

BOARD MEETING
BALTIMORE CITY BOARD OF ELECTIONS
DECEMBER 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, Street, Baltimore MD 21202

IN ATTENDANCE:

BOARD MEMBERS

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

ASSISTANT ATTORNEY GENERAL

Thomas Chapman

STAFF

Armstead B. Crawley Jones, Sr., Election Director
Abigail Goldman, Election Deputy Director

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The meeting was called to order at 11:01 a.m. by Mr. Scherod Barnes, Board President.

The president added an agenda item about the new West Baltimore early vote site and Mr. Threweatt added agenda items regarding the establishment of a closed session in January to discuss the director's performance evaluation and the establishment of a procedure for the board to decide the scores in the director's performance evaluation.

Mr. Barnes shared his concern about those motions and indicated his intention to oppose them. Mr. Barnes' shared his perspective that all the board members have not been in their roles long enough to provide an informed performance review of the election director.

Ms. Goldman clarified that SBE has requested the PEP forms be submitted by the second week of January.

Mr. Novey asked whether the closed session would need to be called as a special meeting because the January meeting is not scheduled until January 18th.

Ms. Williams also added an agenda item regarding the election staff's outreach calendar and staffing.

Mr. Novey added an item regarding electronic payments for filing fees in response to a question from the Shannon Sneed campaign.

Mr. Threweatt made the motion to approve the agenda which was seconded by Mr. Novey. The motion passed.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Ms. Williams made a motion to accept the minutes from the November 16, 2023 meeting including the closed session minutes which was seconded by Mr. Threweatt. The motion passed.

BOARD PRESIDENT REMARKS

Mr. Barnes commended all board members for contributions to the staff Christmas party. Mr. Barnes also thanked Ms. Williams for taking the lead in sending out Christmas cards to all staff. Mr. Barnes also thanked Mr. Chapman for being so accessible to all board members to address their questions.

Mr. Barnes asked the board to not share information about things like tentative site selections for early voting until they are formally approved by the state board of elections.

ELECTION DIRECTOR'S REPORT:

Mr. Jones said holiday time is generally slow as many staff take leave but that their policy is to not allow as much leave closer to the election. He also shared that staff are going out to look at all the polling places and make sure they are operational for the May election.

Mr. Jones shared an update on the move to the new location. In the last plan his team looked at, many things the team needed had been cut down. Mr. Jones said he was working to get the space and design elements needed back into the plan.

Ms. Goldman shared that the tritech machine would not even fit in the room under the revised design and so they pushed back on that.

Ms. Goldman also shared that the city build-out team quoted \$3.7 million in build out costs for the building. That was just a single line item and was not itemized. The city budget director followed up to get an itemized justification for that amount. The annual cost for maintaining the new building has been included in the budget but the build out costs had not yet been approved by city council.

Ms. Goldman also shared that Baltimore City has increased costs because we have more precincts than any other county in the state and so we have more equipment to store to serve all those precincts.

Ms. Williams asked about the timeline for moving. Ms. Goldman said it is all up in the air but that the current plan is that when all the equipment goes out for the primary election it will be returned to the new warehouse. Ms. Goldman said that getting hooked up to MD Voters takes at least 3 to 4 months. Ms. Williams asked about a project timeline and Ms. Goldman said that only is at the city real estate office.

Mr. Novey asked if it would be helpful for the board to consolidate precincts so that the staff did not have to store as much equipment. Ms. Goldman said in many ways the precincts are already consolidated because there is a single check-in spot for buildings that host multiple precincts. Ms. Goldman said they are also limited by state law in what they can do to reduce the number of precincts.

NEW BUSINESS

Approval of Early Vote Site at James McHenry Recreation Center

Ms. Goldman shared that they had found a good early vote location in West Baltimore at the annex building of BCCC at the "old provident hospital."

Ms. Goldman also shared that they had to find a new early vote site to replace the University of Maryland Baltimore Community Engagement Center. James McHenry Recreation Center is around the corner from the existing site. Ms. Goldman said that in addition to being very close to the regular site, the community center has good parking and is actually even larger than the usual site.

