

BOARD MEETING
BALTIMORE CITY BOARD OF ELECTIONS
JULY 20, 2023

The meeting of the Baltimore City Board of Elections was held at the Baltimore City Board of Elections Office at 417 E Fayette St # 129, Baltimore, MD 21202.

IN ATTENDANCE:

BOARD MEMBERS

Scherod Barnes, President
Terrence Threweatt Jr., Vice President
Sam Novey, Secretary
Hope Williams, Board Member

ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL

Thomas Chapman

STAFF

Armstead B. Crawley Jones, Sr., Election Director
Abigail Goldman, Deputy Director
Lisa Stanley, Election Program Manager I

ABSENT

Maria Vismale

The meeting was called to order at 3:58 p.m. by Mr. Scherod Barnes, Board President. A declaration of quorum was present.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

A motion was made by Mr. Scherod Barnes to table approval of the June 22, 2023 meetings notes until the August 17, 2023 board meeting. The motion was seconded by Mr. Terrence Threweatt Jr. Motion Carried.

PRESIDENT'S REMARKS:

Mr. Barnes gave short remarks at the beginning of the meeting. He shared that he received suggestions for agenda items from all board members. He felt some of the items fell within the purview of the Baltimore City Board of Elections and others did not. Mr. Barnes met with the Election Director to review these items and expects a number of them to be covered in the Director's report to be delivered later in this meeting and that board members would continue to get reports on issues of interest within the board purview going forward.

Mr. Barnes also clarified that Mr. Sam Novey would be responsible for taking minutes and recording votes as board secretary going forward. He instructed Mr. Novey to

consult with. Ms. Abigail Goldman on the format of the minutes before each board meeting.

Mr. Barnes concluded by expressing his gratitude to all the board members and elections staff for being on this team working together to administer elections in Baltimore City. Mr. Barnes expressed his feeling that the best way to get things done is in a proper and professional way and communicated his intention to have a process that is inclusive in every way going forward.

ELECTION DIRECTORS REPORT:

Mr. Armstead Jones introduced the full election staff to the board and noted that several members were absent for vacation. The board expressed appreciation to the director for making the introduction and to the staff for all their work on behalf of Baltimore City.

Ms. Goldman answered a question about **voter registration programming**. She said training is done at 10 am and 3 pm every day. She also said that the staff will send representatives out to public events and that for especially large events they encourage civic organizations to send people down to the Board of Elections office to get trained. Mr. Jones expressed appreciation for Ms. Argentine Craig of the League of Women Voters of Baltimore City for being such a dedicated voter registration volunteer. Mr. Jones and Ms. Goldman also noted that other organizations (especially neighborhood associations) have done some voter registration work in recent years. They also have voter registration forms available at city buildings, libraries, and rec centers.

Mr. Jones and Ms. Goldman also addressed issues related to **polling place locations**. They noted that board members can access the full list of polling place locations on the board of elections website (it is listed under [redistricting information](#)). The Election Staff is currently checking in with city agencies - especially Parks and Recreation and Schools - as well as privately owned sites to see what is available for the 2024 elections. There are particular issues with schools that are being closed and not being available. When a polling site is no longer available, the Election Staff seek to find other locations that are as close as possible to the site being closed.

Ms. Williams asked about the timeline for assessing the polling locations from 2022. Mr. Jones said that the staff is working on it now and for the next four months or so will be trying to figure out what sites are closed. Ms. Goldman expressed that she prefers not to start working on this issue too far before an election because it is not always possible to get reliable information about whether a particular building will be available so far ahead of time. Ms. Goldman shared that she plans to begin working on securing polling sites intensively in October 2023.

Ms. Williams shared that she wanted to get a better understanding of the full process for what the Election staff and board do in the event of a polling place closure. She shared that as a constituent and from what she has learned from predecessors and

heard from the central committee members who nominated her for this role, taking a pro-active approach to polling site relocations is hugely valuable. She offered her help to the Election Staff in supporting such an approach especially with regard to the relocation of the polling place at Steuart Hill Elementary Schools in her neighborhood. Ms. Williams expressed that concern about waiting until October to communicate about this polling site would lead to confusion in the community.

