

DeKalb County Board of Registration and Elections

Meeting Minutes

October 10, 2024

Start Time: 4:53 p.m.

End Time: 7:52 p.m.

Board Attendees: Karli Swift, Chair
Vasu Abhiraman, Vice-Chair
Nancy Jester
Anthony Lewis
Susan Motter

Other Attendees: Keisha Smith, Executive Director
Shelley Momo, Supervising Attorney
Michael Petty, Assistant County Attorney
Tristen Waite, Assistant County Attorney

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chair Swift called the Board of Registration and Elections meeting to order at 4:53 p.m. Ms. Austin read the roll by calling each board member by name. A quorum was met.

Motion by Ms. Jester, seconded by Vice-Chair Abhiraman, to approve the agenda with an amendment to move item 5B, I Voted Sticker Challenge Presentation, to follow the approval of the agenda. The motion carried unanimously.

I VOTED STICKER CHALLENGE PRESENTATION

Chair Swift began by reminding everyone that earlier this year, Voter Registration and Elections partnered with the DeKalb County school system to encourage juniors and seniors to submit original designs of the I voted sticker as an option for voters to choose when they exit the polls during the General Election cycle. She stated that the I Voted Sticker Challenge was initiated to promote civic engagement and inspire some of the youngest voters and future voters to get involved in the democratic process. She thanked DeKalb County schools, the members of the review panel, and all of the talented students that submitted their work. Chair Swift then announced the I Voted Sticker Challenge finalists, Charlie Anderson, Laylah Lewis, and Kamryn Pierce, and invited each of them to share their inspiration for their designs.

Laylah Lewis stated that she was born and raised in DeKalb County and wanted to base her sticker on the memories she has made in our county. She said she added Stone Mountain because she and her mom used to walk there every day and she has been there on school field trips. She said she added water because her family liked to fish and the peach because it was a symbol of home when they would return from out of state trips. Lastly, she said she put the bald eagle in the sticker as a symbol of America.

Charlie Anderson stated that she wanted to focus on peace in her sticker, so she put the dove and southern magnolia as the main focus of the sticker. She said she also put the courthouse and Stone Mountain as they represent important parts of DeKalb County and the bald eagle also as a symbol of America.

Kamryn Pierce stated that she wanted to create a logo character that represents the state and DeKalb County with energy, so she designed the peach with a megaphone with the DeKalb seal. She said that the peach is saying “I Voted” loud and proud.

Chair Swift announced Kamryn Pierce as the second runner up, Laylah Lewis as the first runner up, and Charlie Anderson as the winner. She further announced that all three designs would be available to voters for this election cycle.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by Vice-Chair Abhiraman, seconded by Ms. Motter, to approve the minutes of the September 12 scheduled meeting. The motion passed 4-0 with Ms. Jester abstaining, as she was not present for the meeting.

Motion by Ms. Jester, seconded by Ms. Motter and Vice-Chair Abhiraman, to approve the minutes of the October 1 special called meeting. The motion passed 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 printed page or less at a minimum font of 12 to electionspubliccmnt@dekalbcountyga.gov which must be received between 35 and 5 minutes before the scheduled start of the meeting. The body of your email must include your first and last name. By submitting an email for public comment, you agree to have your name 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. All public comments will be limited to 2 minutes. Abusive, profane, or derogatory language, holding up signs, clapping, yelling, standing or laying in the aisles to show support for or opposition to a speaker will not be permitted, but a show of hands or quietly standing in place will be permitted to show support for or opposition to a speaker's position.

