

City of Richmond



CHERLYN STARLET STEVENS

CHAIRWOMAN

JOHN N. AMBROSE
VICE-CHAIR

JOYCE KING SMITH
SECRETARY

Electoral Board

April 9th, 2024

Meeting Minutes

CALL TO ORDER

Chairwoman Cherlyn Stevens called the meeting to order at 10:00am with the Vice Chair John Ambrose and Secretary Joyce Smith in attendance.

OFFICE OF ELECTIONS STAFF ATTENDANCE

Keith Balmer - Director, Jerry Richardson - Deputy Director, Katherin Cardozo Robledo - Executive Assistant, Christian Javins - Election Service Manager, Cynthia Johnson - Project Manager, and Brian Prince - Health and Safety Officer.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

There were no prior minutes presented for approval.

PUBLIC COMMENT PERIOD FOR ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

There were no speakers for public comment for items on the agenda.

INTRODUCTION OF THE ELECTION OPERATIONS DEPARTMENT

Registrar Balmer announced that the Elections Officer Department is getting a makeover and will now be called the Election Operations Department. They're the ones who handle everything on Election Day, and they'll also be in charge of making sure staff and polling places are ready for Early Voting. Registrar Balmer gave a shoutout to Vanessa Floyd for her hard work and welcomed new team members Emmoni Spell and Adrianna Jones, as well as Patricia Haden and intern Kaitlyn Tomlin.

This new team is working within the new software called "Integra" that'll help manage staffing and training for the precincts. They're also updating forms and applications for people who are interested in becoming Election officers.

Vice Chair Ambrose wondered if the Board would get a list of precincts for Election Day visits. Chair Stevens said it's not necessary since the precinct chiefs already have it, but Vice Chair Ambrose thought it'd be helpful to know the election officers by name. Chair Stevens explained it'd be a lot of paperwork for 72 precincts, but Registrar Balmer said he'd provide the list if needed.

Chair Stevens and Secretary Smith liked the updated forms. Registrar Balmer then talked about a new digital oath for Election Officers. Ms. Floyd explained how it works, and Chair Stevens clarified they'd still be sworn in on Election Day.

Registrar Balmer added that with the new online system, applicants can apply using a QR code, making the process faster. Chair Stevens worried some people without computers might be left out, but she was assured there'd still be an in-person option. Training will also be in person.

Vice Chair Ambrose asked about notarizing the oath online, which Registrar Balmer said he'd look into. They discussed other localities doing online processes and how applicants will be contacted.

Registrar Balmer mentioned a new newsletter for Election Officers, with Caitlin Shelton focusing on outreach for voter registration.

ELECTION OFFICER PAY INCREASE

Registrar Balmer proposed adjustments to the pay rates for Election Day roles as follows:

Chief Election Officer: \$220 to \$300

Assistant Chief Officer: \$180 to \$250

Election Officer: \$150 to \$180

Increasing pay rates is expected to attract more qualified applicants. Current pay rates pose challenges in recruiting poll workers from higher income communities, hindering efforts to leverage professionalism and attract younger participants. To adequately staff for the November Election, approximately 600 additional election officers are needed. Registrar Balmer believes that increasing pay rates will help attract individuals to work the polls. Feedback from public outreach indicates that the current pay rates are perceived as below minimum wage, deterring potential applicants.

Madam Chair expressed reservations regarding the proposed pay increase. She emphasized that working as an Election Officer is typically considered a form of public service rather than a primary source of income. She disagreed with the notion of recruiting poll workers specifically from white-collar communities and highlighted her own efforts to engage her community, where interest in working the polls is not primarily driven by monetary compensation.

Secretary Smith expressed support for the pay increase, acknowledging the demanding nature of the role and the long hours involved. However, she emphasized the importance of ensuring that Assistant Chiefs adequately support Chief Officers.

Vice Chair Ambrose raised concerns about the sustainability of the proposed pay increase and its impact on the overall budget, particularly considering the need for approximately 1000 election officers. Registrar Balmer reassured the board that the necessary funds are available in the budget. He also referenced previous discussions about pay rates in neighboring localities, particularly Prince William County, as a benchmark for the proposed adjustments.

Registrar Balmer underscored the significant responsibilities placed on Chief, Assistant Chief, and Election Officers, citing evolving legal requirements and the need for retention strategies. He emphasized that the proposed pay adjustments aim to recognize and compensate for the increased workload and responsibilities.

A motion to approve the Registrar's proposed pay increase was made by the Vice Chair and seconded by Secretary Smith. Chair Stevens opposed the motion, but the majority of the board voted in favor, resulting in the motion's passage.

DISABILITY ACCESSIBILITY REVIEW

Cynthia Johnson, ADA Coordinator, and Brian Prince, Health and Safety Officer, delivered a presentation based on insights gathered by Saundra Ward, Director of Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities for Dominion Care, during her visit to seven precincts on Election Day. The presentation focused on identifying areas of vulnerability experienced by voters with disabilities on Election Day.