Mr. Jones shared that the Election Staff doesn't know a building is definitely going to be closed until they are notified by the relevant city agency. Ms. Goldman confirmed that Election Staff have recently been notified by city schools that Steuart Hill Elementary School would be closed. Ms. Williams asked if there is a timeline of when the board could know which locations are closed so people can be aware of where to go in advance.

Mr. Jones reported that the only way a site would be closed right before an election is if there is some kind of emergency situation. He shared that Ms. Goldman has sent each agency the list of buildings we hope to use as polling sites and he shared his feeling that it is simply not possible to know whether a site will be closed until the election staff is notified by the agency. He also shared that whenever a polling location is changed the board of elections does a mailing to everyone who is affected to let them know their location is changed.

Ms. Williams offered a proposal for consideration that the staff share a timeline with the board about the plan for confirming polling place availability and communicating with the community about changes. Ms. Williams expressed the desire of the board to ensure that we are supporting the community engagement staff with enough time to connect with community leaders about polling place closures. She also expressed concern that mailings are insufficient if they are the only way we communicate about polling place changes - if the board and staff's goal is truly to make voting more accessible, we also need to build more relationships with community leaders and share information about polling place changes with them directly.

Ms. Williams also expressed concern that the board might not revisit these issues at later meetings and so she wanted to make sure to get all the way to the bottom of this issue at the July meeting. Mr. Barnes shared that the board can't know about a location closure until they are notified and that they have a process for notifying the community about the closure.

Ms. Williams shared that she wanted to get a better understanding of the timeline. We start with the list of locations from the last election. When will staff dive in to assess whether those locations are operational? When will these assessment calls be completed? When will replacement sites be confirmed? When will we communicate about polling place changes to affected voters and communities? The board is here to assist with awareness about polling place locations.

Ms. Goldman shared that she goes full force assessing the full list of sites in October. When she makes a change for a polling site, she brings it to the board first and the board votes on it. Then the voters get new voter registration cards in the mail with

the new polling site address on them. Mr. Jones shared that this mailing goes out as soon as the change is made. A sample ballot is also mailed to voters that has the new polling place address on them. Between the time a change is made and election day, several mailings go out to let people know where their new polling place is.

Mr. Threweatt asked for clarification of whether the Election Staff engages directly with city agencies about polling locations or whether they do it through the Department of General Services. Ms. Goldman clarified that she does all these communications.

Ms. Williams asked specifically about the plan for Steuart Hill Elementary School. We know that site is closed. Ms. Williams shared that her community has a number of potential locations. When we understand and know there is a polling site closure, how can we work with our constituency to source locations?

Ms. Goldman and Ms Jones share that the criteria for evaluating new locations is proximity to the prior location and compliance with state regulations. Mr. Barnes clarified that as the issues come before the board, a majority vote will determine approval of changes. Ms. Stanley shared that [the State Board of Elections website has a public Election Calendar](#) that provides some elements of the timeline Ms. Williams had requested.

Mr. Novey inquired about whether the staff has knowledge of other polling locations that will not be available for the 2024 election. Ms. Goldman confirmed that Steuart Hill Elementary Schools and Eutaw Mashburn Elementary School will both not be available in 2024. Mr. Novey suggested that the Election Staff inquire about whether Unity Hall at 1505 Eutaw Place (across the street from Eutaw Mashburn) would be an accessible polling places.

Ms. Williams suggested both the Vivien T Thomas School and University of Maryland Community Engagement Center as potential replacements for the Steuart Hill Elementary School site. She confirmed for Ms. Goldman that both sites are close to the Steuart Hill site and have lighting and street parking.

Mr. Jones also provided an update on **Early Voting Locations**. He shared that Baltimore City has 7 early voting locations based on the population in the city. While some members of the board and state legislature have suggested that we add another early voting location in West Baltimore, that is not possible under current state law because of the size of our population. Mr. Jones expressed that he and the staff are happy with the 7 current early voting locations in Baltimore City.

