



DUVAL COUNTY ELECTION ADVISORY PANEL

MINUTES

April 12, 2023

3:00 p.m.

**Don Davis Room
1st floor, City Hall**

Attendance: Robert Maldonado (Chair), Robert Phillips, Ingrid Montgomery, Austin Kiwkkel, Ray Pringle, Daniel Henry

Excused: None

Absent: Nancy Chrisman, Charles McWhite,

Also: Supervisor of Elections Mike Hogan; Jeff Clements – City Council Research Division

Chairman Maldonado called the meeting to order at 3:06 p.m. and the attendees introduced themselves for the record.

Supervisor of Elections update

Robert Phillips of the Supervisor of Elections (SOE) office reported that turnout for the City first election in March was about 30% for the March first election. There was relatively good election day turnout but vote by mail (VBM) turnout was down compared to the last election and early voting was about the same as previously. There will be 3 countywide races in May – Mayor, Property Appraiser and City Council At-Large Group 5 - plus 6 Council district elections. 49,000 VBM ballots have been sent out for the unitary election in May. Early voting starts May 1 and runs until May 14 from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily. The SOE is training 100-120 poll workers daily for the May election as required by law.

Chairman Maldonado asked how the 30% turnout ranks compared to past elections. Supervisor of Elections Mike Hogan said voter turnout is down statewide over the last couple of years. The “baby boomer” generation votes but younger generations don’t turn out as much. There ~~seemed to be~~ were a lots of relatively unknown candidates on the City election ballot in March which may have hurt, and there was considerable negative campaigning, although that’s a perennial problem. Mr. Hogan said it bothers him that 3 out of 4 registered voters don’t bother to turn out for local elections. Turnout is driven by the candidates in the elections for the most prominent offices and by significant referendum amendments. There’s not much more the Supervisor of Elections could do to turn out more voters. Everyone knew there was an election given the news coverage and the amount of campaign signage, press reports throughout the election cycle, etc. so it was a personal choice not to vote. Ray Pringle wondered if fewer elections would help turnout.

Mr. Hogan said anyone who's ever worked at the SOE believes that holding City elections in conjunction with the gubernatorial or presidential election cycle would improve turnout, but the politicians don't want to try to raise money in competition with national and state candidates. Florida is one of only 14 states that has closed primaries and Jacksonville is one of very few cities nationally that use a unitary election system. People who come from other states to Florida and Jacksonville probably don't understand our electoral process. Candidates in local races are listed alphabetically on the ballot while statewide candidates are listed with the party of the governor first, which many people find confusing. They're used to voting for the position on the ballot without paying attention to the difference in state versus local elections. Mr. Hogan said the SOE sends out a tremendous amount of information to every voter about every election, including dates, times, precinct and early voting locations, sample ballots, etc.

Ingrid Montgomery asked about use of the ExpressVote machines in the March election. Mr. Hogan said it is being adopted surprisingly quickly, but some people are confused by the name. They think the input screen is recording the vote or that a touchscreen is inherently insecure given the controversy from past elections and won't touch it. The ExpressVote system is a huge cost saver from the perspective of the ballot paper needed – about 25 cents per printed ballot which are election-specific versus about 1 cent per thermal paper ballot that are good for any election. Mr. Pringle said he's heard that some voters were put off by feeling pressured by poll workers into using the ExpressVote. Mr. Hogan said that Ballot on Demand printers were an option in every early voting site and any voters who wanted a "full-sized" ballot were provided with one. Mr. Hogan said he believed that ExpressVote will be the only system in use after the next presidential election cycle is finished because ExpressVote machines are much more reliable and the Ballot on Demand is more costly and more prone to breakdowns.

Chairman Maldonado asked about poll worker training. Mr. Hogan said the SOE has joined a nationwide effort to recruit former military service members to act as poll workers. He noted that 63% of current poll workers are registered Democrats and it is proving difficult to recruit workers from other parties or No Party Affiliation to obtain the partisan parity they want to achieve. Robert Phillips said the SOE will need 1,730 workers for the May election and have trained 700 to date with another 1,000 enrolled for training. 16 information technology workers have signed up to take a precinct manager class and 23 techs have signed up for advanced manager training. Training has only been underway for 2 weeks. Chairman Maldonado asked about poll worker demographics – Mr. Phillips said will provide them to staff for distribution to the group.

