

**TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS**

**MEETING MINUTES**

August 17, 2021

The scheduled meeting of the Transylvania County Board of Elections was called to order by Chair Champion at 12 pm on Tuesday, July 20, 2021, at 150 South Gaston Street, Brevard, NC 28712.

**Present**

**Board Members:**

**Staff Members:**

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Chair: Sara Champion

Director: Jeff Storey

Secretary: Lee McMinn

Deputy Director: Julie Dennis

Michael Wainwright

Sandra Watson

Wendy Warwick

Visitors: Barb Jackson, Virginia Pendergrass, Jeff Brewer, Bernard Groseclose, David Thompson

**Review and Approval of Agenda**

**Secretary McMinn made a motion to add an agenda item to give the public a review of the East Fork proceedings to date. The motion carried unanimously.**

**Review and Approval of Previous Minutes**

The board was presented with the minutes from the previous meeting. **Member Sandra Watson made a motion to approve the board meeting minutes for July 20, 2021. The motion carried unanimously.**

**Review of current East Fork Options**

Member Wendy Warwick suggested due to the weather and road conditions that the presentation be delayed allowing more time for the public to arrive. **Ms. Warwick made a motion to delay the East Fork presentation and public comment period until the last agenda item. The motion carried.**

**Appointment of Precinct Chief Judge and Judges**

Director Storey presented the board with the recommendations from the political parties for precinct judges. Secretary McMinn asked if there were any first-time judges being recommended. The director indicated Ellen Delk for East Fork and Kim Corum for Cedar Mountain would be new Chief Judges. Chair Champion stated these appointments will be for a duration of two years. **Secretary McMinn made a motion to accept the recommendations as presented. The motion carried unanimously.**

### **One Stop Implementation Plan for Municipal**

Chair Champion asked the director to describe the differences in requirements between the odd and even years for the board. The director indicated the board has greater flexibility in setting hours for municipal elections. Ms. Watson asked if there was a requirement to be open on Saturdays. Director Storey stated the last Saturday is required from 8:00 am to 3:00 pm, however the board can add additional times / dates if desired. The director indicated in previous municipal early voting plans, the hours were 8:30 am to 5 pm on weekdays and the required last Saturday. Chair Champion asked the board to consider adding hours for the two additional Saturdays of early voting. Ms. Warwick asked to confirm there would be only one site for early voting in the Election Center for both Brevard and Rosman. It was confirmed. Ms. Watson asked about staffing for early voting. The director stated normally there is 1 additional worker in addition to permanent staff for municipals, but 3 to 5 are recommended with the anticipation of higher turnout for 2021. Chair Champion recommended adding two additional Saturdays from 9 am to 1 pm. **Secretary McMinn made a motion to add the first two Saturdays from 9 am to 1 pm to the staff recommended plan of 8:30 am to 5 pm on weekdays and the last Saturday from 8 am to 3 pm. The motion carried unanimously.**

### **Absentee Meeting Schedule**

Chair Champion asked the board for thoughts regarding the schedule for absentee by mail board meetings. As presented, the meeting schedule would be the Tuesdays at 5 pm beginning September 28, 2021. The director explained the October 3, 2021, deadline to mail absentee ballots is per statute so that existing absentee ballot requests for military / overseas are made available no later than that date. The director informed the board it can move the Election Day processing of absentee ballots to 2 pm via resolution. **Ms. Watson made a motion to approve the resolution as presented. The motion carried unanimously. Mr. Wainwright made a motion to approve the absentee schedule as presented. The motion carried unanimously.**

### **Resolution for Temporary Transfer of CC to RE precinct**

The director informed the board there are 20 voters in Cathey's Creek that are eligible to vote in the Town of Rosman Municipal Election. Staff recommendation is to temporarily transfer them to the Rosman precinct for this election only. **Secretary McMinn made a motion to temporarily transfer the eligible Cathey's Creek voters to the Rosman precinct. The motion carried unanimously.**