EARLY VOTING, L&A, PROVISIONALS

Registrar Balmer began by informing the board of an email received from the Department of Elections, indicating a likely Republican Primary on June 18th. However, no official notification had been received yet. He recommended preparing for this eventuality.

Madame Chair inquired about any developments on the Democratic side, to which Registrar Balmer responded that there were no indications. He then shifted the discussion to the logistics of Early Voting, proposing standard office hours of 8:30 AM to 5 PM, with additional considerations for satellite locations and processing times for certain tasks.

The decision was made to open satellite locations for only two Saturdays, in compliance with legal requirements. Madame Chair and Secretary expressed agreement with this plan. Regarding staffing for the primary, Madame Chair suggested scaling down the number of officers, a sentiment echoed by Registrar Balmer.

Discussion then turned to logistics for testing voting machines, with Elections Manager Jarvins providing details on testing dates and certification processes. The timing of testing and certification was agreed upon to ensure readiness for Early Voting and Election Day.

There was a brief discussion about language discrepancies in absentee ballot reports and poll books, with Cynthia Johnson noting efforts to rectify the issue.

Registrar Balmer proposed that the office be closed the day after the election, citing low expected turnout and the coinciding City holiday of Juneteenth. The legality of this proposal was confirmed, with Registrar Balmer citing similar practices in other localities.

The board agreed to close the office on June 19th, with canvassing scheduled for June 20th and provisional ballot processing for June 24th. Concerns were raised about notifying voters of the office closure and ensuring compliance with deadlines for provisional ballot submissions.

NEW BUSINESS

Registrar Balmer introduced several items for new business during the meeting:

He discussed a recently passed bill, HB 943, which expands the list of Protective Voters to include certain election officials, allowing them to use a PO Box address for their registration. This bill aims to provide additional security measures for individuals involved in running elections.

He highlighted an amendment to the Governor's budget that extends the canvassing period for three additional days. Although a separate bill proposing this extension did not pass, its language was incorporated into the budget, potentially impacting future election processes.

Registrar Balmer also brought attention to the language regarding notary for the oath of office, emphasizing its importance in protecting against online versions, as used by Fairfax County.

Madame Chair addressed three items of new business:

She discussed the recent ballot situation involving Printelect, stating that the company took responsibility and committed to using updated materials in future elections.

She proposed considering the use of DS 450 machines for precincts with high volumes of voters, noting that these machines are already in use for such purposes.

She raised concerns about precincts with limited space and suggested exploring solutions such as using equipment that allows for multiple voters at once.

During the public comment section, Ms. Jane Newell from the League of Women Voters expressed interest in exploring split shifts for election officers to accommodate long working hours. While acknowledging the challenges, the board agreed to consider the idea further.

Deputy Registrar Richardson shared experiences from a trial period involving split shifts, highlighting challenges such as no-shows for the second shift.

Madame Chair and Registrar Balmer discussed logistical challenges and the feasibility of implementing split shifts, considering the potential need for increased staffing and the risk of no-shows.

The meeting concluded with an acknowledgment of the difficulties associated with implementing split shifts, particularly in terms of staffing and continuity of coverage.

PUBLIC COMMENT FOR ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA

No one signed up to address items not on the agenda

CLOSED SESSION

The Board entered closed session to discuss personnel matters as it relates to the Electoral Board, the General Registrar, and the staff under the Office of Elections.

MEETING ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned by Chairwoman Cherlyn S. Stevens.

Meeting Minutes

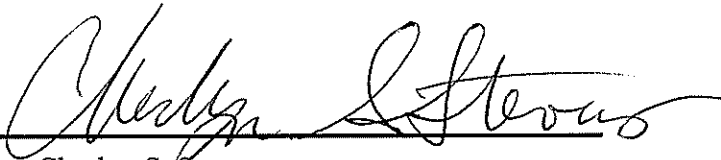
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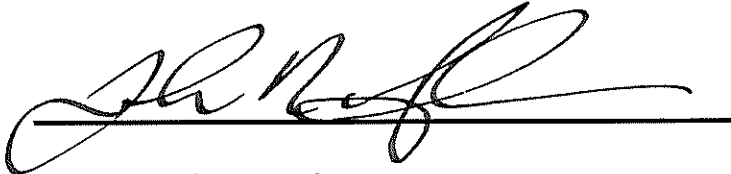
NEXT MEETING DATE

The board did not decide upon the next meeting date.

There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned.



Cherlyn S. Stevens
Chairwoman to the Electoral Board



John N. Ambrose
Vice Chairman to the Electoral Board



Joyce K. Smith
Secretary to the Electoral Board