the Board. The Board of Elections in my viewpoint is one of the most important positions in the county and the Board of Elections in all aspects is important everywhere in the state and the nation. You have an important and responsible job to ensure the integrity and veracity of the election process that all lawfully authorized and verified citizens have a reasonable opportunity to vote. Like all elected and appointed positions the Board of Elections is accountable to the people. Every valid voter gets to vote and every invalid illegal person does not get to vote and that is within your purview as members of the Board of Elections so I ask God’s blessing upon you that you would have his blessing and direction that these things will be carried out decently and orderly according to the democracy that we live in, in this free enterprise nation. Thank you.”

Royce Richardson –

“Madam Chair, Members of the Board of Elections, good afternoon. My name is Royce Richardson, I live at 300 West Hunter Street in Madison. I come before you today to

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congratulate you the new Board members that have been sworn in. I'm not sure how many people in the county realize this is a complete new Board. None of you members were on the Board a year ago, in fact, the senior member on the Board now is Mr. Cole who's been on the Board now for about 7 months, so that's a new, totally, complete Board and congratulations again. I also want to thank you Board members for your service, while your job is an important one it is also one that is sometimes thankless. I am sure you realize the task ahead of you and I hope you keep your meetings brief. I would be remiss if I didn't mention the staff. The Board of Elections staff is a staff of three people: a director, a senior director, and a deputy director and we now actually have two of those members in place. Our new director Paula Seamster has been here now I guess about three months and it's my understanding she's doing a great job as the director of Elections. She came to be the director after about 14 or 15 months with not having a director. In fact, we went about during that period of time having one person in the office, the deputy director who is a new person of about 14 months ago. Kathy Clark did a great job at that time but she was one person by herself. My hope is that you Board members and staff will work together more harmoniously than the last Board did. My charge to you, Board and staff, is that you always work in a non-partisan fashion to ensure that the voting public of Rockingham County have free, fair, and accessible elections, that is your duties as you have sworn to. Congratulations and thanks again to you all."

Chair Wright thanked those who spoke during Public Comments and she closed Public Comments.

**ITEM #9 – DISCUSSION ON REGULAR BOARD MEETING TIME**

Chair Wright stated that at one of the Board meetings one of the Board members had a conflict with the time that the Board was meeting and had an interest in choosing another time for the meetings but to remain in the same venue. She asked the members for their discussion. Secretary Schoolfield stated that he and Member Cole are on the RCC Board of Trustees and the schedule had already been set and published and would be problem to change and requested that the Board of Elections time be changed to 10:00 a.m. on the third Tuesday of each month.

**Secretary Schoolfield moved, seconded by Member Cole to change the Board of Elections meetings to the third Tuesday of each month to 10:00 a.m.**

Chair Wright asked the Director if the Commissioners Chambers would be available to the Board of Elections at this time. The Director responded yes the room would be available at 10:00 a.m. and she had also checked with the video staff and they are available at 10:00 a.m. as well.

**Upon a vote on the motion, the motion carried unanimously.**

**ITEM #10 – DISCUSSION ON AGENDA**

Chair Wright stated that she wanted to make sure that the Board has a part in setting the agenda but she did ask if a Board member wants to add something to the agenda she would like to know what the item is about so the Board will be prepared for the meeting. She stated that the Director will send the agenda out ahead of time for the Board to review and if things needed to be

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changed that would be the time for this to be done. Chair Wright asked if any of the members had anything to add to the Chair's suggestion.

Member Schoolfield asked if there was a timeframe for any changes to the agenda. The Director responded that the sooner the better so there would be time to research the item before sending the agenda out to the public. Chair Wright stated that if an individual is needed for the discussion they would have time to make arrangements to attend the meeting as well.

**ITEM #11 – DISCUSSION ON BOARD OF ELECTIONS ATTORNEY**

The Director informed the Board that 14 law offices had been contacted, 4 stated that they would submit a proposal by the middle of the first week of July, and just 1 law office had responded. She asked the Board how it would like to proceed with hiring an attorney for the Board of Elections.

Chair Wright asked the Board for directions. She stated that the Board of Elections always has the State Board of Elections attorney to help answer questions.

Member Cole stated that he had hoped that the Board could receive at least 3 proposals before making a decision.

Member Hampton agreed that the Board needed a broader field to select an attorney from. He asked the Chair for permission to see the criteria that was designed to look for an attorney.

Chair Wright stated that the Board of Elections was given \$10,000 from the Board of Commissioners to pay for an attorney. She stated that she did not know why the Board of Elections was separated from the county attorney. Chair Wright stated that she did not think there was a need for an attorney to be present at every meeting. She stated that she felt like if the \$10,000 was not enough money the Board may be able to go to the Board of Commissioners to ask for more.

Secretary Schoolfield asked if the Board could talk to the County Commissioners to see if the county attorney could be available on a referral basis rather than to have to hire another attorney.