### **Review of current East Fork Options**

Chair Champion asked the director to review the options for the board and public's consideration for the East Fork precinct. Director Storey specified the current polling site at the Connestee Fire Rescue Substation was unavailable last year due to being utilized as a COVID quarantine site for emergency personnel. COVID remains a factor for future elections. The space is also inadequate to safely conduct elections using COVID protocols. While not a viable short-term option, the substation is supportive of continuing to use it for elections. The director stated the board has several options to consider including keeping it long-term at the existing site, selecting an alternate site within the precinct, and splitting / merging the precinct. The East Fork Baptist Church is the former polling site and is very supportive of using the fellowship hall to conduct elections. Board members and staff conducted an ADA assessment at the church

and found it to follow accessibility requirements. The director then displayed a proposed map if the Board decided to split East Fork into surrounding precincts. Chair Champion asked what the registration numbers would look like if East Fork were added to surrounding precincts. The director stated Dunn's Rock would reach 3000, Cedar Mountain over 1000, and Rosman near 2500. Chair Champion then asked for public comment.

### **Public Comment Period for East Fork**

David Thompson stated he is a registered voter in East Fork and would not recommend splitting up the precinct. Mr. Thompson has noticed growth in the precinct and increased traffic in the area and felt it would be a disservice to the public to eliminate the East Fork precinct. As a precinct chair, Mr. Thompson also indicated the feedback he has received confirmed that the general public would not be supportive of a precinct split. Ruth Harris asked if there is a limit on the maximum registered voters in each precinct and voiced concerns with the sustainability of operating the surrounding precincts with the additional voters they would inherit. The director mentioned there isn't a specific limit, but the State Board would probably scrutinize precinct additions that were significantly over 3000.

Bernard Groseclose indicated he is a precinct officer and felt it would be unfortunate for the precinct to be eliminated, but also wanted to express his opposition to relocating to church facilities. Mr. Groseclose commented there has been an effort to move away from churches as polling sites due to the uncertainty surrounding a church's openness to hosting an election with referendum that goes against their religious beliefs. Early voting has reduced the pressure on an Election Day polling site so Mr. Groseclose would be supportive of remaining at the Connetsee Fire Rescue Substation for the long-term. He would also not be opposed to a logical splitting of the precinct.

Ruth Harris asked if the polling site could be temporarily moved to the East Fork Baptist Church until such time COVID is not an issue. Secretary McMinn asked to comment regarding the substation where he voiced concerns over spacing, potential hazards with an emergency on Election Day, and various other impediments. Mr. McMinn indicated the substation is only marginally adequate to accommodate a polling site. Also, the secretary had concerns with the East Fork precinct's previous difficulties in finding workers for Election Day. It was emphasized that if the precinct wished to remain intact, the political parties should work to support it with workers. Ruth Harris agreed that parties should work harder to recruit officials but stated the problem was not exclusive to East Fork.

Wendy Warwick commented that her understanding is the church objected to having political signage on church property and they are fully supportive of hosting the polling site. Ms. Warwick suggested that if a controversial issue was on the ballot, the board could look at temporarily relocating the precinct to the fire substation for that election. Mr. Groseclose asked why the board would entertain the option for a polling site that could present a problem in the future. Chair Champion understood the concerns presented and shared those concerns as well but felt comfortable with the church's response to those concerns during a site visit. It was mentioned that similar measures were being taken in Brevard #4 due to Brevard College's reluctance to commit to a polling site while the pandemic is still active. Chair Champion felt utilizing church facilities outweighed the alternative of breaking up precincts. The chair responded that moving a precinct polling site is much less involved than splitting a precinct and allows the board to address concerns for future elections. A precinct split would involve the

State Board of Elections and would be a more permanent result. The director added that while churches are not considered ideal polling sites, they are used across the state. In the case of the rural East Fork precinct, the fire substation and the church are the only viable polling sites within its boundaries.

### **East Fork Precinct Deliberation**

Chair Champion reiterated that splitting the precinct would require submitting a package to the State Board with documentation that justified the recommended actions. The State Board would consider factors such as driving distance, total registrations, demographics, and adequate facilities. If there is an alternative site in East Fork that is viable, then the chair questioned whether it was justifiable to recommend splitting the precinct.

