

**BOARD MEETING MINUTES
DECEMBER 17, 2024 – 10:00 AM
REGULAR MEETING**

The Rockingham County Board of Elections met Tuesday, December 17, 2024 at 10:00 a.m. at the Rockingham County Governmental Center Commissioners Chambers.

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

Staff Members Present: Paula Seamster, Director.

ITEM #1 – MEETING CALLED TO ORDER

Chair Wright called the Board meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. Chair Wright welcomed the Board members, those present in the meeting, and those who were watching online.

ITEM #2 – PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Mrs. Diane Parnell led the Pledge of Allegiance.

ITEM #3 – INVOCATION

Chair Wright stated that the person who was going to do the Invocation was not present but she thought it was important during this time of the year to have an Invocation and asked the Board if this portion of the meeting could be postponed until later in the meeting.

ITEM #4 – APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

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

ITEM #5 – APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Secretary Totten moved, seconded by Member Schoolfield to approve the October 15, 2024 Regular Meeting minutes, the October 15, 2024 Absentee Meeting minutes, the October 22, 2024 Absentee Meeting minutes, the October 29, 2024 Absentee Meeting minutes, the November 4, 2024 Pre-Election Absentee Meeting minutes, the November 5, 2024 Election Day Absentee Meeting minutes, the November 12, 2024 Absentee/Provisional Meeting minutes, the November 14, 2024 Absentee/Provisional Meeting minutes, the November 15, 2024 Canvass Meeting minutes, and the November 21, 2024 Emergency Meeting minutes as presented. The motion carried unanimously.

ITEM #6 – PUBLIC COMMENTS

There were no Public Comments.

ITEM #7 – RESOLUTION

Chair Wright stated that this was a resolution that she would like for the Board to study and see if the Board could move forward with it. She stated that the Board has some of the information and there is still information that needed to be gathered to help with the decision of the Board.

The Chair stated that she would like to appoint two individuals to work on the resolution to make sure it is worded correctly if the Board decided to move forward with the resolution. She asked Member Schoolfield and Member Hampton to work on the resolution. The Chair stated that the Director spent a lot of time, overtime, during the election and she wanted to see if there was

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something the Board could do to help the Director with that. She stated that the Director did not ask for this, the resolution was presented to the Chair and she thought it should be presented to the Board on how to move forward.

Member Schoolfield stated that he would participate and asked if the Board had any input for consideration. He stated that he personally liked the way it was written. Secretary Totten responded that she agreed with Member Schoolfield.

Member Hampton stated that he would assist the Chair any way he could but he did have a few questions. He asked if this was for hours worked during this past election season. Chair Wright responded yes. Member Hampton stated that as he understood it the Director is not entitled to according to the County Personnel Policy the Director is exempt and not entitled to overtime or compensatory time.

Member Cole stated that he concurred to pass the resolution and added that this had been a very unusual election with all the issues along the way plus the additional work after the election that caused a tremendous workload on the Director. Member Hampton responded that he agreed.

Member Hampton stated that he and Member Schoolfield would like to meet with the Director to get more concrete information about the hours she and her staff has worked. The Board saw them there and we know what they were doing, if that is okay with the Chair. Chair Wright responded that it was okay to talk with the staff but the staff gets comp time. Member Hampton stated that the staff was entitled because they are not exempt.

Chair Wright stated that whatever Member Hampton and Member Schoolfield bring back before the Board will be considered.

ITEM #8 – COST OF 2024 GENERAL ELECTION

The Director went through the cost of the 2024 General Election

ITEM	COST	TOTAL
EARLY VOTING		
Postage	\$8,875.40	
Advertising	\$1,072.00	
Ballot Coding & Layout (1st time)	\$4,932.00	
Ballot Coding & Layout	\$689.92	
Ballot Printing (1st Time)	\$14,209.10	
Ballot Printing	\$19,989.50	
Materials Printing	\$5,152.92	
Precinct Supplies	\$5,995.98	
Early Voting Pay	\$81,294.30	
MAT Team Pay	\$865.00	
L & A Testing Pay	\$530.28	
Temp Staff Time	\$6,021.54	
Staff Comp Time (Kathy & Polly)	\$378.96	
Election Technicians (Overtime)	\$712.80	

