

DeKalb County Board of Registration and Elections

Special Called Meeting Minutes (Election Debrief)

March 1, 2023

Start Time: 1:00 p.m.

End Time: 3:23 p.m.

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

Other Attendees: Keisha Smith, Executive Director
Terry Philips, Deputy County Attorney
Irene Vander Els, Assistant County Attorney

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chair Lowman Smith called the election debrief meeting to order at 4:30 p.m. Ms. Austin read the roll by calling each board member by name. All members were present.

Motion by Mr. Lewis, seconded by Ms. Swift, to approve the agenda subject to one addition. The motion carried unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Austin read the rules for public comment:

Public comments may be made in person or submitted by sending an email of one page or less to electionspubliccmnt@dekalbcountyga.gov which must be received between 1:00 p.m. and 1:30 p.m. on the day of the meeting. The body of your email must include your first and last name, followed by your address. Abusive, profane, or derogatory language will not be permitted. By submitting an email for public comment, you agree to have your name, address and the email broadcast on the UStream and entered into the record and minutes. The DeKalb Board of Registration and Elections reserves the right, at the DeKalb Board of Registration and Elections' sole discretion, to (1) add your email to the record/minutes without reading any of it into the broadcast or (2) read all or a portion of your email into the record/minutes.

The following citizens provided public comments:

- Jim Duffie
- Bonnie Chappell
- Julie Adams
- Gail Lee
- Deborah Baker
- Mary Benefield
- Liz Throop

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- Elizabeth Burns

There were no comments received via email.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

A) Director's Report

Director Smith reported on information collected internally regarding election integrity, operational efficiency, and staff training throughout the 2022 election cycle.

Ms. Motter asked about the status of the budget process. The Director responded that her 2023 request had been to keep the same level of funding from 2022. The county's recommendation was to reduce the budget by three million dollars. She stated that she would request the additional funding in the midyear budget.

Mr. Lewis recommended publishing a uniform set of instructions regarding poll watchers. He asked if the advance voting wait times could be posted to the website like election day wait times are. Director Smith responded that this had been done in a limited way during 2022 and would be expanded in the future. Mr. Lewis noted that there had been virtually no lines during election day and suggested that people waiting in line during advance voting could be told that election day is an option. He asked if there would be any change to the number of election day polling places. Director Smith responded that no additions were currently scheduled but that the sites were being assessed.

Ms. Swift asked about the cost of risk-limiting audits. Director Smith responded that staffing costs were the primary expense. Ms. Swift asked if additional audit requirements would require hiring additional staff. The Director responded that they would. Ms. Swift asked about drop box usage. The Director responded that she could provide usage statistics.

Vice Chair Jester asked for additional information about the drop off times of each precinct. She offered several pieces of feedback she had received about the drop off process and the process for poll watchers. She requested for the department to schedule a meeting with the stakeholders themselves.

Ms. Motter asked if the staffing levels Director Smith had reported were adequate. The Director responded that they were. Ms. Motter also asked about plans for training, confusion between poll watchers and poll observers, the budget request for voting hubs, ADA compliance of polling places, and the stakeholder list.

Mr. Lewis suggested redirecting voters from busy advance voting locations to locations with short lines.

Ms. Swift asked if there would be more staff for advance voting. Director Smith responded that there would. Ms. Swift asked how many voter challenges had been received in 2022. The Director responded that she would look up that figure.

Vice Chair Jester asked what the county had removed from the department's budget request. Director Smith responded that the three million dollars would have paid for equipment such as the voting hubs.

Chair Lowman Smith commented on the level of innovation and efficiency that it takes to manage elections at a large scale. She was pleased to see positive comments made about DeKalb County's operations at the GAVREO conference. She asked Director Smith about the planned cellular poll pad upgrade. The Director described the poll pad and scanner updates and their potential costs. The Chair commented on PR, ADA issues, training, and documentation.

B) Legislative Discussion

Ms. Vander Els outlined the provisions of Senate Bill 221. Chair Lowman Smith asked about the status of SB 222, which would regulate grant funding. Ms. Vander Els responded that it had not yet been considered by the House.

Vice Chair Jester stated that it was likely too late in the process to formulate proposed changes to legislation. Ms. Swift disagreed, suggesting that the board address drop boxes and voter challenges.

Ms. Motter stated that the additional requirements being proposed would carry costs and requested that the legislature include a fiscal note funding the proposed provisions. She also noted that the State Election Board needed funding to fulfill its responsibilities.

Mr. Lewis recommended caution in advocating to the legislature since the board members were not elected officials.

Chair Lowman Smith commented on SB 222, stating that in her experience working with various local governments, grant applications were commonplace. She echoed Ms. Motter's comments about the lack of funding from the state and regretted that local officials had not been consulted regarding this year's proposed legislation. She commented on the difficulty faced by elections officials and board members given the lack of funding and the climate surrounding elections.

BOARD COMMENTS

Vice Chair Jester acknowledged the difficulty of elections work currently but stressed its importance. She welcomed the prospect of clearer rules surrounding voter challenges. She was pleased with the board's engagement with each other and with stakeholders.

Ms. Swift thanked the public, staff, and the Law Department. She stated that SB 221 would not make elections safer. She criticized the audit, voter challenge, and drop box provisions specifically. She called for elected officials to fund elections and focus on meaningful election safety issues.

Mr. Lewis thanked the meeting attendees and thanked the staff for their work. He thanked citizens for bringing voter challenges.

Ms. Motter thanked Ms. Swift for proposing this meeting and the Director and staff for working on it. She requested a discussion of remote meeting attendance at the next meeting.

Chair Lowman Smith asked the public to call for transparency in the legislative process.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Vice Chair Jester, seconded by Ms. Swift, to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 3:23 p.m.