The following citizens provided public comment:

- Betsy Shackelford
- Cheryl Dudley
- Carmen Tripp
- Bill Henderson
- Gail Lee
- William Freeman
- Victor Tripp
- Janet Grant
- Dwain Smith
- Ellen Mintzmyer
- Sonia C. Frix
- Keiji Fukuda
- Shawn Olweleen
- Kristin Nabers

- Catherine Carter
- Thong (Tom) Phan
- Lynda Holliday
- Elizabeth Levine

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

A) Director's Report

Director Smith reported on registration and election activities including registration processing, absentee domestic and UOCAVA application processing. She stated that the goal was to be complete with processing registration applications and updates before the first day of advance voting and that staffing levels and work hours were increased to reach the goal. She further stated that they were working with the Secretary of State's office to ensure all registration applications were received from their office by the end of the week. She noted that in the event that registrations were still being processed during advance voting, the poll managers know to contact the office if there is any discrepancy. Director Smith stated that over 18,000 domestic ABM applications had been received as well as close to 2,100 UOCAVA. She went through key dates and stated that October 25 is the deadline to request an absentee ballot for the November 5th election and encouraged everyone to make a plan to vote. Additionally, she reminded everyone that advance voting will begin on Tuesday, October 15 due to the observation of a state holiday on the preceding Monday. She further reported on the budget, facilities, personnel, and outreach activities.

Mr. Lewis asked Director Smith about what was charged to the part-time salaries line item in the budget. Director Smith replied that she would find out and let the Board know but there are not any current part time positions. She elaborated that the requisition technician may have started in a part time capacity or been converted to part time for a short duration of time. Director Smith further stated that she was advised by our financial budget analyst that the line item for insurances would always be negative until they are reconciled at the end of the month.

Vice-Chair Abhiraman asked Director Smith if the remaining registration applications to process would bring the total number of active registered voters above the 500,000 threshold. Director Smith replied that a significant number of the applications left to process were duplicates and that she is not confident that the 500,000 threshold would be reached.

Ms. Jester asked if the variance data could be added to the budget report and inquired about negative line items in the budget. She stated that the County is committed to putting the resources in the budget. Director Smith went through each of the line items Ms. Jester asked about in detail and stated that the department would not overspend in the total budget.

Ms. Motter thanked Director Smith and the staff for pivoting and accommodating the line of voters that came on Monday, October 7th to meet the deadline to register to vote. She stated that normally, business operations cease at 4:30pm but due to the line, staff stayed until 8:00pm to continue to process registrations and she wanted to commend the staff for doing so.

Chair Swift asked Director Smith if there was a plan to add another dropbox in the event the active voter total reached the 500,000 threshold. Director Smith and Ms. Momo both replied that they would have to look into that answer. Chair Swift also asked for clarification in the budget between the line items for temporary personnel services and salaries temporary. Director Smith replied that

temporary personnel services is for the temporary staff in the office and warehouse and salaries temporary is for poll officials exclusively.

Vice-Chair Abhiraman asked Director Smith to report on numbers for absentee ballots expected to be mailed out in the first batch this week and what would be left to be mailed. He further asked if there was any information about the kind of delay between when a ballot says it's been issued in the system versus when it actually gets mailed. Director Smith replied that VRE uses the vendor Fort Orange to mail absentee ballots. She stated that 20,443 domestic and 2,689 UOCAVA had been issued and that files are sent to Fort Orange daily.

Ms. Motter confirmed with Director Smith that Fort Orange is located in New York and so the ballots would be coming from there.

ITEMS FOR DECISION

A) Approval of Return of Absentee Ballots to Advance Voting Locations

Director Smith stated that this proposal is to approve the 14 advance voting locations that are not receiving absentee ballots through drop boxes as designated locations dictated by the code.

Motion by Vice-Chair Abhiraman, and seconded by Ms. Motter, to establish all DeKalb County advance voting locations without a drop box as places of registration for the purpose of receiving absentee ballots for the November 5, 2024 General Election (and runoff) and direct the Department of Voter Registration and Election's Executive Director to establish the following protocols for the return of those ballots:

1. The absentee ballot(s) shall be hand delivered directly to the poll manager or assistant manager who shall be responsible for applying a time and date stamp to the ballot(s).
2. The poll manager or assistant manager shall complete any legally required forms upon receipt of the absentee ballots(s), which shall be returned to the superintendent.
3. The absentee ballot(s) shall be placed in a secured ballot bag with the appropriate seals.
4. The ballots shall be recorded on the chain of custody forms at the end of each night in a separate category as a hand-delivered absentee ballot.
5. Once returned to the office the ballots shall be stored in a secured location until they are ready for processing.