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Service/Maintenance of Equipment	\$7,553.43	
Fuel Expense	\$45.50	
Zoom Link for Absentee Board Meetings	\$27.18	
MiFi	\$101.30	
		\$158,447.11
38,311 Early Votes / 1468 Absentee Ballots = 39,779		
Cost per Ballot Cast	<u>\$3.98</u>	
	-	
ELECTION DAY		
Advertising	\$2,211.28	
Ballot Coding & Layout (1st Time)	\$1,233.00	
Ballot Coding & Layout	\$172.48	
Ballot Printing (1st Time)	\$3,552.28	
Ballot Printing	\$4,997.37	
Board Pay	\$1,500.00	
Precinct Officials Pay	\$33,750.00	
Temp Staff Time	\$4,330.26	
Election Technicians (Overtime)	\$1,425.60	
Staff Comp Time (Kathy & Polly)	\$1,674.10	
Hand to Eye Count (President)	\$694.98	
Machine Recount (NC Supreme Court Seat 6)	\$1,662.12	
Hand to Eye Count (NC Supreme Court Seat 6)	\$106.68	
Postage - NC Supreme Court Seat 6 Letters	\$216.00	
Lunch for Precinct Officials – Machine Recount	\$116.02	
Video Recording - Protest Hearing (estimate)	\$350.00	
Legal Fees - Jefferson Protest (estimate)	\$9,750.00	
Materials Printing	\$1,288.23	
Precinct Supplies	\$1,566.43	
Fuel Expense	\$38.25	
Service/Maintenance of Equipment	\$7,553.43	
		\$78,188.51
9,845 Votes / 160 Provisional = 10,005		
Cost per Ballot Cast	<u>\$7.82</u>	
Cost of 2024 General Election		\$236,635.62
49,784 Ballots Cast		
Cost per Ballot Cast	<u>\$4.75</u>	

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The Director informed the Board that the 2024 General Election was still ongoing so there may be additional costs to this election.

Secretary Totten asked the Director if she had heard anything about the letter that was sent to the State Board for the additional costs of the ballots. The Director responded that she had not heard anything back on this.

Chair Wright asked if the State Board would have responded back to the Board of Elections or the Board of Commissioners. The Director responded that the Chairman of the Board of Commissioners sent the letter to the State Board so the State Board would have responded back to the Board of Commissioners. She added that any refund received would go back to the general fund.

The Director asked if there were any questions or comments.

Member Schoolfield stated that the additional cost for the general election, Election Day, was because of the things that happened with the appeals, protests, etc., which goes with the job and the Board of Elections has to pay the bill.

Member Hampton asked how much was budgeted for the election. The Director responded it is broken down in different categories. She added that she could not provide that information right now but she could get that information. Secretary Totten stated that the financial information was given to the Board and it breaks it down by category. The Director stated that she could go back to the original budget and break it down by each category and bring that information back.

Secretary Totten stated on the last page of the financial statement, page 9, original budget, does that figure represents the original budget amount. The Director responded that this was the original overall budget for the whole year, which was \$602,077 for the entire fiscal year and the cost of the elections was \$236,635. Secretary Totten stated that the Board of Elections was not over budget. The Director responded no not for the year, but for the estimates on the election she thought the election went over budget. Secretary Totten asked if the Director knew by how much. The Director responded that she did not know but she could get the Board that information. She added that she should have prepared that information.

Member Schoolfield stated that the Board of Elections will be discussing the Municipal Election later on the agenda. He understood that the municipalities pay for this election. The Director responded that the municipalities do pay for the election however it is still included in the budget. Member Schoolfield stated that it will be in the Board of Elections budget but the money from the municipalities will come back into the general fund. Member Schoolfield stated that it will be interesting to see how the budget ends up. The Director stated that the cities and towns are charged the cost of the municipal election. Member Schoolfield stated that the Board of Elections has ongoing costs of the election that are not included such as the staff pay, etc. that is not charged to the towns and cities. The Director responded that this was correct. She added that overtime would be charged however none of the regular working hours of the staff is charged to the towns and cities.

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Secretary Totten asked if the municipalities pay in a timely manner. The Director responded yes the towns and cities, since she has been in elections, have paid in less than 30 days. She stated that the municipalities are very responsive.

Chair Wright asked if there were any other questions for the Director. There were no other questions or comments.

ITEM #9 – ACCOMPLISHMENTS, PROFICIENCIES, ISSUES, CHALLENGES, AND OPPORTUNITIES FROM THE 2024 GENERAL ELECTION

The Director informed the Board that after talking to others that have been in elections for over 20 years have stated that they have never encountered an election like this one before.

