



DUVAL COUNTY ELECTION ADVISORY PANEL

MINUTES

November 15, 2023

3:00 p.m.

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

Attendance: Ray Pringle (Chair), Lanelle Philmon, Robert Maldonado, Robert Phillips, Carmen Martinez

Excused:

Absent: Ingrid Montgomery, Daniel Henry, Austin Kiwkkel

Also: Supervisor of Elections Jerry Holland; Jeff Clements and Eamon Webb – City Council Research Division

Chairman Pringle called the meeting to order at 3:04 p.m. and the attendees introduced themselves for the record.

Approval of Minutes

The minutes of the August 16, 2023 meetings of the Election Advisory Panel were **approved unanimously as distributed**.

Supervisor of Elections update

Supervisor Jerry Holland said his office is doing a number of voter registration drives. They have sent letters to all high school principals offering to provide voter registrations events at the schools. The SOE also manages elections for entities such as unions, and is running an election for the Jacksonville Association of Fire Fighters today. He reported that the City Council appropriated the requested funding in the FY23-24 budget for the purchase of new vote tabulators and high-speed ballot counters, and more ExpressVote machines in order to have enough to supply all early voting sites. Early voting sites will be expanded from 19 to 24 for the 2024 elections. Although the SOE is not required to get City Council approval for those sites, he has submitted the list of sites and days/hours of operation to the Council for their information and endorsement by the passage of legislation.

Mr. Holland discussed the settlement of the Equal Protection Clause lawsuit filed during the summer regarding equal access to voting based on varying numbers of precincts in each City Council district. To avoid lengthy litigation, the SOE agreed to a settlement which will provide for a median number of 11 precincts in each district, ranging from a low of 10 to a high of 12. City Council has approved that settlement agreement. He noted that there have been some precinct changes, The Deer Creek Country

Club decided they didn't want to be a precinct so that locations had to be changed. Currently pending legislation will combine 2 precincts in District 11 and change some precinct boundaries in District 10. The SOE is asking for emergency approval of that legislation so voter information cards can be sent out in December to the approximately 240,000 voters affected by the re-precincting process. Mr. Holland said the SOE will be posting signage for the new precincts and will have an employee stationed at all the discontinued precincts on election day to inform voters who do not read their sample ballot or their voter information card about their new polling place if they come to the old location. The SOE will also be sending a letter to all vote-by-mail (VBM) voters who have not renewed their VBM ballot request application since Senate Bill 90 passed in 2021 and may not know that they now have to re-apply for a ballot after every general election.

Poll worker training starts in January for the March Presidential preference primary. Eventually some portion of the training will be done online, but a majority will always be done in-person because Mr. Holland believes it's important to have personal interaction and build camaraderie during the training process. He said it is his goal to get poll workers from both major parties working in every precinct (preferably at least 2 from each party). He said he is going to Republican Club meetings to recruit because he has a shortage of Republican poll workers. Distribution of workers by party can sometimes be problematic based on where poll workers live and how far they are willing to commute to staff precincts far from their neighborhood. He said he is happy to speak to any group that wants to hear from him about election issues.

Lanelle Philmon asked about education efforts for the ExpressVote machines since some people are leery of touchscreens. Mr. Holland said the SOE will be offering a bar code reader app to let voters verify the selections on their ballot if they want that and they emphasize that the machines not connected to the internet in any way so cannot be manipulated by hackers. The new DS300 model is easier to operate than the DS200s they are replacing and can display more races on each screen so there is less changing of pages to scroll through the ballot. Carmen Martinez said when she worked the polls at the last election, there was substantial resistance from some voters about not having a paper ballot, which they prefer. Mr. Holland said poll workers will not try to persuade voters on election day to use the ExpressVote instead of a paper ballot, but they will be available.