Member Warwick commented she felt very strongly that the board should keep the East Fork community together and not split the precinct. She added she would like to keep things simple for the voters, staff, and board. Ms. Warwick also suggested keeping smaller precincts would aid investigating accusations of fraud or voting irregularities. In today's environment, having more precincts allows for more alternative sites in the event of terrorist activities, COVID shutdowns, or other disasters. It was the opinion of Ms. Warwick that the East Fork Baptist Church should be used as the polling site for the East Fork precinct.

Ms. Harris asked the board if a resolution could be done to move the precinct back to the fire substation if a controversial issue were on the ballot. Chair Champion stated its already in the board's power to move a polling site and it could be addressed at that time.

Secretary McMinn commented that if the board does not vote to break up the precinct today, the option is to go to the fire substation or the church. Splitting the precinct can be tabled for another time when and if the current precinct is not sustainable.

Mr. Brewer asked the board if there were less precincts, would there be less participation. If so, then that would be a bad thing. Ms. Harris added that both political parties in her opinion would have a problem with less participation. Chair Champion felt that could be true if a voter's polling site were eliminated and they had to drive further, it might impact their participation. It wouldn't be a massive number but could be a factor.

Secretary McMinn reiterated without COVID, there are two viable polling sites in the precinct and the fire substation could be used. Right now, it's not an option, but the board can decide to return to the fire substation when the pandemic subsides.

Member Watson asked for clarification on the church's stance with political signage. Chair Champion stated the church did not want them posted on the property, but electioneering would not be an issue.

Chair Champion thanked the public for their input, closed public comments and asked the board how they wished to proceed. **Secretary McMinn made a motion to table further actions with splitting the precinct until such time it becomes an issue again. The motion carried unanimously.**

It was determined there was conflicting information on the availability of the fire substation for 2022. **Secretary McMinn made a motion to table the decision on the location of the East**

**Fork polling site until next meeting while staff got clarification. The motion carried unanimously.** Chair Champion invited the public to share the proposals with any interested parties to give them a better understanding of the decisions the Board was facing regarding East Fork.

**DIRECTOR UPDATES**

Director Storey informed the Board that Brevard College still has not committed to providing a polling site for the Municipal Election due to the ongoing pandemic. The director indicated a commitment is needed by the college prior to the September 9 board meeting otherwise the assumption is an alternative sight would have to be used.

The director stated court is scheduled next for September 21 and that the dates in August were not disruptive to election or county operations. Director Storey has spoken with the clerk of court about the March 2022 primary dates, and they will plan accordingly.

Ballot proofing has started for the Municipal Election. Director Storey explained that will be followed by logic and accuracy testing.

The director informed the board that PPE equipment would most likely be used again for the Municipal Election and staff are conducting inventory. Director Storey felt supplies are sufficient for the November election, but more items may need to be ordered for the March primary.

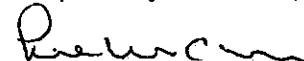
**BOARD COMMENTS**


Member Warwick asked if the active shooter training provided at the state conference could be shared with the precinct workers. The director indicated it is discussed during precinct official training and included in the emergency action plan.

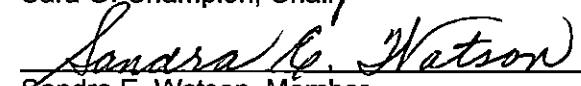
Ms. Warwick also asked about the informational card discussed in a previous meeting. The director stated Deputy Director Julie Dennis was developing a prototype pamphlet that would include contact and resources for combating misinformation. Director Storey showed the board the current site the state uses to combat misinformation. Outreach projects include creating content for the website and speaking engagements.

**On a motion by Member Wainwright, the meeting adjourned at 1:43 PM.** The next scheduled meeting will be at 10 AM on September 9, 2021, at 150 South Gaston Street, Brevard, NC 28712.

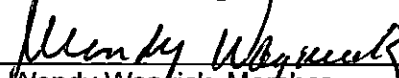
Respectfully submitted,

  
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Lee McMinn, Secretary

  
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Sara G. Champion, Chair

  
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Sandra E. Watson, Member

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Michael Wainwright, Member

  
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Wendy Warwick, Member

Approved by Board on: 10/12/2021