Ms. Jester asked for the required parameters for this proposal. Ms. Momo stated that the board of registrars may establish additional registrar offices or places of registration for the purpose of receiving absentee ballots and that the sites have to be government service centers or government buildings generally accessible to the public or locations used as an Election Day polling place. She said the advanced voting locations being considered met those requirements in the past and that they would ensure any sites approved are still compliant. She expounded that the next effort would be to comply with the other areas of the law that speak to safekeeping and safeguarding of ballots. Ms. Jester then confirmed the 14 sites that were being proposed for approval.

Ms. Motter noted a public comment that was made and clarified that this proposal was to expand the acceptance of absentee ballots to 14 advance voting sites and not 15 as commented because the VRE office could still accept absentee ballots.

Vice-Chair Abhiraman said that this is an important thing to adopt given what some had already mentioned regarding the unpredictability of USPS. He further stated that this allows voters to cut USPS out as the middleman and return their absentee ballots directly and with confidence. Vice-Chair Abhiraman also made note that before SB202, the first batch of absentees used to be mailed out 49 to 45 days ahead of the election. He said this policy not only harmonizes DeKalb County with best practices across other similarly sized counties but also allows voters to return their ballot at any early voting location. He said it's a consistent thing that people can quickly understand instead of having to look up which locations have asterisks and he is in strong support of this policy.

Chair Swift asked Director Smith if this proposal were to pass, what is the plan to communicate this to the public and explain the additional things that voters would need to do to submit their ballot. Director Smith replied the first thing would be to inform the poll managers and provide an overview of the process. There would also be a media blitz around this change to inform the public and instructions on what was required.

Ms. Jester asked if voters would be allowed to drop off their own ballot or if they would be able to drop off multiple ballots. Director Smith replied that voters would be able to drop off ballots for the same people they could before which includes family members and people residing in the same home. Ms. Momo provided a few additional exceptions including voters in the hospital or incarcerated. Ms. Jester asked what the validation process is. Director Smith replied that a photo ID had to be presented and they had to complete a form.

Chair Swift stated that there are many reasons someone may request an absentee ballot and it is their right to receive it and turn it in, regardless of whether they could vote in person or not.

Vice-Chair Abhiraman confirmed with Director Smith that the VRE office would be open to accept absentee ballots on Saturday, November 2nd and Sunday, November 3rd and asked if information regarding the hours for accepting ballots on these days could be posted on the website. Director Smith replied affirmatively.

Mr. Lewis reconfirmed that absentee ballots are accepted at the VRE office and the proposal is to expand to the 14 advance voting locations that do not have drop boxes.

The motion passed 3-2 with Ms. Jester and Mr. Lewis voting nay.

B) Approval of Poll Managers

Director Smith presented the rosters of advance voting managers, election day managers, and area managers to the Board.

Motion by Vice-Chair Abhiraman, seconded by Ms. Jester to approve the advance voting, election day, and area managers. The motion passed unanimously.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Motion by Ms. Jester and seconded by Ms. Motter to go into executive session for the purposes of litigation. The motion was carried by unanimous vote. The Board entered executive session at 6:29pm.

No action was taken during the executive session.

Motion by Ms. Jester and seconded by Vice-Chair Abhiraman to adjourn executive session and reconvene in open session. The motion passed unanimously. The Board exited executive session at 7:47pm and resumed the regular meeting.

BOARD COMMENTS

Mr. Lewis responded to public comments that were made earlier in the meeting. He stated that in 2020, the Board had to re-certify the election twice due to issues that arose after certification and in 2022 the Board had to file for an extension to certify twice to address issues with the election. Mr. Lewis further stated that the goal is to always certify elections and that the Board would immediately do what was needed to solve any issues and certify the election.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Mr. Lewis, seconded by Ms. Jester, to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 7:52 p.m.