The Director went through the list of accomplishments and proficiencies:

- 38,311 voters voted during Early Voting without extreme wait times. Most people were in and out within 30 to 40 minutes even with long lines.
- IT Support was outstanding especially Peter Allen.
- Safety measures put in place with the assistance of Rodney Cates with Emergency Services and Jay Brooks with Emergency Management. On Election Day Emergency Services, Emergency Management, EMS, 911, Sheriff's Office, all cities and towns' police departments and fire departments were on standby and willing to respond quickly.
- Received a lot of support from Maintenance staff during Early Voting delivery, Early Voting, Election Day delivery, Election Day pick up, and most importantly Election Day. A big thank you to Eric, Josh, Matt, and Robert for their assistance during Early Voting. A thank you to Billy, Robert, Eric, Josh, Matt, Jaferrell, Jeff, Jason, and Brandon.
- Communication between BOE and GIS, Andy Tredway on Geocoding
- Communication between BOE and Political Parties
- No major issues during Early Voting and Election Day.
- Parking lots were more "voter friendly" No issues at BOE with gym facility
- New Early Voting space/training room was ready thanks to County Management, Board of Commissioners, and Maintenance staff and was received very well.
- Elections, both Early Voting and Election Day, started on time with no issues

The Director asked if there were any questions or comments.

Member Hampton asked if it was the plan of the Director to send to the employees listed a thank you note recognizing what they contributed and how they impacted the election. The Director thought this was a great idea.

Member Schoolfield stated this was a new election for most of us, a new experience for most of us and added that he was shocked when looking at the numbers from 2020 and 2024. He added that 77.89% of the registered voters to turnout and in 2020 it was 77.79% which was a small difference. Member Schoolfield stated that there were more registered voters, about 2000 more, in 2024 but he wanted to know what caused the stress. The Director responded the amount of voters that turned out the very first day, staff was not expecting the numbers that turned out the very first day and it was like that the first week. She added that staff was trying to make sure that no one had to wait an extreme amount of time. The Director added making sure that all sites had the ballots that were

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needed. She stated that ballots were running out in the middle of the day and ballots would have to be delivered to the sites. The Director stated that all the different styles of ballots were sent to the sites but no one can predict where the ballots will be needed the most and the voters were coming in so quickly no one had the chance to check stock on the different ballot styles. Member Schoolfield stated that the amount of early voting turnout at all four precincts was one of the issues. The Director responded that it was not an issue, it was good but it was stressful as well. Member Schoolfield stated that there was an issue with spoiled ballots with people not knowing what they were doing made the sites run short as well. The Director responded yes it did.

Secretary Totten stated that there was a major push to vote early and she thought that accounted for the large number of voting. The Director reiterated that the voters were all good but staff did not want the voters to have to stand in line for long periods of time.

The Director went through the list of Issues and Challenges:

- There were a few falls during Early Voting

Secretary Totten asked the Director to elaborate on the falls. The Director responded that there was one person that was not paying attention and when stepping off the sidewalk fell; another individual had a seizure and fell; the other she did not know the specifics other than the individual fell on the curbing when coming in or leaving the early voting site. Secretary Totten stated that she did not think those falls attributed to anything staff should have done that was not done. The Director responded that they were accidents but staff does not like any type of incidents. She added that all three of the individuals were fine and Chair Wright followed up with two or three of the individuals. The Director stated that the precinct officials and she were getting information on the individuals as well.

- There was a disturbance at one voting precinct on Election Day where law enforcement had to be called in.
- Parking at the Eden Library, law enforcement had to be called a couple of time to direct traffic. People were driving on the sidewalks.
- Political signs were stolen from several locations
- Staff worked a lot of overtime.
- Precinct officials were giving provisional ballots to registered voters
- Geocode issues, not aware of new subdivisions in the county
- Not enough time to research voters for canvass
- Paying for second order of ballots due to Presidential Contest and the additional cost of staff
- Changing county emails right before Early Voting began. Emails stopped being forwarded at the end of November
- This election was not like any other election including the 2020 General Election

The Director went through the list of Opportunities:

- More laptops for training
- Better communication between county, state and BOE
 - Making sure emails and information are sent to the appropriate person(s)
- More in depth training for precinct officials
- Better communication between BOE and county staff on new housing developments

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- More trained office staff during a presidential election

The Director stated that she had never been through a presidential elections before, this was the first time for most of the office staff; Kathy was here during the 2020 election. She added that there were a lot of spoiled ballots.