Mr. Novey made a motion to approve the change to the McHenry Recreation Center site. Ms. Williams seconded the motion. Mr. Threweatt expressed some unreadiness because community groups had not been consulted about the change. Ms. Goldman clarified that state law requires community consultation regarding polling place changes but not early vote center changes. The motion passed.

Discussion of communications and community engagement

Ms. Williams asked how information will be spread in the community about the change in the southwest baltimore early vote site for the primary. Ms. Goldman shared that the change would be reflected on the website and sample ballot and asked that board members spread the word as well. Ms. Goldman said that community engagement for early vote sites is particularly difficult because they serve the whole city so you need to communicate with everyone in Baltimore City, not just the immediate neighborhood around the early vote location.

Ms. Williams asked if there are any pro-active communications to the community association list owned by Baltimore City. Mr. Jones responded that "when you engage too much people resist." Ms. Williams and Threweatt expressed concern about this sentiment. Ms. Williams shared her perspective that the board of elections should engage in proactive communications even if it sometimes generates feedback from the public.

Mr. Novey shared that the board could take the lead on reaching out to community associations in the planning department database in the state legislative districts

served by early vote sites that change. Mr. Barnes agreed that the board should go ahead and do that after the state board of elections approves the early voting sites.

Mr. Jones shared his concern that politicians and elected officials will try to influence early vote site and polling site placement for political reasons if outreach is not done strategically.

The consensus of the board was that they would seek to do limited strategic and proactive outreach about early vote and polling to community partners.

Ms. Goldman also shared that she is also maintaining a list of people to get notified about polling place changes to comply with new state legislation. Ms. Goldman also shared that there are 10 polling places that need to change in 2024 and that those will be communicated at the same time. Ms. Williams suggested that the board send the link to sign up to that list to the planning association list.

Ms. Williams asked about obtaining the outreach team's calendar of events. Ms. Goldman said that the system is for people to email Lisa and then the staff goes out and does the requested training. Ms. Goldman said the system is that the staff does trainings in the office at 10 am and at 3 pm every day for individuals and then for groups of over 10 the staff goes out and does the training in the community. Mr. Barnes encouraged all board members to take a training.

Ms. Goldman offered to have a staff person come to the next meeting and conduct training before the next board meeting.

Discussion of process for Election Director performance review

Mr. Thrweatt expressed his intention to propose a motion to have a special closed session in January to discuss the Election Director's performance review. Mr. Thrweatt also expressed his intention to propose a motion to establish scores for the review through an average of all board member submissions.

Mr. Barnes expressed his total opposition to these motions. Mr. Barnes said that none of the board members have been around the director long enough to give him an honest and truthful evaluation. Mr. Thrweatt shared his perspective that the evaluation is required and so the board needs a system regardless.

Mr. Jones said it has been practice for the board president to evaluate the director.

Mr. Thrweatt made a motion expressing board intent to have a special meeting in January to go into executive session to discuss the election director's performance evaluation. Ms. Vismale seconded. Mr. Barnes requested a roll call vote. Mr. Thrweatt voted aye. Ms. Vismale voted aye. Ms. Williams voted aye. Mr. Novey voted aye. Mr. Barnes voted no. The motion passed 4-1.

Mr. Thrweatt made a motion to establish the procedure for that evaluation that would involve either the board members each submitting scores and averaging them or

discussing them in closed session and coming to consensus. Mr. Chapman suggested that this issue could be resolved in the special January meeting.

Mr. Novey suggested January 4th, 2024 at 4pm for the January meeting at the Fayette Street location. The board agreed to meet at the this time and location.

Discussion of electronic payments for filing fee

Mr. Novey shared a concern from the Shannon Sneed campaign about the filing fee for Mayor and City Council President being larger than the amount she can get reimbursed for a cash expense from her campaign which is receiving funds from the new fair elections program. Mr. Novey and Ms. Goldman agreed to look into what other counties are doing to accept filing fees.

ATTORNEY GENERAL REMARKS

Mr. Chapman shared that the board of elections has received several new petitions. There is one to reduce the number of city council districts and another to establish a Baltimore baby bonus program.

OTHER ITEMS

Ms. Vismale disclosed that she attended a fundraiser held by the Maryland GOP.

Board approved at January 18, 2024 meeting.