Mr. Jones also shared updates about the **Community Outreach Efforts** of the Election staff. There are a number of community groups that do voter registration outreach during neighborhood block parties. Others are doing this outreach in public spaces like the inner Harbor. Mr. Jones shared that the election staff has also been doing significant and important outreach work through the mail. The election staff has been sending mailings to all registered voters with their particular ballot and precinct information. Voters are benefitting a lot from getting something in the mail

that gives a clear picture of what the ballot will look like when they go into the voting booth.

Mr. Novey asked about whether the Election Staff had accurate information about the total number of unregistered eligible voters in Baltimore City and whether they had a plan to systematically reach out to these people. Mr. Jones and Ms. Goldman confirmed they did not have this information. Ms. Goldman also shared that the vast majority of registrations are now coming in electronically through interactions with state agencies and the state online voter registration system and there are many fewer paper forms coming in from community organizations.

Mr. Jones provided a report on the ongoing **Office Relocation Effort**. He shared that he had a very informative conversation with the person who works at the state board and he has been meeting regularly with representatives from the Mayors' office to find a space that can combine the warehouse and the office. They are meeting regularly but the effort is still not coming together. The Baltimore City Board of Elections Staff has identified a potential location and made that known to the state board of elections. The state board has heard back from Simone Johnson in the Mayor's Office and they will have another meeting with the Election staff. The state board of election has emphasized to the Mayor the importance of Baltimore City finding a new, decent, functioning location for the Baltimore City Board of Elections. What the Baltimore Board of Elections has now is functional but it isn't working as well as it should. When Mr. Jones first started this project, he hoped to be out of the two locations (Fayette Street and Franklinton Road warehouse) and into a new location by October. That would have given the election staff a chance to get everything organized ahead of the 2024 election. The trainings for election judges would be in a new facility and all the election staff would be co-located in a single facility. Mr. Jones still hopes it will come to be. He knows it is a priority for Jared Demarinis (the new state Election Administrator) that this move happen as quickly as possible. He is hoping the move will materialize because it is something that has to be done and needs to be done.

Mr. Jones expressed frustration at some of the suggestions put forward by the Baltimore City Department of General Services regarding the new location. DGS suggested building a parking lot at the warehouse location or adding a second floor. The Election Director showed DGS staff pictures of concrete cracking - he does not believe the building is structurally sound enough to hold a second floor. He shared that Mr. Demarinis has a meeting in the next couple of weeks with Mayor Scott to help things get on track and get an appropriation of funds made so this move can happen. Mr. Jones is concerned that the new property might not be available soon. Mr. Jones also shared his concern that the Comptroller is not supportive of the location that Mr. Jones is proposing. Mr. Jones shared his belief that there is no 80,000 sq foot building available that is centrally located in Baltimore City that is available for this purpose. He also expressed his feeling that the proposed location will help the whole operation run more smoothly and save everyone money - the current set up requires the board of election to pay rent at the Fayette Street office, pay rent to University of Baltimore for training space (over \$100,000), and has significant heating bills associated with the Franklinton Road warehouse.

Ms. Williams asked if it would be helpful for the new board to write a letter from the Baltimore City Board of Elections to the Mayor and Comptroller expressing support for the proposed location. Mr. Jones responded that he felt a general letter emphasizing the importance of the move and encouraging city leaders to open dialogue about it would be helpful. Ms. Stanley clarified that every effort with city leaders is helpful on this issue and that the letter should go to both the Mayor and the Comptroller.

Ms. Williams made a motion that the Baltimore City Board of Elections members send a letter to the Mayor of Baltimore City and the Comptroller of Baltimore City in support of the immediate co-location of the Baltimore City Board of Elections' office and warehouse. Mr. Thre watt seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Mr. Barnes asked Ms. Williams to draft a letter and send it to the Election Staff for comment.

NEW BUSINESS/OPEN FORUM:

Mr. Jones responded to a number of questions submitted in writing by Mr. Thre watt. Those questions are included in the minutes below.

Mr. Jones felt that questions regarding an early vote site in West Baltimore, Community Outreach efforts, and voter education materials were answered sufficient in the director's report.