Secretary Totten asked why there were so many spoiled ballots. The Director responded that there were various reasons and she gave some of those reasons and recommending using the ExpressVote to ensure the ovals were circled correctly.

Chair Wright stated that she would recommend the ExpressVote to anyone and that will be the route that she takes from now on. The Director stated that she knew that with something new it is a little scary but the individuals that tried the ExpressVote are saying the same thing that Chair Wright just said, that this would be the way that they vote from now on. She added that the ballot was two pages long and it took a lot of time to circle the ovals and with the ExpressVote you press the screen and it selects the candidate immediately, and it prints out the names of the candidates for the voter.

Secretary Totten asked what would be the best way to encourage more use of the ExpressVote. The Director responded more education and staff can do that. She added that voters are used to filling out the ballots the way they always have with paper and pen it is hard to change their mindset and using something new always presents a learning curve and the voters want to feel comfortable and know that their vote counts. Secretary Totten asked if the option was being presented to the voters. The Director responded yes but some of the voters just do not want to try it. She stated that after an individual would spoil several ballots the precinct officials would encourage using the ExpressVote. The Director stated that with the use of the ExpressVote it will read to the voter the candidates' names, the print on the ballots can be enlarged, the contrast can be changed on the screen from a white background with black letters to a black screen with white letters. Secretary Totten asked if the Director knew how many used the ExpressVote machine. The Director did not have the answer and added that it was not the percentage that staff would have like to see.

Member Schoolfield asked knowing what staff knows now what could be done differently. The Director responded train earlier and she added that presidential elections are a totally different election from any other election including the general election so there was no way to know what was needed. She stated that there were six staff members in the office on Election Day and that was not enough staff. Member Schoolfield stated so if Elections were preparing for the 2028 election there would need to be more staff in the office. The Director responded yes. Member Schoolfield asked what the Board could do differently. The Director responded that the Board was very supportive, the Board approved the budget that was presented to the Board, the Board was at the sites during Early Voting, the Board was at the 15 precinct sites on Election Day, she stated that staff could not asked for a more supportive Board that we have. Member Schoolfield stated that going to the early voting sites he did not see any real problems. He did learn that some voters consider their early voting sites as their home precinct sites and they did not know where they were supposed to go on Election Day for their home precinct.

Chair Wright stated that this was a lot of information that the Director shared today and she was sure once the Director talked with the precinct officials they have more information that the Director may

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not have thought about. She added the precinct officials may share information on how to make things easier. Chair Wright stated that she appreciated the fact that the Director put this information down on paper and gave the Board members the opportunity to ask questions and make comments.

Member Cole stated that as the Director spoke about the different agencies within the county that came together to make it a very successful election and having been appointed the day of the 2020 Election Day is as different between daylight and dawn. He added that these agencies this is not their normal operation, it was an additional operation and they did a fantastic job. Member Cole stated that he was searching for a word to put in the communication to send to each of those organizations and he remembered the last job he had with a major automobile manufacturer and there was a word that was always used on personnel evaluations which had a lot of words but the last word and most important word was outstanding and what we have here has been an outstanding performance. He thought that if it is communicated to all the agencies that were involved they would appreciate that. The Director responded that she did thank them via email but not in that way. She added that it was a true teamwork effort and she had never seen anything that worked so well. Member Cole said he thought it was fantastic. He added that had the Board been there in 2020 they would have fully understood. Member Cole stated that he had seen the Board working in a united way moving through the election contributing what they could contribute. He added that he could not be complimentary enough for the staff and county management to do what was done. Member Cole stated that the Board did not feel any of the anticipation that was expected with regards to running the election so he thought it was great. Member Cole asked what the cost difference was between the paper ballot and the ExpressVote ballot. The Director responded that there was no difference. Member Cole stated that Director needed to start planning to buy more ExpressVote machines because the demand may grow. The Director stated that the ExpressVote machines are expensive and the cost per ballot are the same. She added that it was not a cheaper avenue but it was a more efficient avenue.

Chair Wright stated that the Board would like to thank Paula, as Director, and her staff publically on how well everyone worked together during the election especially the times here late at night and on the weekends. She stated the Board took its hat off to the Director and staff and how appreciative the Board was of how the elections become more successful. The Director responded thank you.

