**Decatur County Board of Elections and Registration**

**Decatur County Elections Office, Courthouse Annex**

**122 W. Water St.**

**Bainbridge, GA 39817**

**April 9, 2019**

**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 6:30 p.m. and stated that the meeting had been duly advertised in the newspaper and on the appropriate buildings properly identifying meeting date, time and location as required by governing laws. Board Member Gina Burke had notified staff prior to the meeting that she was not feeling well.

**Public Participation**: Ronnie Sheppard, president of the National Federation for the Blind’s Bainbridge chapter, said he was glad to attend his first meeting.

**Board Members present: Staff 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

Board Member Dan Provence Poll workers, Suzan Yates, Billy Ward, Emma Sales and Stancil Tootle

Member of the public Ronnie Sheppard

**Approve Minutes**

Board Member Dan Provence made a motion to accept the minutes from the Feb. 12, 2019, regular meeting. Board Member Johnny Brown seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

**Budget**

The ideal remaining percentage is 24. The current percentage remaining is 30 percent. Chairman Keith Sellars said he’s looked over the budget and things that he would have addressed have been discussed in previous meetings.

**Old Business**

1. **Closing of Fairgrounds for advance voting only during all ensuing elections. Using the Elections Office only for advance voting.**

Chief Elections Official Carol Heard said the only public comment that was negative about the closing of the Fairgrounds for advance voting was that the set-up during the 2018 General Election got a little cramped. Because of the hurricane, that person was right but with the planned removal of the file cabinets and the opening of the room into a work station, the space may not be cramped as it was.

Chairman Sellars said he doesn’t believe any voters would be negatively impacted with closing the advance voting location as opposed to moving or closing a regular polling location. He said he was in favor of closing the Fairgrounds for advance voting.

Board Member Dan Provence asked if there was a parking issue in downtown during advance voting. CEO Heard said the only issue she was aware of was when a building down Water Street was used as a staging area for debris removal workers, and they occupied the handicapped space. That vehicle was removed.

1. **Consideration of changing polling locations from the Coliseum to the Kirbo Center.**

CEO Heard said precinct Coliseum voters had to use the Kirbo Center after Hurricane Michael because the Coliseum was used by FEMA as a recovery center. There were some positive comments from poll workers and voters that the Kirbo Center would be a better polling location. A poll on Facebook had 12 votes for staying at the Coliseum and two votes to move to the Kirbo; there were comments on The Post-Searchlight’s Facebook page that were in favor of staying at the Coliseum; and, poll worker Mary Jacobs called to say it was easier to get in and out at the Coliseum.

Board Member Beverly Holmes said the board needs to consider the future of Bainbridge Middle School since the school board has purchased land for a future Bainbridge Middle School.

CEO Heard said she talked with School Superintendent Tim Cochran on Monday prior to the meeting that Mr. Cochran mentioned the unavailability of West Bainbridge to Heard. She said she called him to get his opinion on use of the Coliseum. He said he had no issues with the Elections Board using the Coliseum for the near future.

Stancil Tootle is the first vice president of BAIN, a board member of the National Federation of the Blind in Georgia, a poll worker and a voter in the Coliseum precinct. Mr. Tootle said he would be totally against moving the polling location to the Kirbo Center. He said his primary concern was a lack of access and transportation because the Kirbo Center is farther out.

Ronnie Sheppard said he drives a bike around town and to ride a bike to the Kirbo Center could pose a risk for himself. He said he would like to leave the polling location at the Coliseum.

Board Member Johnny Brown said he would like to wait when the construction of the school is completed.

Poll worker Billy Ward said the county needs to emphasize advance voting and the Annex’s location.

CEO Heard said with all the changes coming up in the next year with a new voting system, new advance voting locations, and the possible new location for West Bainbridge, trying to educate the voters in all of these is a must. She said if we don’t have to educate voters on an optional move, that it would be preferable.

Board Member Provence said he agreed with Heard because there is a lot of changes voters will have to absorb, so if the Board doesn’t have to do it, why do it?

Chairman Sellars said he has reservations with the access of the Kirbo versus the Coliseum. He said he is in favor of leaving the Coliseum polling location where it is. Chairman Sellars said based on the sentiments heard at the meeting that the proposal to moving the Coliseum polling location to the Kirbo Center is tabled.

**New Business**

1. **West Bainbridge polling location will not be available in future elections. New location needs to be discussed and considered.**

Chairman Sellars said he doesn’t know of a suitable location in the West Bainbridge precinct to take the place of the old West Bainbridge Middle School, and there is some discussion of consolidating that precinct in with the Fairgrounds, Brinson and/or Kendrick.

CEO Heard said School Superintendent Tim Cochran informed the board via phone conversation that the West Bainbridge polling location will undergo some renovations following some hurricane damage and then the polling location area will be used for the school board’s nutrition center. Geographically, the precinct is a large land area. There are 2,127 active voters in West Bainbridge. Heard said if a voter on King Road at the county line were to drive to Brinson, it would take as much time and miles to drive to the Fairgrounds.

Chairman Sellars said the old elementary school or the current school support center would have access issues because of egress and ingress.

Stancil Tootle suggested a building at King West community center on Bethel Road. Billy Ward said parking is a serious problem.

Chairman Sellars said the two options are to find a suitable location in West Bainbridge or make a reasonable split among the adjoining precincts with considerations to the drive and accessibility. The VFW building was also mentioned.

Board Member Provence moved to table the issue until the next meeting. Board Member Holmes seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

1. **Public meeting scheduled for April 24 with State Elections Director Chris Harvey.**

Chairman Sellars said he considered it an honor for State Elections Director Chris Harvey to come to Decatur County. CEO Heard said he may talk about the new voting system, highlights of House Bill 316 and answer any questions. Surrounding counties have been invited.

1. **Recap from the VRAG\GEOA conference.**

Chairman Sellars recognized CEO Heard and her receiving The Ann Hicks Award during the election officials conference on Jekyll Island. Sellars read into the minutes the news release announcing the award.

Clerk of Voter Registration Tasia Porter gave a brief recap on the conference, which was her first one.

Chairman Sellars said he is proud of the staff and that he felt it is the strongest staff that the board has ever had. He also said the board has a terrific group of poll workers.

1. **Recap of list maintenance and other office functions.**

CEO Heard updated the Board on some list maintenance chores, including reviewing political lines to ensure voters are assigned their correct combo. Heard also said Tasia Porter has developed a “Voting Fact Friday” video package to be released on our Facebook page.

Board Member Beverly Holmes suggested a letter be sent to the churches and let the churches be an outlet to the community or have a representative from the churches be in contact with the Elections Office for future voter education opportunities.

**Adjournment --** The meeting adjourned at 7:35 p.m.