

ELECTION BOARD
September 14, 2020

Present at the meeting were:

Gary Eby
Brenda Watson
Patti McLaughlin
Bill Bunt
Bonnie Delancey
Shannon Hines

Present from the Public via Phone: Karen Anderson, Alane Balchunas, Gene Cohick, Ann Miller, and Melanie Wertz

Election Board met on Monday, September 14, 2020 at 11:30 a.m. The meeting was conducted via telephone conference and in person in the Commissioners' Conference Room. The meeting was recorded by the County.

Public Comments: Alane Balchunas commented on the information provided to her during the Commissioners' Meeting regarding communication to the public regarding the ballot application solicitation by political parties and candidates. She stated that Commissioner Eby had said that the communication was in the local newspapers due to the deadline not being met, a notice had been posted on the Facebook page, and due to the website being under construction the notice was not on the website currently. She also stated that Commissioner Eby had said that an interview would be taking place on Wednesday with Jim T. Ryan to get a notice out to the public via the Perry County Times.

Ann Miller commented on House Bill 2626 and hoped there would be discussion on this bill. She stated that the bill included information about moving around the dates to accommodate mail-in ballots and the bill also did not include verbiage about drop boxes for ballots.

Melanie Wertz questioned why the minutes did not include responses from the Commissioners to any of the questions. She requested that the responses from the Commissioners be included in the minutes.

Alane Balchunas questioned how many ballots had been rejected during the primary election.

Approval of the Minutes: Patti McLaughlin made a motion to approve the minutes from the August 31, 2020 meeting. Commissioner Watson seconded the motion. All agreed. Motion carried.

Meeting Business: Election Litigation Update: Solicitor Bunt provided an update on the pending litigations regarding the election. He stated that the Republican Party lawsuit had been stayed until October 5th and the Democratic Party lawsuit, which was previously pending before Commonwealth Court, was now before the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania. He stated that the move of the Democratic Party lawsuit to the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania takes away one level of appeal. Solicitor Bunt commented that no decisions had been made to his awareness regarding the Democratic Party lawsuit.

Pennsylvania Department of State Absentee & Mail-In Ballot Return Guidance: Solicitor Bunt stated no additional guidance had been received from the Commonwealth and no decisions had been made by the courts regarding these issues. Since no other information was known at this time, further discussion did not occur.

Solicitor Bunt stated that 12 ballots were rejected during the primary election due to the fact that the declarations on the envelopes were not completed properly. He commented that two representatives from each political party had met to at the time to determine the rejections.

Ballot Drop Boxes: Solicitor Bunt said this issue was also still being reviewed by the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania and no decision had been made. Commissioner Eby wanted to discuss extending the hours at the Veteran's Memorial Building to accommodate ballot drop off. Commissioner Watson said she agreed that the building should have extended hours that it is open which would provide increased accessibility to residents and would be more secure than a drop box. Patti McLaughlin also agreed with extra hours for ballot drop off. Commissioner Eby said the dates and hours of the extended building availability would need to be communicated at a later time once details were determined. Solicitor Bunt stated that this is a joint decision between the Election Board and the Board of Commissioners, since the Commissioners are responsible for staffing and compensation of staff that would work the extended hours. Commissioner Eby questioned if the County Commissioners and Election Board members can staff the extended hours. Solicitor Bunt confirmed that was fine, but did recommend that two individuals staff the extended hours. Commissioner Watson stated that the decisions handed down from the courts will affect the hours and the number of times the building will be open for ballot drop off. All members of the Election Board stated they would be willing to staff the additional ballot drop off hours.

Public Comments: Karen Anderson questioned if whether the two individuals that staff the ballot drop off extended hours, would swear to an oath. She said it would be a good idea to have the employees that work the extended hours swear to an oath. Ms. Anderson stated that she had read an article about the Democratic lawsuit and hoped that decisions will be made quickly. She stated that she has three family members that will voting from Japan and is concerned about them receiving and returning their absentee ballots. She said that communication should go out that the results of the upcoming election will most likely not be know very quickly and asked that the Board consider this and possible reach out to Jim Ryan for coverage.

Melanie Wertz commented that by not reaching out to the western end of the County and not providing a drop box for that area, those residents may feel disenfranchised. She stated that a drop box in that area would be appreciated.

Commissioner Eby questioned dropping off ballots at the poll. Bonnie Delancey stated that if an individual brings their ballot to the poll, they will be required to complete a form. She said that she had been told that then the individual will either vote on a provisional ballot or use a machine. Ms. Delancey did not have final confirmation on which way was correct at the time of the meeting. Solicitor Bunt stated that the Department of state had verbally provided information on this issue, but as of yet had not put the guidance in writing.

Karen Anderson questioned what are individuals with mail-in ballot supposed to do that want to stay away from the polls due to the virus.

Alane Balchunas said this affects not only individuals that want to stay away from the polls, but also those that have disabilities or are sick and cannot drive to the polls.

Melanie Wertz stated that the mail service is not functioning properly which is the concern.

Karen Anderson stated that if the ballots are printed late, the drop boxes will help ensure that individuals are able to vote. She also commented that Blain Elementary has a secure entrance.

Ann Miller discussed House Bill 2626 and was to amend the election code. She stated that it passed the House and moved to the Senate a week ago. Ms. Miller stated that the current bill changes that dates of when mail-in ballots can be sent in and also there is a possibility that ballot drop boxes may not be allowed in Pennsylvania. She asked if the House Bill relates to the lawsuits and if it passes does it supersede the lawsuits. Ms. Miller stated that this is very relevant to the other questions being asked and that it may not allow drop boxes.

Patti McLaughlin made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Watson seconded the motion.

The next Election Board meeting is scheduled for September 21, 2020 at 11:30 a.m.