ITEM #10 – FY 2024 – 2025 BUDGET UPDATE

The Director provided the Board with the most recent Account Activity Report for the Board of Elections. She stated that as the Board looks over the line items they will find that some of the line items have been completely expended such as the Temporary Staff line item and if any of them had any questions to call or email her.

ITEM #11 – DIRECTOR'S UPDATES

2024 General Election Information

The Director stated that the 2024 General Election was one for the record books. Rockingham County had record breaking daily turnouts during Early Voting. There were 38,311 ballots cast during Early Voting at the four Early Voting Sites. There were 9,845 ballots cast on Election Day. 2,285 Absentee ballots were mailed out and 1,468 absentee ballots were received. 523 Provisional ballots were cast and 160 of those were approved by the Board. For the 2024 General Election there were 49,784 voters that voted out of 63,912 that were registered for a total of 77.89% turnout. During the 2020 General Election 47,937 voters voted out of 61,624 registered voters for a total of

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77.79%. She added that Member Schoolfield shared this information earlier in the meeting. The Director asked if there were any questions.

NC Supreme Court Seat 6 Protest Update

The Director stated that the Board held the hearing for the Hon. Jefferson Griffin protest on Monday, December 2nd for the first 3 protests. The 4th protest was heard by the State Board of Elections on Wednesday, December 11th. The State Board dismissed the 4th protest for all counties however an appeal is possible. The first 3 protests that the counties ruled on may be heard by the State Board of Elections as early as Friday, December 20th. She added that if an appeal takes place it will go before the NC Supreme Court. The Director stated that there is a possibility that the Supreme Court could rule to hold another election. She added that she was not saying this would happen but there is a possibility and she wanted to make the Board aware of that. The Director stated that the contest only had a difference of 734 votes throughout the State of North Carolina. She stated the 2024 election is still not finalized; canvass had been completed however this contest is still ongoing. The Director asked if there were any questions.

Senate Bill 382 Update

The Director informed the Board that Senate Bill 382 passed the House on Wednesday, December 11th and is now law, SL 2024-57. This new law changes who the State Board of Elections reports to which is the State Auditor. The State Auditor will now appoint the State Board of Elections members as well as the Chair of the County Boards of Elections. The County Boards of Elections will remain at 5 members. There will be changes as to how absentee ballots and provisional ballots will be handled. This new law is 132 pages long, the pages that affect Elections can be found on pages 29 through 41. The Director stated that those pages were included in the Board's packet. The Director asked if there were any questions.

2025 Municipal Election Estimates

The Director informed the Board that she was currently working on the 2025 Municipal Elections estimates for the 6 cities and towns so that they would have the estimates for their budget sessions. The only issue holding these estimates up is the closure of one of the Eden precinct sites.

Redistricting – Precinct Sites

The Director informed the Board that Leaksville Christian Church which serves as the Leaksville – 2 precinct will no longer be available to hold elections. She stated that she was informed by the pastor prior to the Primary Election that the Board of Elections would have use of the facility through this election year however it would not be available for the 2025 election cycle. The Director spoke with the City Manager about this matter and send an email for this to be presented to the Eden City Council for their comments and suggestions. The State Board of Elections has also been notified on how to proceed. There are two options the Board can consider: 1) merging the precinct with another adjacent precinct or 2) find a new location within the Leaksville – 2 precinct. The Director asked the Board to hold a separate meeting to discuss this matter since there may be other precincts that need to be addressed as well. She stated that now was the time to work on this since there would not be an election in the spring of 2025. The Director stated that this process will take months of research as well as going through the process of moving precinct lines.

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Chair Wright asked if there were any questions or comments concerning the redistricting of the precinct sites.

INVOCATION

Chair Wright stated that the person that was supposed to come and give the invocation did not show for some reason or another. She did not want the Board to go through the Christmas season without a moment of prayer, a moment of silence for those individuals in Madison, Wisconsin who were shot yesterday in one of the schools and she added that she wanted to certainly keep the schools in mind and the families of those lives that were lost yesterday. Chair Wright asked the Board to stand so she could give the Invocation.

ITEM #12 – ADJOURNMENT

At 11:14 a.m. **Member Cole moved, seconded by Secretary Totten to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously.**

Respectfully submitted,

Paula P. Seamster, Director

Ophelia Wright, Chair