**Decatur County Board of Elections and Registration**

**Decatur County Elections Office, Courthouse Annex**

**122 W. Water St.**

**Bainbridge, GA 39817**

**March 23, 2021**

**Call To Order**

**Administrative Notes and Announcements**

The regular meeting of the Decatur County Board of Elections and Voter Registration was called to order by Board Chairman Keith Sellars at 6:45 p.m., and stated that the meeting had been duly advertised in the newspaper, and on the appropriate building properly identifying the meeting date, time and location as required by governing laws. Board Member Gina Burke texted staff prior to the meeting to say she was sick. Board Member Dan Provence said after the meeting that he got tied up at his work.

**Public Participation**: None

**Board Members present: Staff and others present:**

Board Chairman Keith Sellars Carol P. Heard, Chief Elections Official

Board Vice Chairman Beverly Holmes Tasia Porter, Clerk of Voter Registration

Board Member Johnny Brown Margaret Bryant, office staff

 Poll workers Melba Andrews, Edith Miller, Billy Ward,

 Emma Sales, Patricia Williams, Fields Varner, Susan Mosely, Becky Harrell and Wendy Barber

Democratic Party state liaison Meghan Heckman

**Approved Minutes**

Board Member Beverly Holmes made a motion to accept the minutes from the January 12, 2021, regular meeting. Board Member Johnny Brown seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

**Budget**

Chief Elections Official Carol Heard reviewed the 2020-2021 budget. The Elections Office is at 22 percent with the ideal remaining at 42 percent. This is after the Jan. 5, 2021 Runoff Election. The March 16th Special Election has not been accounted for in the budget. The Decatur County Board of Education will reimburse the county for March 16, 2021 election; therefore, the costs will not reflect in the Elections Office budget.

CEO Heard went through the proposed 2021-2022 budget, highlighting certain elements of it. Heard stated the office is proposing the addition of EasyVote’s check-in module, which would check-in votes more efficiently during advanced voting. The office already has the inventory module, so the check-in module would be in addition to campaign finance and poll worker modules.

Another addition is IT support, which is $2,340.

Equipment warranties for the new voting equipment is an additional $21,020. Warranty costs are picked up by the state until Dec. 31, 2021.

Heard said another big item is a wheelchair lift to the second floor at the back the building that will tie in to the sidewalk.

Internet rewiring in the Annex is another proposal.

The VFW Building will become the county’s new West Bainbridge precinct location, but there’s work that needs to be done to the building first, which $10,000 is proposed.

Postage, which $16,120 is proposed, will increase this year because of redistricting and perhaps new precinct lines. Because of that, voters will need new precinct cards.

Office and election operating supplies went up, so the proposed budget reflects that.

Chairman Keith Sellars asked about the small trailer next to the VFW building, which is owned by the woman’s VFW organization, and not county-owned. He asked why would the county pay for removing the trailer. Heard said she thought it was abandoned.

 Board Member Beverly Holmes made a motion to submit the proposed budget as is. Board Member Johnny Brown seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

**Old Business**

None

**New Business**

1. Honor retired long time poll workers Sammie Battle, Ethel Fuller, Diane Gibson and Maxine Medley.

Chairman Keith Sellars presented resolutions on behalf of the Board of Elections to retired long time serving poll workers Sammie Battle, Ethel Fuller and Maxine Medley. Diane Gibson was unable to attend the meeting.

1. Complaint stemming from SEB Rule 183-13.-02 Assistive Technology Devices.

Chief Elections Official Carol Heard reported a voter, Stancil Tootle, complained of how he was treated while voting at the Coliseum during the March 16 Special Election. Tootle, who has limited sight, said he took a photo of his ballot and said he was using his phone to review his ballot as allowed under State Elections Board Rule 183-1-13.02; however, according to statements from poll workers who were familiar with what happened at the time said Mr. Tootle never stated he had taken a photo of his ballot for the purpose of reviewing his ballot. The poll workers said they were responding to the simple fact that he took a photo of his ballot with his phone. CEO Heard said she doesn’t feel comfortable to self-report, which has been part of our mission, because she stated she’s not convinced the poll workers violated any rules or laws. She said the issue could have easily been resolved had Mr. Tootle stated that he was using his phone to review his ballot.

Board Member Beverly Holmes stated her issue was that the issue should be resolved with the Chief Elections Official first before going to the Secretary of State’s Office. She said the chain of command was not followed in this case. She asked poll workers to report an issue with the poll manager first and then to the chief elections official.

Chairman Sellars said the board needs to gather the facts from all sides, and then allow the board to decide on how to proceed with any complaint. It is the board’s responsibility to evaluate incidents, gather facts, issue our rulings on the incidents, and attempt to arrive at a resolution that is acceptable by the affected party (or parties). Absent such a resolution, then it is his opinion that the matter should then be reported to the state. He said any self-reporting should come from the Board first and not from the chief elections official without first consulting the board. He said he doesn’t see anything that was done wrong.

Board Member Holmes made a motion that CEO Heard contact Mr. Tootle and let him know that the board had discussed his complaint and to request that he let the poll workers know in the future why he was using his phone under SEB Rule 183-1-13.-02. Board Member Johnny Brown seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

1. Audits and the audit of the March 16, 2021, Special Election

Chief Elections Official Carol Heard said in 2024 the state will mandate audits in statewide election, so in forthcoming elections, Heard suggested that the office and staff get in the habit of conducting the various types of post-election audits to ensure integrity. Heard pointed out that there was one blank ballot for each category of voting. Two poll workers took an hour and a half and all the ballots were counted and accounted for.

Chairman Sellars said we are going above and beyond what is required under law. He said the recent audit was well worth the costs associated with it.

Chairman Sellars asked that the Elections Office simply notify the board of any post-election audits but to proceed with post-election audits for all forthcoming elections.

1. Certification of March 16, 2021 Special Election

The Board members present signed the consolidation of returns in the March 16th Special Election. Board Member Beverly Holmes made a motion to officially certify the Special Election, Board Member Johnny Brown seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

The board members reviewed the proposed costs for the ESPLOST Special Election. Board Member Beverly Holmes made a motion to submit that bill to the Decatur County Board of Education. Board Member Johnny Brown seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

**Adjournment --** The meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.