

SPALDING COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS & VOTER REGISTRATION
Regular Meeting
October 10, 2023

This Regular Meeting of the Spalding County Board of Elections and Registration was held at the County Courthouse Annex, 109 East Solomon Street at 6:00 p.m. on October 10, 2023. Attending were Vice Chair, James Newland, presiding; Roy McClain; Jim O'Brien; and Dexter Wimbish, arriving late.

Also present were Elections Supervisor Kim Slaughter; Attorney Stephanie Windham by video conference; Attorney David Penland; and Teresa Watson to record minutes.

Invocation/Moment of Silence - Invocation was given by Jim O'Brien.

Pledge to the Flag - Pledge was led by Roy McClain

Citizens Comments

Vice Chairman Newland read the guidelines for citizen comments.

Mike Laster

Mr. Laster thanked the board members for their service. He was concerned that he had seen nothing definite on the Board's July 24 vote to hand count the paper ballots in future elections. This is an important decision and elections are less than a month away. People are distrustful of elections machinery, and he wanted to see such a move toward ensuring the integrity of the process.

Adoption of the Agenda

Motion/second by Roy McClain/Jim O'Brien to approve agenda as presented carried unanimously at 3-0.

Minutes

Motion/second to approve the Regular Monthly Meeting of September 12, 2023, by Roy McClain/Jim O'Brien carried unanimously at 3-0.

Dexter Wimbish arrived at 6:08 p.m., thereby affecting the tally of votes for the remainder of the meeting.

Report of Elections Supervisor

Ms. Slaughter noted that Elections Code Manuals are provided for Board members. She provided an overview of her monthly report to the Board for the period ending September 30, 2023, noting voter registration actions such as re registrations, transfers, felons, and deceased voters; the status of precinct cards and the resulting inattentiveness of the state for same; GARVIS updates regarding improvements needed; correspondence from the Secretary of State's Office concerning pending issues relative to elections changes; and list maintenance as it pertains to ERIC (Electronic Registration Information Center), NGE (no activity for two general elections) and no contact (no activity for five calendar years).

As for My Voter Page, she detailed updates coming prior to the November 7 general municipal-special election. Enhancements have been incorporated to make the site more user-friendly.

Ms. Slaughter explained the status of the State Election Board meeting that was not held on October 3 as anticipated. Hopefully, notice will be forthcoming about when we can expect our case to be heard. She reminded the Board of the State Elections Board's measure that were put in place to avoid issues with a fake ballot(s) as before. She has submitted information as requested to the SOS Investigation Division.

Precinct health checks have been completed and any required actions are in the process of being implemented. These will be finished and communicated to Poll Managers prior to November 7. She complimented Mary and Sandra on the office staff for all their assistance with operations and training. The

Secretary of State's office has notified they will wait until after the November 7 election to conduct the voting equipment health check.

She reminded everyone of the ballot wording for different precincts, depending on the City's municipal races. The ESPLOST referendum question will appear in all precincts and represents a continuation of the penny sales tax rather than a new tax. Logic and accuracy testing is mostly done and should complete no later than October 11.

Ms. Slaughter informed the Board of the new hire, Kelly Romero, for the position of Voter Registration Clerk. All onboarding activities have been scheduled for Ms. Romero. Kelly has served eight years in Spalding County's 911 division and brings with her a wealth of institutional knowledge and a great understanding of mapping. She is also bilingual, which will serve the office well. Once all processes for hiring are complete, Ms. Slaughter will introduce Ms. Romero to the Board.

The hand count proposed earlier will be reviewed in a Special Called Meeting to be scheduled. She will notify Board members of the date by Monday of next week.

Ms. Slaughter noted that GARVIS updates cannot be guaranteed to not affect the November 7 election. She will keep the Board informed, and Roy McClain agreed that GARVIS has been a struggle with many issues. Ms. Slaughter stated, though, that we are seeing issues actually resolved along the way. She emphasized the need to keep lines of communication open in the process.

She detailed early voting dates and times, and she noted the Homeland Security visit that is to take place on October 18. Members are welcome to attend. The scanning project has identified 550 ballots from the November 2020 election that were cast on regular copy paper instead of the required security paper.

Ms. Slaughter mentioned concerns for 2024: Precinct 17 will probably need relocation from Ambucs Park. We will begin reviewing the area for other accommodations in the near future.