Early voting will only operate for 8 days for the Presidential preference primary in March because it will only be Republicans voting, so the volume will be less. The next planned early voting site will be in the Oceanway library when it is built. He noted that polling places can only be located in a government building, with 1 wild card exception per county for a non-governmental building. Mr. Holland said his goal is to have an early voting site within a 4 mile drive of anywhere in the county. Chairman Pringle suggested the Dinsmore Community Center as an early voting site to serve the needs of the Northside, which doesn't have too many government buildings and therefore has long drives to reach the early voting site. Mr. Holland said the SOE will take a look at that facility, possibly for next fall's elections. Robert Maldonado asked about any plans for a redesign of poll worker training. Mr. Holland said new training will be needed for poll managers and technicians for the new equipment being used, and his staff is trying to standardize the curriculum to be taught by all trainers so it's uniform from trainer to trainer and session to session. If a problem is encountered in an election, they specifically train for that situation in the next election cycle to prevent a recurrence. He said has re-established a community outreach and education office with several people to have a team to handle those functions. Robert Phillips mentioned the state-mandate regarding particular training items that must be covered.

Regarding a new election operations center in downtown, Mr. Holland said he is disappointed that the DIA didn't care for his proposed location on the City-owned block surrounded by Jefferson, Union, Davis and Beaver Streets. DIA has been seeking a private developer for that block for many years without success. The new administration backed the DIA, so the SOE has been looking at several different

potential locations, including existing department stores and office buildings. They have a 2-year lease at the current facility in Imeson Park and are making repairs to the Monroe Street headquarters to keep it usable while the search for a new location continues. The existing operations center is well designed and serves its purpose but is just too far removed from town to be practical.

In response to a question from Chairman Pringle, Mr. Holland said the ExpressVote machines do not print out a take-home receipt for the voter showing their ballot as marked by the machine, but a voter can take a picture of their ballot if they want a record. The ExpressVotes are very easy to operate since they were originally made to accommodate voters with various disabilities. Mr. Pringle suggested bringing an ExpressVote unit to a future EAP meeting and to a Mayor's Disability Council meeting for people to try out and become familiar with its operation.

Ms. Philmon asked if the EAP could meet at the Imeson Operations Center. Mr. Holland said he welcomes that. Chairman Pringle announced that the EAP will meet there for its January 17, 2024 meeting.

Mr. Maldonado asked about poll worker recruitment, retention and demographics. Mr. Holland said it's still early and they don't know how many will come back for the 2024 election cycle, although they usually have a large percentage of workers return. He will provide a poll worker demographics report at the next meeting. He said they are always trying to recruit younger poll workers, but it's the retired population who are the most dedicated workers. In order to have 2 representatives of each party in every precinct, they need about 130 more Republicans. Ms. Philmon asked if poll workers could work half-days, because many seniors don't want to or can't work the 14-hour days required on election day. Mr. Holland said the chain of command of ballots almost requires that the same poll workers have to be there all day; it would be hard to pin down responsibility with absolute certainty for things that might happen if people are coming and going during the day. For the sake of integrity he prefers to keep a uniform crew there all day.

Mr. Pringle asked if the SOE can accommodate persons with disabilities as poll workers; Mr. Holland said he would consider it on a case by case basis, but it depends on whether the person can perform the functions adequately. For example, a person with a visual disability who could not clearly see to verify a voter's signature or a person with a hearing disability who could not hear a voter's response to poll worker's question would not be able to adequately perform necessary functions of the job.

Carmen Martinez said she thinks that there should be less vote-by-mail because it has been a source of fraud in some places. Mr. Holland said he will never discourage anyone from using a state-approved method but will encourage early voting as the best method. He said VBM registrants vote at a rate twice that of people who vote in person at polling places. The SOE will be notifying people who voted by mail in November 2022 with a reminder to request ballots due to the requirement of SB 90 (passed in 2001) that VBM ballot requests expire after every general election. Mr. Holland said there has never been a problem with VBM in Jacksonville.

Old Business

Membership: the group discussed the current vacant positions and staff was requested to draft letter for the Chairman to the Mayor and Council President requesting that they fill their vacancies and replace members serving on expired terms.

New Business

None

EAP meeting schedule for 2024

January 17 (at the Imeson Operations Center), April 17, June 26, September 18 and December 4.

Chair's comments

None

Public comment

None

Ms. Martinez asked what EAP should be doing, aside from getting a report from the SOE. Mr. Pringle said the EAP is an advisory board, so it provide opinions, asks questions to SOE, and conveys information and opinions from the community at large to the Supervisor of Elections and City Council. Mr. Maldonado said the EAP's annual report tells City Council what is being discussed with regards to elections and where improvements or investments might be made.

Next meeting

January 17, 2024 at Imeson Election Operations Center

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:10 p.m.

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