

# DeKalb County Board of Registration and Elections

## Meeting Minutes

August 12, 2021  
\*via zoom platform  
Start Time: 4:30 p.m.  
End Time: 7:15 p.m.

Board Attendees: Chair Dele Lowman Smith  
Vice-Chair Nancy Jester  
Anthony Lewis  
Susan Motter  
Karli Swift

Other Attendees: Erica Hamilton, Director  
Terry Phillips, Deputy County Attorney  
Irene Vander Els, Senior Assistant County Attorney  
Shelley Momo, Senior Assistant County Attorney

### **APPROVAL OF AGENDA**

Ms. Smith called the meeting to order. Motion by Ms. Jester and seconded by Ms. Motter and Mr. Lewis to approve the agenda. Motion carries by unanimous vote.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

A) July 8, 2021 Meeting

Motion by Ms. Swift and seconded by Ms. Jester to approve the July 8 minutes. Motion carries by unanimous vote.

### **PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Ms. Baker read the rules for public comment.

Public comments of two minutes or less may be made live via the teleconference. For those joining the meeting by telephone, please be aware that your phone number may be displayed to the public viewing or participating in the online meeting. Citizens who attend the meeting via the Zoom link above may join the public comment queue by raising their hand in the Zoom application, while citizens who attend the meeting via telephone may join the comment queue by pressing # followed by 2. There will be no comment cards, so when you are called upon, please state your name and address for the record. Also, please be conscious of speaking time so that everyone has an opportunity to provide input in the allotted time. Abusive, profane, or derogatory language will not be permitted.

The following citizens provided comment:

- Liz Throop
- William Freeman
- Marci McCarthy
- Catherine Bernard

## **NEW BUSINESS**

### A) Orientation for New Board Members with the Director

Ms. Swift followed-up with Ms. Hamilton about binders and scheduling meetings for new board members to meet staff. Ms. Hamilton stated that the binders were reviewed by legal and can be picked up in the office starting tomorrow. Board members will need to sign an acknowledgment form for the binders. Ms. Hamilton will send her availability to Ms. Swift and Ms. Jester to coordinate a meeting with staff.

### B) Advance in Person Times and Locations

Ms. Hamilton shared a presentation for the upcoming municipal election voting sites. Recommended voting hours are 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.

Ms. Swift suggested extending voting hours from 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. and having additional voting locations.

Ms. Jester requested that the Board receive the Director's Report before the day of the meeting. Ms. Jester wanted to know more about the department's communication with elected officials about advanced voting locations and echoed Ms. Swift's desire to have more early voting locations.

Ms. Motter expressed concern about the lack of advanced voting sites in the northern region of the county and how to improve the process for communicating with cities about establishing early voting locations for municipal elections.

Mr. Lewis commented on the distribution of voting locations and suggested opening a location(s) in unincorporated DeKalb.

Ms. Smith concurs with the Board's concerns about the equity and distribution of advanced voting locations and believes the Board can take action to expand sites to the northern region of the county.

Ms. Swift requested a list of county-owned facilities/sites and a map with marked locations.

Motion by Ms. Jester and seconded by Ms. Motter to defer this item until the next board meeting. Motion carries by unanimous vote.

### C) Establishing Budget Committee

Ms. Smith explained that the purpose of this subcommittee is to drive transparency and to ensure that the Chair is not the only board member involved in the budget process. Ms. Smith recommends the Board appoint at least one other board member to this committee.

Ms. Jester is in favor of establishing this committee and suggests amending the bylaws to give the Board authority to approve the recommendations that will be presented to the administration for its consideration. Also, Ms. Jester noted that this committee would be subject to the Open Meetings Act and discussed concerns the Board may want to consider regarding the construction of this committee.

Mr. Lewis is in favor of establishing a more formal budgeting process and suggested this be a Board effort instead of a smaller subcommittee.

Ms. Motter is in favor of the decision to have a small group of board members that can engage in a robust conversation about the budget process and wants to know more about how this can be accomplished without running afoul of the Open Meetings Act.

Ms. Swift supports the Board's goals to create a more transparent budget process and to provide the opportunity for all Board members to be involved.

The Board discussed varying levels of transparency and thoughts on what may or may not be appropriate to discuss in a public forum. Ms. Smith offered to draft a process that reflects today's discussion of this item and will circulate that proposal back to the Board for discussion and/or adoption at the next meeting. Motion by Ms. Swift and seconded by Ms. Jester to defer this item until the next meeting. Motion carries by unanimous vote.

