

MINUTES

City of Charlottesville Electoral Board Meeting of December 5, 2017

The meeting was called to order by the Chair at 5:50 p.m. in the office of the Charlottesville General Registrar. Those present were Electoral Board members Anne Hemenway (Chair), Jon Bright (Vice Chair), and Jim Nix (Secretary), General Registrar, Rosanna Bencoach, Deputy Registrar Katie Mauller and Assistant Registrars Melissa Morton and Paul Boggs.

On a motion by the Chair, seconded by the Vice-chair, the agenda was approved unanimously with a single change to the sequence of discussion topics.

On a motion by the Chair, seconded by the Vice Chair, the minutes of the October 16, and November 7-13, 2017 meetings were approved unanimously without change.

Public Comment

No members of the public were present for this meeting.

Review of Ballot Printing Procedures

Assistant Registrar Paul Boggs provided the board with copies of a draft document containing detailed recommendations concerning policies and procedures governing in-house ballot printing. Mr. Boggs led a discussion summarizing the major points of the document including personnel, equipment, security and legal considerations. Mr. Boggs was the principal member of the office staff engaged in printing the ballots for the recent general election and his recommendations are based on his experience in what was the first election using only in-house ballot printing. This document remains a work in progress with changes anticipated following the upgrade to Hart Verity 2.0 software early in 2018. The board members thanked Mr. Boggs and commended him on his efforts to rationalize and document this vital activity.

Report of the General Registrar

Ballot Printing - Based on his experience with printing ballots for the General Election and reports from several precincts of ballots not scanning on Election Day, the Secretary had recommended a return to the use of 28 pound paper for ballots. The Registrar reported that a source for high-quality paper of this weight has been located adding that the cost was actually lower than that of the 24 pound paper used in the recent election.

Budget - There followed a discussion on the budget proposal submitted by the Registrar to the city on December 4 for the fiscal year that begins on July 1, 2018. The Chair and Vice-chair questioned a number of items on “budget vs. actual” spreadsheets previously sent to the Board for the current and previous fiscal years. These were explained by the Registrar who also pointed out that, in spite of significant growth in the electorate and record turnout in recent elections, the new operating budget request is only slightly higher than that for the current year. The request for officer of election pay for the two expected-high-turnout elections in FY17-18 is higher than this year.

Voting Equipment Technicians – At present Raenell Lockley is the only technician on staff. Her hours will increase to 20 per week by the end of the year and, early in the new year, she and Ms. Morton will travel to Texas for training on version 2.0 of the Hart Verity system. The Registrar indicated that she planned to hire an additional technician whose working hours would be lower and would be concentrated around the time of elections. This prompted questions from the Chair on the cost effectiveness of employing in-house technicians instead of relying on contractor support. The latter option is the one employed by the Albemarle County registrar and Ms. Morton agreed to contact that office to obtain data on the cost and the scope of support supplied by the contractor. The Registrar pointed out that the Board has no responsibilities for staff hiring decisions. The requested information should be available from the County Registrar before the Registrar must decide whether to post the position.

Appointment of Election Officials

Assistant Registrar Melissa Morton presented applications from nine individuals seeking to become election officials. These were reviewed by the Board and approved unanimously on a motion by the Chair, seconded by the Vice-chair. The following individuals were appointed:

Matthew Page
Regina L. Edwards
Ivana Key
Tchein Lawani Ouadja
Charlotte Meadows
Cynthia Denise Ivery
George Rudebusch
Hillary Zeman
Nicholas Yates

Ms. Morton also reported that the three-year terms of many of our election officials are coming to an end. Letters will be sent to each of them asking if they wish to be reappointed by the Board.

Reporting of Election Night Results

The Chair initiated a discussion on this topic covering not only dissemination of election results to candidates and the public but also reporting of results in VERIS. This discussion was prompted by some negative feedback on the scope and timeliness of reporting of unofficial results to candidates and the public on November 7 and by Board member concerns about the accuracy of data reported in VERIS. The Chair had consulted with the Albemarle County Registrar on this and learned that they report phoned-in results from the precincts to the public. However, for VERIS, they wait until the data contained in the digital storage media from the voting machines has been downloaded and compiled. The phoned-in vote tallies are entered into a spreadsheet, which is then printed out and posted for public viewing. The spreadsheets are set up to automatically add the tallies from multiple scanners at each precinct.

After a brief discussion the Board decided we should adopt a similar system. The change to a much simpler Statement of Results (SOR) form in the most recent election proved effective in reducing the time delay in delivery of election materials to the office by the precinct teams. Spreadsheets will be created for each precinct. The data read by the precinct closers from the tally tapes will be entered directly into the spreadsheets by registrar's office staff members taking the calls. The spreadsheets will then be printed out and immediately posted for public viewing. The posting will occur after each call is received from a precinct and delays should be minimal except in the rare event of hand-counting some ballots at a precinct.

No data will be entered into VERIS from the phoned-in reports. As each precinct chief arrives at the office the V-drives containing the recorded election results will be downloaded into the stand-alone Verity work station and immediately printed out. Copies will be provided at once to the Registrar or Deputy Registrar for entry into VERIS. At the same time the SORs and Provisional Ballot Logs will be examined by the Board and the additional data required on election night in VERIS (the number of voters who voted, the number of outside-the-polls voters and the number of provisional ballots categorized by reason per the state's instructions) will be provided to the Registrar. This will greatly reduce the possibility of errors in election night reporting to the state and eliminate the requirement to check tally results during the canvass. The net result of these two changes will be to increase the accuracy of VERIS election night reporting, while delaying it slightly, and to provide timely and orderly public reporting of unofficial election results after the polls are closed.

Lessons Learned from the November 7 Election

A number of issues were discussed and several decisions were made to correct shortcomings. The role of the research specialists continues to evolve and the Chair

reported that at some Albemarle County precincts these individuals are provided with electronic poll books (EPBs) allowing them, when appropriate, to take corrective action saving time and effort for both voter and official. There was a consensus to do this where sufficient EPBs are available.

Ms. Morton reported that there were complaints about the complexity of the research form and she will chair a committee of selected staff and election officials to review and simplify this form. She will also be heading up a review of all of the election forms which we have the ability to change. She also reported that it may be time to replace aging lap top computers used as EPBs and to consider moving to different poll book software. The Registrar requested that the Board members carefully examine such software and equipment when it is demonstrated at state-wide meetings and training sessions.

Other items discussed included the need for more tables at some polling places, ropes and stanchions for line control at busier precincts and parking issues. These and others will be discussed at the Chief's round table on December 6.

Next meeting

The next meeting will take place in the office of the Charlottesville General Registrar at 5:45 p.m. on Tuesday, January 23, 2018.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:41 p.m.

Respectfully submitted:

James Nix, Secretary

Anne Hemenway, Chair

Jon Bright, Vice Chair