

The regular monthly meeting of the Erie County Board of Elections was called to order by Chairman Ferrell at 9:00 a.m. on Friday, April 23rd, 2021.

| | | |
|------------|---------------------------------|---------|
| Roll Call: | (D) Thomas M. Ferrell, Chairman | Present |
| | (D) William J. Monaghan, Member | Present |
| | (R) Nicholas J. Smith, Member | Present |
| | (R) Jeffrey N. Krabill, Member | Present |

Guests in attendance: Preston Barnum and Amy Grubbe

Motion to approve the minutes from the previous meeting on March 26 was made by Mr. Monaghan, seconded by Mr. Krabill. Motion carried.

Motion to pay the bills was made by Mr. Monaghan, seconded by Mr. Krabill. Motion carried.

Adrienne James, Deputy Director, stated that there needed to be a motion for the allocation of equipment for the May 4, 2021 Primary/Special Election. The plan is to have one DS200 per polling location, and one Expressvote per polling location. Motion to approve this allocation of equipment was made by Mr. Krabill, seconded by Mr. Monaghan. Motion carried.

Ms. James then stated that after the reorganization meeting in March, we never made an updated contact sheet. Ms. James made an updated contact sheet for this board meeting, and put the contact sheet in everyone's folders. She asked the board members to review it for accuracy, and then she could send it to the Secretary of State and the other 87 county BOEs. The board members took a few moments to review the contact sheet and said everything looked okay.

Next, Ms. James gave an update on absentee voting. She stated that absentee voting had been really slow this election. We have cut down on our part-timers, but we do have at least one Democratic part-timer in the office for several hours a day to try to maintain parity between Democrats and Republicans. In addition, the full time staff have been staggering their hours to try to avoid accumulating excessive comp time. As for numbers, there have been zero military and overseas voters, 58 in office, 201 mailed out, 128 mailed ballots returned, zero hand carries, and six nursing home ballots. Ms. James and Director Lori Salyers did the public test a couple weeks ago, and starting scanning but not tabulating ballots earlier in the week. So far, numbers are coming out perfectly. Clerk Eliza Link also added that so far, there have been zero provisional voters.

Next, part-time worker Preston Barnum spoke to the board members about the topaz signature pads. According to Triad, a couple of counties implemented the pads in last year's August special, while 33 counties implemented them during last November. None of the counties had any problems with them. Triad also stated that they would provide technical support for us for the pads, regardless of where we buy them.

Mr. Ferrell stated that he liked the idea of using the topaz signature pads. Mr. Barnum stated that with the topaz pads, the voter's signature would be on file forever, which could help us verify signatures in the future. Mr. Barnum also gave handouts to the board members that explained how the topaz signature pads would work.

Mr. Ferrell asked if we needed a motion to go through with purchasing the pads. Mr. Smith stated that he was not in a hurry, and that he wanted to form a sub-committee to look at the whole process of early voting. According to him, the topaz signature pads are part of a bigger conversation of how we can improve and speed up the early voting experience. He also suggested that Mr. Ferrell and Mr. Krabill could try out the topaz pads during the vendor fair portion of the SOS conference in June. Mr. Krabill suggested that we keep the pace moving. He also suggested that Mr. Smith and Mr. Monaghan could serve on the subcommittee while he and Mr. Ferrell attended the conference.

Mr. Smith asked who in the office takes the lead on early voting, and Ms. Link stated all of us. Mr. Smith also suggested a new location for early voting, such as the fairgrounds. Ms. Salyers stated that that would be difficult, because it would involve moving equipment. Mr. Smith stated that he was thinking of a new location for gubernatorial and presidential years.

Next, Ms. Salyers gave an update on the dropbox. She said that we ordered one and got it shipped to us. She also stated that she had a couple quotes for security cameras, but asked the board if they wanted to talk about that in executive session because it is regarding security. Mr. Ferrell stated yes. He also stated that it looks like the dropbox will go where the commissioners want it. However, some voters, including members of the Democratic Party, have expressed their concerns to the commissioners about the placement of the dropbox. The letter that the Democratic executive committee sent to the commissioners is below:

“Dear Commissioners:

On behalf of the Erie County Democratic Party Executive Committee and all voters of Erie County, we are writing to you concerning the elections drop box receptacle that is to be installed for Erie County electors.

As you know, the current drop box is located within the foyer of the Erie County Service Center at 2900 Columbus Ave, Sandusky. The box is small and has been confused with the Veterans drop box that was located in the same area. Thus, there were issues with security and chain of custody when someone other than an elections official/employee of the Erie County Board of Elections was retrieving any elections materials that may have been dropped in the wrong drop box. In addition, the location of the drop box required voters to walk up several stairs/steps or walk around a long and angled ramp- both are difficult for many people such as seniors and/or those with various restricted physical abilities to navigate. Finally, it is located right inside the foyer of the building causing confusion, delays, and access to the building not only by voters, but also by other visitors to the building when visiting other offices as long lines were consistent during the 2020 primary and general election cycles early voting periods.