#### D) Discussion of Board Governance Procedures and Notice of Intent to Amend Bylaws

Ms. Smith asked the attorneys for advice on how to work through suggested revisions to the bylaws. Mr. Phillips recommended selecting an order for review to facilitate input from all the Board members.

In the interest of time, each member will review and provide input for substantive changes offline. The Board intends to have a more developed draft to discuss and adopt at the next meeting. Motion by Ms. Jester and seconded by Mr. Lewis to defer this item to the next meeting. Motion carries by unanimous vote.

#### E) Communications Update

Ms. Hamilton provided updates on Mr. Burton's behalf.

#### F) Director's Report

Ms. Hamilton shared a presentation.

Ms. Jester had a question about the approval of the mid-year budget and commented that the difference between the amount requested and the amount approved, based on information displayed on the county website, is \$4.48 million.

Ms. Swift asked if there is a communications plan to inform voters without an ID that they can request one. Ms. Hamilton is working with Mr. Burton and his team to do a social media blitz and voters can get a free ID for voting in the office. Ms. Swift had additional questions about mailers, the budget, and poll workers.

Ms. Motter had questions about poll workers, grant funds and absentee ballots. Ms. Motter followed-up on her request for access to Firefly for Board members and Ms. Coven-Wilson's engagement with key stakeholders. Furthermore, Ms. Motter expressed interest in Board orientation so that incumbent members have updated information and clarified for the public that the special called meeting for challenged voters will be Wednesday, August 18.

Ms. Hamilton asked the Board to add an item for advanced in-person voting to the agenda for next week's special called meeting.

Ms. Jester commented on the budget and urged other members to contact commissioners to get more funding approved for the department. She will be reaching out to commissioners in her official capacity and as a voter.

## **BOARD COMMENTS**

Ms. Swift reminded the Board to schedule a special called meeting to discuss establishing the budget committee and amending the bylaws.

Mr. Lewis suggested revisiting the adjudication panels from the last election and reviewing the process so any issues that need to be addressed can be resolved moving forward.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Motion by Ms. Swift and seconded by Mr. Lewis to adjourn. This meeting is adjourned.

August 11, 2021

To: Members of the DeKalb County Board of Registration and Elections  
From: Elizabeth Howze  
Paula Bosworth  
Liz Throop  
Nancy Watkins  
Karen Davenport

Subject: Minimizing election confusion for voters

We welcome the new BRE members, the new chair, and returning members. We expect the new term will bring many long overdue changes to the operation of the BRE and the climate of its meetings as well as to the performance of the Office of Voter Registration and Elections.

We have been observers of the BRE for some time as well as its critics and champions. Below we have identified several important issues that we want to bring to your attention in an effort to minimize election confusion for voters this fall and in 2022.

1. Most immediate is the fact that the website is not compliant with the new law, SB202. Voters can begin requesting absentee ballot forms next Monday, August 16th. However, the form on the website is the old non-conforming one and the information outdated. If voters use the forms, they will be rejected.
2. We are seeing reports on NextDoor that some voters have received letters from the Secretary of State saying they will be placed on inactive status because they have not voted, when in fact they voted in the 2020 election. We urge the VRE to work closely with the SOS office about the accuracy of the purge lists. We urge the BRE to closely supervise the VRE on this matter to avoid wrongfully removing eligible voters from the rolls.
3. The website remains difficult to navigate, despite improvements by Eric Burton's communications group last year. It contains, for example, hard to comprehend information, empty pages (e.g., FAQs and Key Dates - Key Dates actually shows up under the link General Election Information), confusing or redundant menu choices, and more.

Recommendations:

1. Delete information on the website that conflicts with the new SB202 and replace it with up to date, accurate information and forms.
2. Simplify the website and make it more user-friendly to navigate. We would like to see the creation of a communications sub-committee of the BRE or VRE that includes a diverse group of voters who can advise Eric Burton's team BEFORE communications are sent out, website changes are finalized, and not afterwards. The subcommittee could also advise on strategies to reach voters with key messages about how to get a voter ID, how to vote early or absentee and more via social media, radio PSAs, and the use of existing County resources such as water bills which could include pertinent voting information.
3. Create, post, and widely distribute a hotline number for DeKalb voters to call for questions about their voting status and other matters. Many voters do not have easily accessible internet access, may not be fluent in English, or have a computer or the skills needed to navigate the internet. The VRE should offer excellent customer service. A well-functioning hotline would be one mark of excellence.