Daniel Henry asked about the state's recent withdrawal from the national Electronic Registration Information Center (ERIC) voter registration database and the new requirement for poll workers to get more training in signature verification. Mr. Hogan said the SOE has been doing signature verification training for several years now. Mr. Henry asked about the process for the transition to Jerry Holland as the new Supervisor of Elections. Mr. Hogan said he's put on hold some initiatives in order to let the new supervisor proceed as he sees fit, including the Imeson Operations Center consolidation process that got delayed by the special election process last year. There will still be a physical SOE presence downtown, but fewer and fewer people come into the office any more since just about everything can be done online. Mr. Holland will be the one to decide about renewing the SOE's lease for the operations center at Imeson when it expires next year.

Mr. Henry said the new Nassau County SOE has been doing some different and interesting things to provide voter information, particularly via a smartphone app since younger people are more used to that means of communication. Mr. Hogan noted that the SOE will have run 6 elections in less than 18 months when the May election is complete, plus 2 City Council redistrictings in one year, which is unprecedented. His staff has done nothing but run elections for 2 years and haven't had time to do anything else. Robert Phillips said he believes the Nassau County SOE app was written in-house by their tech staff. Jacksonville's SOE tech staff have been swamped with doing all the work for the 6 elections so

have no time for anything else. Mr. Hogan said the state has made major waves of election law changes in the last 3 years and that has been a huge burden on the staff as well.

Mr. Henry asked about ordering VBM ballot covers for the November 2024 election. Mr. Phillips said they bought enough in preparation for the 2022 general election to last through the City election this May but will have to reorder more along with lots of other physical items after Mr. Holland becomes the new supervisor so that his name will replace Mr. Hogan's. Mr. Henry suggested following the practice in Nassau County of having a check box on the VBM ballot allowing a voter to order a VBM ballot for the next election in order to limit the number of separate mailings needed. Mr. Phillips said different supervisors in counties around the state are attacking that issue in different ways. Mr. Henry asked about the SOE's budget in a mayoral transition year and whether they are thinking about seeking to grow the staff to deal with the workload. Mr. Hogan said that the Mayor Curry administration has been very generous in providing whatever has been requested as they certainly don't want Jacksonville to get any bad headlines for something going wrong with an election. Mr. Phillips said every administration has been very leery of adding new permanent full-time employees, but they did get 2 new positions back this year that had been dropped several years ago. The SOE uses a lot of part-time employees, including many who retired from the SOE, who are very good.

Austin Kwikkel asked how much is spent annually on voter education. Robert Phillips said the primary education mechanism is the sample ballot, which costs about \$75,000 to \$100,000 per election depending on what races are involved. The SOE spends less on City election sample ballots because they are a unitary election ballot and don't have as many variations as closed primary elections. He noted that state voter education funds can't be spent on City-only elections. The SOE recently spent \$6,000 on radio advertising and is leveraging the assistance of the local sports teams (Jaguars, Icemen, Jumbo Shrimp) to spread the word about the importance of voter registration and voting. The state has stopped distributing federal Help America Vote Act grant funds and now concentrates more on voting technology and election safety rather than voter education. Mr. Phillips said there are many fewer provisional ballots produced in City elections than state elections because City election voters seem much better informed about candidates and issues and the mechanism of voting than the voters who only show up once every 4 years to vote for president or governor.

Ray Pringle asked about the SOE's use of social media. Mr. Phillips said they find that it only reaches a relatively small number of the same people who re-tweet and re-post about election issues. Supervisor Hogan noted that voters can get their sample ballots delivered via email. Mr. Henry said engagement in social media by viewers depends heavily on the content being produced and distributed. Other Florida counties seem to have a very robust social media presence with photos, videos, etc. that are more attractive to younger voters.

With regard to currently pending Florida Senate Bill 7050 that would make numerous changes in state election law, Mr. Phillips said the bill will affect the City's May election. Chairman Maldonado said the outcome of the debate on that bill will be an agenda item for the August EAP meeting to review what finally happened.

Chairman Maldonado asked about the state's withdrawal from the ERIC system and its impact on the SOE's operations. Mr. Hogan said ERIC has been around for years, but Florida only joined the voluntary coalition in the last few years. The concept of comparing voter registration information across multiple states to identify double-registration is great but implementation has been somewhat problematic. The focus seemed to be more on promoting voter registration than on comparing voter rolls. It's a private organization not a government agency, and several other states have pulled out of the ERIC system in the last year over concerns about the coalition's organizers and about data security. Some of the biggest states (California, New York, New Jersey) are not part of ERIC so its usefulness for the purpose of identifying

dual registrations is limited. Mr. Maldonado asked if the governor could pull the state out of the system unilaterally without legislative approval. Mr. Hogan said he could and did through a directive to the Secretary of State.