The Erie County Board of Elections Board Members have ordered a more appropriate drop box for the 2021 election cycle. It will be a post office mailbox-style receptacle- much larger than the current drop box. The intent of the board members and staff is to locate the new drop box in an area on the grounds of the Service Center that would enable 24/7, easy, convenient drive-up access for voters when registering to vote, updating registrations, requesting ballots by mail and most importantly- delivering their ballots to the Erie County Board of Elections by maintaining the secure and bipartisan chain of custody as required by the Secretary of State’s Directive 2021-10.

Initially, the location of the new drop box was tentatively planned for the north end of the Service Center building- as suggested by one of the maintenance staff to the board of elections staff. There is a ‘roundabout’ drive area for cars to easily access from two different approaches- the roadway off of Columbus Avenue that leads back to the Erie County Sheriff’s building- and from the driveway along the eastside of the Water Department. This drop box area would checkoff all the boxes outline above: 24/7, easy, convenient drive-up access, more visible from Columbus Avenue and the Sheriff’s Department and allow voters to remain in their car to literally drop off elections material- this would be good no matter what the weather may be at any time during the election cycle. The camera that is required for security purposes as outlined by the Secretary of State’s directives would be easily mounted to provide the 24/7 monitoring at a substantially lower cost- which taxpayers, the board and commissioners would appreciate for everyone’s budgets.

During recent Erie County Board of Elections Board Meetings, staff have advised that commissioners would like for the drop box to be located on the east side of the Water Department next to the Water Department's payment drop box. This area is located right outside the Employee Entrance where there is little room for a large mailbox-style drop box. The area is behind the building; therefore, it would not be out into the open as the location of the north side would provide. There is potential for confusion with voters dropping their elections materials into the wrong box which would then jeopardize the security and the chain of custody of elections materials. The Maintenance Department and the trash pickup area is located there along with multiple parking areas. It would seem there would be the possibility of accidents with more cars dropping off materials into two drop boxes. The cost of mounting the camera on the brick building would be more expensive than on the north side of the main Service Center Building. Finally, when staff are retrieving the elections materials from the drop box, they will be more secured and safer when walking inside the Service Center building through the hallway to the north side of the building rather than walking outside to the east side behind the Water Department building- including dealing with weather elements and darkness depending on the time of the year.

Upon review, we hope the commissioners would agree that placing the new drop box on the north side of the Service Center building is better and safer for all concerned- constituents and employees of all departments alike. Thank you for your consideration and resolution to this matter."

Mr. Ferrell mentioned that when we assisted the voters last year at the OVH, we gave the oath of office to two OVH workers, one Republican and one Democrat, so that they could assist the residents. He inquired whether we could do that for the water department, too. That way, if voters accidentally put their voted ballots in the water box instead of the BOE box, the designated water department employees who took the oath can handle those ballots, and then there would not be a chain of custody issue.

Mr. Krabill stated we should run that by Sue Brown of the prosecutor's office. He said if we ask the Secretary of State's office, they will just defer to our county prosecutor. Mr. Monaghan commented that he wasn't sure why the commissioners aren't letting us put the box where we want to put it. He stated that the money isn't coming from the commissioners' budget; it is coming from ours. Mr. Smith stated that if you pay attention to what is going on the state legislature, they're talking about getting rid of dropboxes. He stated that we should wait because we might be spending all this money for nothing. He also stated that hopefully we would hear more about dropboxes at the conference.

Next, Ms. Salyers stated that she had some information to share regarding credit cards. She checked with the Sandusky County BOE, but they did not get back to her. She also checked with the Huron County BOE. At that board, the director uses her own credit card to make purchases for the office, and then the board reimburses her. In other counties, though, the BOE has its own credit card. Ms. Salyers stated that we could get our own credit card, and set up a policy whereby we must have prior authorization before we can use it. Right now if we need something from Amazon, for example, we must borrow the county IT department's credit card.

Mr. Smith stated that if other county departments have credit cards, then they must have policies in place that have been reviewed by the prosecutor's office. Mr. Ferrell confirmed that that was correct. Ms. Salyers pointed out that we needed a credit card to set up our email domain, so Mr. Krabill used his card and then we reimbursed him. Mr. Smith suggested getting a credit card policy in place and contacting the prosecutor's office for help with that. Mr. Krabill agreed, and stated that in the meantime, if the office needs to purchase something using a credit card, to contact him.