Old Business

- 1) Amendment to Resolution in Delegating Authority to Election Supervisor.
A maximum of \$500 was established, but after stepping back, Ms. Slaughter realized that amount needs to be increased to \$3000. Between ballots being printed, security paper purchased, equipment, poll worker pay, etc., there is a real justification for this increase. Some discussion followed.
Motion/second by Roy McClain/Jim O'Brien in favor of the increase to \$3000 carried unanimously at 4-0. Ms. Windham advised we will execute an amendment to the resolution for Mr. Newland to sign that will reflect this increase.
- 2) Supervisor and staff compensation.
Mr. McClain explained that the Board's research into the salaries of several surrounding counties revealed an average of \$69,507.40 for the supervisor position. When hired, we did not realize this structure and brought in Ms. Slaughter at a significantly lower salary. She is the lowest paid supervisor in Spalding County.

Mr. Wimbish inquired if the Board should go into Executive Session for its discussion on personnel compensation. Ms. Windham advised the Board could elect to do that but was not required to do so. Ms. Windham stated we can amend the agenda, but no advertisement was provided for an Executive Session. The appropriate time for consideration would be after completing the regular agenda business. A vote would need to be taken in a public session. ***The motion was by Roy McClain was made to amend the agenda to include an Executive Session for the purpose of discussing personnel. No second was received, and the motion died with no action. It was determined that Ms. Slaughter will add this item for consideration to the upcoming Special Called Meeting and duly advertise it.***

New Business

- 1) Discussion of National Voter Registration Day proclamation approved by Spalding County Board of Commissioners.

Mr. Wimbish noted the Board's previous consideration, subsequent compromise after much discussion, and recommendation to approve the National Voter Registration Day Proclamation to the Spalding County Board of Commissioners by a 4-1 vote. The Board of Commissioners did not approve the Proclamation as recommended by the Elections Board but rather approved a changed document. He was concerned about the integrity of the process and the setting of a precedent. He wondered and would like to know exactly who changed the document and who directed the change. He wondered if this could result in some type of criminal action since the document presented and put forward was not the document that we approved for recommendation.

Ms. Windham said she believed the change was initiated by one or more Commissioners and, since the Proclamation actually comes from them, they felt it within their rights to adjust the document. It was, in fact, not the one approved by the Board of Elections. She believed one or more commissioners when reviewing their agenda packet(s) decided they wanted changes to make the Proclamation more palatable. So, instead of not issuing it, they changed it. Had she known this would occur, she would have recommended not issuing the Proclamation. She had no opportunity to review these changes prior to the presentation. She went to Kim Slaughter when she entered the meeting to tell her the document was different. She advocated removal of the phrase that this was recommended by the Board of Elections since it was not appropriate to say the Proclamation was based on the Board's recommendation. She felt this action was most appropriate in the moment. Ms. Slaughter had staff members there, and Board member Roy McClain attended, as well.

Mr. Wimbish stated we thank the Board of Commissioners for taking an action, but the fact remains that someone changed the document. He would like to find out who made the change and when (meeting, planning meeting, etc.) and let us know. He maintained this change was made without authorization to do so. He felt someone usurped the Elections Board's power. He requested that a letter be sent to the Board of Commissioners asking who made the change and in what context. Since Ms. Windham felt this would be more appropriately handled by the Board, rather than staff or herself, Mr. Newland as Vice Chair tonight could ensure this is sent to the County Clerk or County Manager or both with a copy to Chairman Davis, as well.

Motion/second to authorize a letter from Vice Chair Newland, on behalf of the Board of Elections, to request the information as identified in the discussion, by Jim O'Brien/Dexter Wimbish, carried by a vote of 3 – 1 with Roy McClain opposing.

Board Member Comments

Roy McClain thanked the Elections Supervisor and staff. They have been hamstrung by state mandated issues without state provided assistance, along with the mess that is GARVIS.

Mr. Wimbish had no comment.

Mr. O'Brien had no comment.

Mr. Newland thanked Board members and noted that all are trying their best for the voters of Spalding County. He, too, thanked Ms. Slaughter and the staff. He reminded Ms. Slaughter to add the Executive Session to the Special Called Meeting agenda.

Adjournment

Motion to adjourn at 6:45 p.m. by Dexter Wimbish/Jim O'Brien carried unanimously at 4-0.


James Newland, Vice Chair, Presiding


Teresa A. Watson, Recording Secretary