

HOWARD COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS MEETING MINUTES

9770 Patuxent Woods Drive, Suite 200
Columbia, MD 21046

Monday, March 22, 2021 – 4:00 pm

Note: *This meeting was held virtually due to the current COVID-19 restrictions and the Governor's directives concerning limiting in-person gatherings & meetings.*

Regular Open Board Meeting

ATTENDEES:

Board Members:

Donna K. Thewes	Board President, Republican Member
Ann M. Balcerzak	Vice President, Democratic Member
Diane L. Butler	Republican Member
Timothy J. Mummert	Republican Member
Raymond M. Rankin	Democratic Member

Staff: Eric C. Brousaides, Esq.	Board Counsel
Charlotte B. Davis	Deputy Director
Phyllis A. West	Board Secretary

Absent: Guy C. Mickley	Election Director (excused)
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CALL TO ORDER AND DECLARATION OF QUORUM

Board President Donna Thewes called the meeting to order at 4:00 pm with an established quorum present.

Since Board members were in different locations without flags available, the President indicated the Pledge of Allegiance would not be given for this meeting.

WELCOME GUESTS

There were none.

APPROVAL OF BOARD MEETING MINUTES

Copies of the minutes for the February 22, 2021 Regular Open Board Meeting were provided to Board members by electronic mail for their review prior to the meeting. President Thewes asked for a motion to approve the minutes. Ray Rankin motioned to approve the minutes as presented and Tim Mummert seconded the motion.

Action: The minutes for the February 22, 2021 Regular Open Board Meeting were unanimously approved.

ADDITIONS OR CHANGES TO THE AGENDA

Board members made no additions or changes to the agenda.

CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence.

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

President Donna Thewes discussed three issues:

1. Director Guy Mickley would not be attending the Board meeting since he is at a session of the state's pollbook review committee today. The committee is hearing vendor presentations on potential new pollbooks. She stated that Deputy Director Charlotte Davis will be presenting the Director's Report.
2. The Petition had garnered enough signatures to be placed on the 2022 ballot, which will be discussed further in the Director's Report.
3. Members had received the MAEO On-line Survey concerning the 2021 MAEO Conference currently scheduled for late August. Board Members discussed the difficulty in assessing the COVID situation and conditions this far out from the Conference date, and whether or not they felt they wanted to attend. They will continue to monitor information sent from MAEO on this event and decisions will be made closer to the date.

DIRECTOR'S REPORT

1. **General Office Update:** Deputy Director Charlotte Davis reported on accomplishments and what the office and warehouse staff will be working on as they finish cleaning up from the Presidential General Election and gear up for the 2022 elections:
 - a. Voter Registration/Office Work – Voter registration numbers for the month have returned to pre-election cycle numbers. This is anticipated to continue for the rest of this year.
 - i) *Street Maintenance* – Staff is working with the County GIS Department to review address points as they exist in the County system and compare those points to the files currently in MDVOTERS. This will provide a baseline as we look forward towards redistricting.
 - ii) *Redistricting* – The State and some of the key players from the local boards met on redistricting, and it was also discussed during the Director's meeting. With the extremely tight timeline at this point, LBE's were told to reach out to our counties, which Director Guy Mickley has done. The County indicated that if the redistricting process could be postponed or done at the same time the State and Federal governments are doing their redistricting process, it would be the best option. The

County had a redistricting meeting last week, in which the Director was not a participant. Guy Mickley has emailed the County Office of Law again to provide them with our timeline.

- iii) *Warehouse* – The warehouse staff has finished Post-Election Maintenance on all equipment. They continue to create a new in-house storage and supply database. The warehouse continues to serve as the mail house for the office and to send out the Voter Notification Cards. Staff has contacted a welding company to engineer a stronger ballot cart (the dark green wire carts) to ensure that the wheels don't break off in transit as some did during the last election.
 - iv) *MDVOTERS Records Cleanup* – Staff is taking this opportunity between elections to re-verify every voter registration done since the beginning of 2020 to ensure that entries were done correctly, cell phone numbers and email addresses have been entered, and all other information has been captured for each voter. This verification process helps to ensure that Howard County's voter rolls are clean and up to date.
2. **Budget** – Charlotte Davis reported that Guy Mickley had a budget meeting with the County Executive on March 15, 2021. He said the County Executive, key members of the County Executive's team and other staff from the County Budget Office attended and asked a few questions about legislation. The Director was told to continue to track what higher costs can be expected for the upcoming budget year. He will do that and alter the final budget proposal as necessary. Otherwise, there were no changes to our budget submission.
 3. **Telework** – The office staff continues to primarily do telework. Supervisors and management continue to monitor the work being done. The warehouse staff comes into the office most days as there is more hands-on work to be done there. Staff continues to practice social distancing while working. The Director wanted a special thanks given to employees who helped process the petition over the past several months. Thinking outside the box, we came up with a way to do the petitions and still do the majority of the work via telework. Employees had to learn a new way of doing things, have the ability to be flexible and learn things on the fly. He reported that we have an outstanding group of individuals in this office that continues to go above and beyond for the citizens of Howard County.
 4. **New Pollbooks** – The State continues to look into either purchasing or leasing new pollbooks for the 2022 and future elections. Focus groups consisting of many local election employees have been established and have met. The team that will be evaluating and advising the State on procurement has been established. More information will be provided to the Board as the State goes through the process.
 5. **Legislation** – Charlotte Davis said that Director Mickley asked Board members to continue to review the MAEO summary of bills, including MAEO's position on the bills, which so far has primarily been "no position". Two bills which affect Early Voting have passed through and crossed over. These bills change the number of Early Voting Centers to five in Howard