Mr. Jones said he is still seeking clarity from the state board of election regarding the next performance review for the Election Director and that he will talk to the board president about this issue as well.

Mr. Jones also shared that he has a department working on election judge recruitment and they have already started fielding calls about when training will start.

Mr. Jones expressed reluctance to do a voter impact survey and opening up the Baltimore City Board of Elections to too much input that can not be responded to appropriately. Bringing too many people into the process of picking new polling sites can be tricky and impede timely decision making.

Mr. Thre watt expressed a desire to do a voter impact study before changing polling sites. Ms. Goldman shared with the board that the Election Staff faced significant challenges associated with the relocation of the Grove Park Elementary School polling place. The only available location was Forest Park High School and many in the community were very unhappy.

Mr. Jones provided clarification about the cleaning of voter contact information and voting rolls. He shared that there are times when the state cleans the rolls and that there is maintenance being done on them on a regular basis. He also confirmed that a death certificate is needed to remove someone from the voting rolls. Mr. Barnes asked if there is anyone being removed because they have not voted in a long time?

Ms. Goldman confirmed that we can't remove someone for failure to vote. She also confirmed that some people are removed if their election mail is returned with "mixi sticker" that confirms a change of address and that the state is careful to follow federal election laws related to removal of voters from the voter rolls.

Mr. Jones provided clarification that some provisional ballots are uncounted and some of them are rejected. He said that the Election Staff is required to keep the provisional ballots for 24 months and provide accounting of them. He did not share how many provisional ballots go uncounted.

Mr. Jones shared that he did not anticipate any problems with the 2024 election. He said that there have been some issues with past elections and the staff and board just work through them. He encouraged the board members to be prepared to be in the office until the early morning hours on election day.

Mr. Jones expressed that he was baffled by Mr. Threweatt's question about staff morale. Mr. Threweatt clarified that he felt that problems with elections often emerge around the implementation of policy. If the staff is feeling motivated everything runs more smoothly. Mr. Threweatt expressed a general concern about staff morale given his impression that the Baltimore City Board of Elections "gets a bad rap" around Baltimore. He asked what the board role is staff support. Ms. Williams shared her interest in helping to support the Election Director in keeping staff happy.

Mr. Jones shared that he has appreciated the board providing meals for staff on election day. He also shared that morale at the board of elections is pretty good and his feeling that leadership treats everyone well. There are not significant issues with employees being disgruntled. He also shared his feeling that there are very good staff members on the team and that the Election staff look out for one another and help do what needs to be done. Mr. Jones also reiterated that the board has no role in personnel decisions and that the hiring and management of staff is solely the Election Director's responsibility. He specifically shared that Ms. Stanley and Ms. Sabrina Graves both do an excellent job in their roles.

Mr. Jones closed by sharing updates about warehouse maintenance. The team is still working to get preventative maintenance done. While many challenges are emerging due to the transfer to Workday this challenge can not be attributed to this. The team is working to get suppliers paid and retained for future elections.

ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL'S REPORT:

Mr. Chapman circulated the **updated board bylaws** and redlines. Mr. Threweatt moved that the board approve the update bylaws. Ms. Williams seconded the motion. The motion passed.

Mr. Novey disclosed a \$75 campaign donation to purchase 3 tickets to Odette Ramos's Ice Cream Social event.

Mr. Barnes disclosed a campaign donation to the Baltimore City Democratic Party associated with a fundraiser hosted by the Baltimore City Democratic State Central Committee.

Ms. Williams disclosed intention to make campaign donation to purchase a ticket to James Torrance's event on August 8th.

Ms. Goldman confirmed that the next meeting would be on August 17th at 4 pm at the Benton Building. Ms Williams shared that she will participate in the August meeting by phone.

Mr. Thre watt made a motion to adjourn. Ms. Williams seconded. The motion passed. Mr. Barnes declared the August meeting of the Baltimore City Board of Elections adjourned at 5:05 p.m.

BOARD MINUTES APPROVED AT THE AUGUST 17, 2023 BOARD MEETING