Next, Ms. Salyers gave an update on the open Democratic clerk position. She stated that we received five applications for the job, and that she gave copies of the apps to both Mr. Ferrell and Mr. Monaghan. Mr. Monaghan stated that he would like to advertise again and this time put in the salary and benefits. He stated that the applications we got are okay, but he would like to see if we can get a few more.

Mr. Smith asked if either Mr. Monaghan, Mr. Ferrell, or anyone else in the Democratic Party had any leads on anyone looking for a job right now. Mr. Monaghan responded that we need to examine the clerk salary, and look at what they used to do versus what they are doing now. Mr. Smith responded that anything we do regarding the clerk salary has to be in line with our budget. He stated that the commissioners approve our budget, and we must work with them.

Mr. Monaghan stated that if you look at the salary survey that Mr. Krabill conducted last year, about 30 percent of the counties that are around our size are paying their clerks more than we are. Mr. Ferrell asked Ms. Salyers to contact Matt Wilson in Human Resources and have him do a review of the position. Ms. Salyers responded that she already contacted him, and that he would be coming down to our office after the election.

Ms. Salyers also stated that she thinks there is something to be said for experience. She does not feel it is fair for the new clerk to be paid the same amount of money as Ms. Link, since Ms. Link has been here for two years and will be training the new clerk. Ms. Salyers also mentioned that when she worked for the state, employees there got step raises. Mr. Krabill stated that he would appreciate a proposal on step raises being brought to the board. Ms. Salyers stated that she could do that.

Mr. Monaghan stated that recently in the HR department, an employee underwent additional training and then received a \$2,000 raise. He stated it should be the same here. Ms. Salyers stated that she completed Ms. Link's performance evaluation and placed it in the board members' folders. Ms. Salyers stated that when a previous deputy director left in 2019, Ms. Link picked up more responsibilities. When the prior director left in 2020, Ms. Link took on more responsibilities then, as well.

Mr. Monaghan stated that it seems like there is a bit of bias against the BOE up in the commissioners' office. He read the minutes from a commissioners meeting last year on March 4, which are as follows:

“Board of Elections: It was pointed out that that office staff had received a 2% rate increase (\$3,961) and an employee who resigned was paid \$20,325 over policies. Mr. Old said he doesn't believe the members of the Elections Board are taking their jobs seriously, and they are making poor managerial and financial decisions.”

Mr. Ferrell stated that he wants to make it clear that for the new clerk position, there is a six-month probationary period. At the end of six months, the director and deputy director would evaluate the new employee. If not everything is satisfactory, then we can look for another employee.

Mr. Krabill asked if the Democratic board members are just not seeing the kind of candidates that they want. Mr. Ferrell responded that he hasn't even looked at the applications yet. Mr. Monaghan stated that there's only five applications, and he thinks it's a good idea to run the ad again. Ms. Link and Ms. James agreed. Ms. Salyers asked if when she reruns the ad if she should list the salary. Mr. Ferrell stated yes, and reminded her to mention the health benefits. Mr. Monaghan commented that many places are struggling to hire employees right now, and Mr. Krabill confirmed that was true.

Mr. Ferrell then asked if there were any questions from the audience, and Ms. Grubbe stated she had several. First, she asked for a follow up on her public records request regarding the payout for the Democratic clerk who recently left.

Next, Ms. Grubbe asked how the office was handling hiring part-timers. Ms. Link stated it was based on what we need. Ms. Grubbe commented that right now in the office there are three Republicans and one Democrat. Staff stated that no, there are currently two Democrats in the office. Ms. Grubbe commented that it was still not equal. Mr. Krabill explained that was only because a Democratic full time staff position is not currently filled.

Ms. Grubbe then asked why the county Democratic Party did not receive a campaign finance notice to file a pre-primary report. Ms. Link stated that for this election, it only affects Huron, Margaretta, and Monroeville Schools, plus Vermilion City Mayor. Ms. Grubbe replied that if the party had decided to send a check out in support of the schools, and it was over \$1,000, they would have to file. She also stated that the party appreciated getting the letters. Ms. Link stated that she would check the campaign finance handbook and get back to her.

Motion to go into executive session to discuss security matters was made by Mr. Monaghan, seconded by Mr. Krabill. Motion carried. Board went into executive session at 9:40 am.

Motion to return to regular session was made by Mr. Monaghan, seconded by Mr. Krabill. Motion carried. Board returned to regular session at 9:50 a.m.

Motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Monaghan, seconded by Mr. Krabill. Motion carried. Board adjourned at 9:50 a.m.

Lori J. Salyers, Director

Attest:

Thomas M. Ferrell, Chairman