County, and change the time the centers must be open to 7:00 am – 8:00 pm for all days. This was changed via an amendment to the original bill, which had the Early Voting Centers open from 8:00 am – 8:00 pm. As the legislature moves closer to the end of their session, things will start to move faster. Ms. Davis said the Director will keep the Board updated on any bills that pass.

6. **Candidate Filing** – Candidate filing has started, but no candidates have filed locally. For the time being, candidates can make an appointment to file at the office on Wednesdays between 9:00 am and 4:00 pm.
7. **Petition** – Charlotte Davis reported that the petition contained enough signatures to be placed on the ballot for the 2022 Gubernatorial Election. The petitioners garnered 9,173 valid signatures and needed 7,170 valid signatures to have the bill placed on the ballot. She said Guy Mickley had informed the County Council and the Office of Law on the outcome of our verification process.
8. **MAEO Annual Conference** – The MAEO Annual Conference is tentatively scheduled for August. A questionnaire was sent to all MAEO members concerning the likelihood of their attendance at this point, considering the current information we have on Covid-19. Charlotte Davis said that as soon as the Director has more information on the results of the survey, or if he hears of any changes to the conference, he will advise the Board.

Board members were asked if they had any questions. On redistricting, Diane Butler indicated she had listened to the County’s redistricting meeting where they discussed the tight time frame, how it could be accomplished for 2022, and if redistricting should be postponed until 2024. No decisions were made at the meeting. She indicated that based on the timeframe for 2022, there would be no time for public hearings. She mentioned that redistricting had been postponed in the past. Ray Rankin stated there is an issue with postponement until 2024, as it would only affect the congressional representatives in 2024. Legislative and county representatives are elected every four years, so their changes would be delayed until 2026. Donna Thewes stated that until we have more information, we won’t be in a position to make the decision.

There was also a question on the budget and whether there would be enough funds for 2022 since we had received a large grant for the 2020 election to offset costs. Donna Thewes reported that Guy Mickley indicated the County understands there will be more expenses to come for the budget year, and he will be adjusting our request accordingly.

Donna Thewes then thanked Charlotte Davis for presenting the Director’s Report for this meeting.

BOARD COUNSEL REPORT

Eric Broussides, Esq., Board Counsel, stated that he had nothing to report.

OLD BUSINESS

There was no old business.

NEW BUSINESS

There was no new business.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

President Thewes then asked for a motion to recess the Regular Open Board Meeting so that the Board could convene in closed Executive Session according to the Open Meetings Act General Provisions Article 3-305B to discuss a personnel issue. A motion to recess the Regular Open Board Meeting was made by Ray Rankin, and Tim Mummert seconded the motion.

Action: Board members voted unanimously to recess the Regular Open Board Meeting at 4:19 pm.

The Regular Open Board Meeting was reconvened at 5:02 pm. President Thewes reported that the purpose of the Executive Session was to discuss the process and gathering of information related to filling the Board Counsel contract position in July at the start of the new contract year. She indicated the Board will wait until further information is available to decide how to proceed. The Board also approved the Executive Session minutes from the January 25, 2021 meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, Donna Thewes asked for a motion to adjourn the Regular Open Board Meeting. Ray Rankin made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Tim Mummert seconded the motion.


Action: Board members unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 5:03 pm.

The next Regular Open Board Meeting of the Howard County Board of Elections will be held on Monday April 26, 2021 at 4:00 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,



Phyllis A. West, Board Secretary



Donna K. Thewes, Board President