Mr. Henry asked if there were any projects Supervisor Hogan is trying to get accomplished before he leaves office. Mr. Hogan said he wished he could have accomplished the consolidation of the two SOE facilities into one space at the Imeson operations center. The project got no traction in Mayor Curry's first term and by the time it was approved two years ago several special elections intervened and closed the window on getting the project done because the move could not happen while staff was preparing for or running an election. Mr. Hogan said the other thing he recommends is moving the City elections from the odd-year cycle to the even-year cycle to coincide with either the gubernatorial or presidential election. Not holding a stand-alone election would save \$3 million per cycle and would improve voter turnout.

Ray Pringle asked how many man-hours it takes to run an election. Robert Phillips said the election call center opens and requires staffing 2 weeks before early voting begins, the warehouse staff is called in 2 months before the election to handle logistics, plus there are additional man-hours required for training poll workers and prepping the voting machines and supplies. The scale of the operation is huge and Jacksonville is much bigger than most counties in Florida, but still much smaller than huge counties like Miami-Dade that have twice the population and dozens of cities each holding their own elections. Mr. Hogan said he would love to be able to have voting precincts in schools like some other Florida counties. Every county has a tough time acquiring precincts – it's a universal problem.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the September 21 and November 16, 2022 and February 15, 2023 meetings of the Election Advisory Panel were **approved unanimously as distributed**.

Old Business

Membership: several panel members terms are expiring this month and there are several other vacant positions. Mr. Hogan initially said he would prefer to hold off on appointments and let incoming Supervisor Holland make his own nominations, but after further discussion he agreed to appoint Lanelle Phillmon to fill one of his vacancies and to reappoint Ray Pringle to a first full term.

Chairman Maldonado said he has drafted letters to the various appointing authorities reminding them of their vacancies and asking for seats to be filled.

Motion: the Election Advisory Panel declares the seats of Nancy Chrisman and Charles McWhite to be vacant due to excessive absences pursuant to Sec. 50.104 of the Ordinance Code – **approved unanimously**.

New Business

Election of Officers: Chairman Maldonado asked for nominations for officers for the next year. Ray Pringle volunteered to serve as Chair if that's the will of the group, noting that he serves on a number of other appointed boards so has experience in how boards operate. Mr. Pringle was declared Chair by acclamation and Austin Kwikkel was declared Vice Chair by acclamation.

Chair's comments

Chairman Maldonado said the EAP's annual report is due this summer and will be beefed up a little from last year's with some highlights of the panel's discussions and copies of all the meeting minutes.

Public comment

Lanelle Phillmon said she is excited to see the Supervisor at the meeting today. The ERIC system gave the SOE the opportunity to know when a voter died and caught registrations in multiple states, especially given the number of snowbirds in Florida.

Mr. Hogan said the SOE gets death records from the Florida Bureau of Vital Statistics and Social Security Administration which duplicated what they got from the ERIC system. There will always be gaps in catching people who die or double-register. The biggest problem they face is people who move and don't inform the SOE. The reminder letter sent out to a voter by the SOE after several cycles of non-voting typically gets thrown away by the new residents at the address rather than being returned to the SOE as undeliverable, so they don't get confirmation that the voter has moved. There is a balancing act to be performed between removing voters from the rolls too soon if they don't vote or confirm their address versus too late.

Ms. Phillmon asked if the SOE staff is taking the ExpressVote machines out to school elections so the young generation gets a chance to see them in action. Mr. Phillips said that will be the way to go in the future. Ms. Phillmon asked about on-line training for poll workers. Mr. Phillips said it will save money and time for the trainees in travel to and from the operations center, but the SOE needs to verify who is actually taking the training when it's not in person to ensure that it's really the poll worker who signed up.

Ms. Phillmon said that between August 18 and August 20 last year over 2,000 voter registration applications were rejected, with 48% being Black registrants and 24% race unknown. She asked if third-party organizations that turn in batches of registration forms that they collect get some kind of notice from the SOE when applications they submit are rejected so they know that something is wrong. Mr. Phillips said third-party registration solicitors and paid signature gatherers have produced a lot of problems for the SOE. When SOE staff do registration drives they have a second employee double-check forms for accuracy and they catch missing information, illegible writing, etc. while the voter is present to make corrections before the form is submitted. He said the SOE is not allowed to segregate applications by who turns them in, so problem forms (invalid address, illegible handwriting, etc.) are reported to the person trying to register, not to the organization that collected the forms. Mr. Hogan said there's a big difference between incomplete registrations and rejected registrations, and the distinction is frequently overlooked when there are reports of large numbers of registration applications being "rejected". When the SOE gets an incomplete form they fill in all the accurate information that was provided by the applicant on a new registration form, highlight the problem areas on the original application, and send the remade form to the applicant to sign and return. He said very few third-party registration solicitors take the time to do a good job of turning in complete and accurate forms.

Next meeting

August 16, 2023

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:45 p.m.

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