**Chair Wright asked the Director to contact the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners to see if the Board of Commissioners would allow general counsel to continue to help the Board of Elections until an attorney could be retained.** Chair Wright stated that she did appreciate having General Counsel Morris as the attorney for the Board of Elections and she wanted the public to know that the Board does and did appreciate everything Mr. Morris did to help out the Board of Elections during his time with the Board of Elections.

**ITEM #12 – 2021 MUNICIPAL ELECTION ONE-STOP PLAN**

The Director stated included in the Board's packet is an email from the State Board of Elections with the requirements on the One-Stop site Plans. She stated that the County Board of Elections office must be open at least regular business hours and from 8:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on the last Saturday before the election on November 2<sup>nd</sup>. The Director's recommendation is to begin One-Stop Voting on Thursday, October 14<sup>th</sup> and continue through Saturday, October 30<sup>th</sup>, this would be Monday through Friday from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the Board of Elections Office.

Secretary Schoolfield asked how this compared to what was done in 2019. The Director responded that One-Stop Voting started one day earlier, a Wednesday, in 2019 and ended on the Friday before Election day and was held 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the Board of Elections Office. She stated this year the Saturday before Election Day was added.

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Chair Wright asked what the Director needed from the Board. The Director stated that the One-Stop Plan would need to be submitted to the State Board of Elections by August 20<sup>th</sup> and the Board will meet again on August 17<sup>th</sup> and if the Board needed time to review the plan that would be okay.

**ITEM #13 – SUMMER CONFERENCE – AUGUST 2 – 4, 2021 (VIRTUAL)**

The Director stated that the Summer Conference would be held on Monday, August 2<sup>nd</sup> from 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., Tuesday, August 3<sup>rd</sup> from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m., and Wednesday, August 4<sup>th</sup> from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. She stated that the Board would be required to attend on Monday, August 2<sup>nd</sup> but the other two days are optional for the Board members. The Director stated that there would be a discount if the Board would attend the Conference together at the Elections Office.

Chair Wright asked the Board for their preference on attendance. She then asked the Director if staff would be attending the Conference and if part time help would be brought in to cover the office. The Director responded that the Deputy Director would be attending the Conference and that part time staff has been arranged to be at the office during the Conference. Secretary Schoolfield stated that he preferred to meet as a group.

**Member Cole moved, seconded by Member Totten to meet at the Board of Elections as a group for the Virtual Summer Conference for the Board of Elections. The motion carried unanimously.**

**ITEM #14 – DIRECTOR’S UPDATE**

Eden Municipal Filing Period – July 26, 2021 – August 13, 2021

The Director informed the Board that the Board of Elections just finished the filing for the 5 municipalities: Reidsville, Wentworth, Madison, Mayodan, and Stoneville. She stated that she had a list of the candidates for the Board members. The Director stated that the Eden Municipal filing period will be held starting at 12:00 p.m. (noon) on Monday, July 26, 2021 through 12:00 p.m. (noon) Friday, August 13, 2021.

Precinct Officials

The Director informed the Board that one of the more important things that the Board will do is to appoint the Precinct Officials. She stated that at the next Board meeting the Board will be selecting the precinct officials for the next two years. The Director stated that this is usually done in August of the odd numbered years. She stated that a letter was sent out to the Political Parties asking for recommendations for precinct judges and these names will be given to the Board ahead of time so there will be enough time to review those submissions before the Board meeting. The Director stated that the Board of Elections is accepting applications for precinct officials via email, mail, or by dropping the applications off at the office. She stated that included in the Board packet a sheet that explains what a precinct official is as well as the general statute on precinct officials.

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Numbered Memo 2021-04 – County Canvass

The Director informed the Board that the State Board of Elections had changed the day on County Canvass, instead of it being 10 days after the elections County Canvass will take place 7 days after election which will be November 9<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 a.m. She stated that there will be other dates that the Board would meet during the one stop voting for absentee voting but she would get all of those schedules out to the Board ahead of time.

**ITEM #15 – CLOSED SESSION**

At 12:52 p.m. **Member Cole moved, seconded by Secretary Schoolfield to go into Closed Session to prevent the disclosure of information that is privileged or confidential NCGS 143-318.11(a)(1) . The motion carried unanimously.**

Chair Wright thanked the Board of Elections members who are no longer on the Board, Member Purgason and Member Reece, she thanked them for their service to the Rockingham County Board of Elections and she thanked the guests who came to the meeting of the Board of Elections today. She thanked those who are listening online and added that the Board appreciated them as well for being a part of the meeting.

At 1:11 p.m. **Member Cole moved, seconded by Member Hampton to go back into regular session. The motion carried unanimously.**

**ITEM #16 – ADJOURNMENT**

At 1:12 p.m. **Secretary Schoolfield moved, seconded by Member Cole to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

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Paula P. Seamster, Director

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Ophelia Wright, Chair