**Decatur County Board of Elections and Registration**

**Decatur County Elections Office, Courthouse Annex**

**122 W. Water St.**

**Bainbridge, GA 39817**

**February 12, 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 Vice 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. Chairman Willie Lamb Jr. submitted his resignation to be effective Feb. 7, 2019.

**Public Participation**: None

**Board Members present: Staff present:**

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

Board Member Beverly Holmes Tasia Porter, Clerk of Voter Registration

Board Member Gina Burke Margaret Bryant and Carla Robinson, office staff

Board Member Dan Provence Poll workers, Suzan Yates, Billy Ward,

Board Member Johnny Brown Melbah Andrews and Edith Miller

Probate Judge Edwin “Chip” Perry

Member of the public Charlie Laing

**Motion to amend agenda**

Vice Chairman Keith Sellars requested a motion to amend the agenda in order to swear-in Johnny Brown, Democratic Party Chairman Kelvin Bouie’s appointee.

Board Chairman Keith Sellars offered a motion to add an executive session to discuss personnel matters as it deals with the budget. Board Member Dan Provence forwarded the motion, Board Member Gina Burke seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

**Approve Minutes**

Board Member Beverly Holmes made a motion to accept the minutes from the Jan. 8, 2019, regular meeting. Board Member Johnny Brown seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

**Budget**

1. **Review of current fiscal year budget.**

Chief Elections Official Carol Heard said the ideal remaining percentage is 40. The current percentage remaining is 40 percent.

Board Chairman Keith Sellars questioned the line-item of buildings and grounds. CEO Heard said that item includes upgrades to the Fairgrounds, which included a new roof. Other upgrades were scheduled if the Fairgrounds continues to be used as an advance voting location. However, since all the Courthouse Annex is now the Elections Office, most of the upgrades slated for the Fairgrounds would need to come to the Annex.

Board Member Gina Burke asked about the plans for the Annex that Board Vice Chairman Beverly Holmes was overseeing. CEO Heard said some of those upgrades are in the proposed budget, which includes what the U.S. Department of Homeland Security recommended.

Chairman Sellars asked about the liability/property/vehicle insurance line-item that stood at negative 18 percent. CEO Heard said she’s not familiar with that line item since that charge is handled through the County Administration office.

Chairman Sellars said the line-item contract labor is significantly over – negative 33 percent. CEO Heard said it is over-budget because contract labor was used extensively following the resignation of the former Clerk of Voter Registration. This was also the time that hundreds of requests for absentee ballots started to arrive in the office. Hurricane Michael hit on Oct. 10, and the office was trying to prepare for advance voting beginning on Oct. 15. Furthermore, there were special requests from the Secretary of State’s office dealing with absentee and provisional ballots. Finally, there was a Dec. 4 General Runoff.

Chairman Sellars asked about operating supplies. CEO Heard said election printing supplies and precinct supplies are thrown in with regular office supplies. She said there needs to be a separate regular office supply line item and a separate election-related supply line item so the board can better track those expenses.

Chairman Sellars asked about the food/luncheons item. CEO Heard said the runoff election and feeding the inmates when they assisted the office may have accounted for that line item being over budget. Heard said the County Administrator asked her not to feed the inmates lunches while they assist with delivery and pick-up of voting equipment.

1. **Review of next fiscal year’s budget.**

Chairman Sellars asked for a motion to go into executive session related to personnel matters as it concerns next year’s budget. Board Member Gina Burke forwarded the motion, Board Vice Chairman Beverly Holmes seconded it. Motion passed unanimously. The session began at 6:50 p.m.

Board members returned from executive session at 7:04 p.m. The Board discussed salary increases for chief elections official, clerk of voter registration and the part-time clerks. There is no recommendation nor a motion.

Chairman Sellars asked the board members to review the proposed budget. CEO Heard said the proposed budget for next fiscal year is $254,168, which is $9,285 less than the current fiscal budget. There are three elections that will take place next fiscal year, the November municipal elections, the March Presidential Preference Primary and the May Primary as well as the beginnings of the July Runoff. There are huge questions marks on what the state will do and what the county will be required to do with the new voting system.

Chairman Sellars outlined the proposed items in the buildings and grounds category.

Chairman Sellars requested a motion to submit the proposed budget as submitted to the Board of Elections. Board Member Dan Provence offered a motion to have the proposed budget submitted as written and in its entity to the County. Board Vice Chairman Beverly Holmes seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

**Old Business**

1. **Review of Clerk of Voter Registration applications.**

Chairman Sellars introduced new Clerk of Voter Registration, Tasia Porter, who said she has been involved with the Board of Elections since 2016. Everyone welcomed Ms. Porter and CEO Heard said she’s already making some very positive impressions, one being a brochure she produced for the upcoming Senior Meeting at Bainbridge High School, which is March 28, 2019.

Chairman Sellars said Ms. Porter was a very strong candidate and he’s glad she has joined the team. Sellars also thanked the part-timers Margaret Bryant, Carla Robinson, Suzan Yates, Emma Sales and others who stepped up and performed outstandingly during the 2018 General and Runoff Elections.

**New Business**

1. **Mr. Willis Lamb’s resignation and Democratic Party Chairman’s nominee Johnny Brown.**

Judge Edwin “Chip” Perry swore in Johnny Brown as a new Elections Board member to replace former Board Member Willie Lamb Jr.

1. **Elections of Board Chairman and Vice Chairman.**

Board Member Beverly Holmes made a motion for Vice Chairman Keith Sellars to become board chairman. Board Member Gina Burke seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

Chairman Keith Sellars made a motion for Board Member Beverly Holmes to be vice chairman. Board Member Johnny Brown seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

1. **Consideration of closing Fairgrounds for advance voting only during all ensuing elections and using the Elections Office only for advance voting.**

CEO Heard said since the District Attorney’s moved out of the Courthouse Annex and the county administration gave us use of the building that there will be enough room to accommodate advance voters for the whole county. Having the Annex as the sole advance voting location works well, Heard said. After Hurricane Michael forced the Elections Office to only have the Annex open initially, it proved to be a better option and to explore closing the Fairgrounds for advance voting only in ensuing elections.

Board Member Gina Burke said closing the Fairgrounds makes the sense in terms of financial and logistically reasons.

Board Vice Chairman Beverly Holmes said it might cut down on confusion as well so voters who voted at the Fairgrounds during one election and then think that the Fairgrounds is their precinct.

Chairman Keith Sellars said the one advance voting location is more secure and the short distance is not going to pose that much inconvenience to voters.

Board Member Burke made a motion to make the Courthouse Annex the sole advance voting location for future elections. Board Vice Chairman Holmes seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

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

Chairman Sellars said changing a regular polling location is more involved and voters must be given proper notification months ahead of an election. CEO Heard asked the board for their consideration on how to best proceed. Heard said following Hurricane Michael, the Coliseum was occupied by FEMA, so the polling location was changed to the Kirbo Center. There was a lot of positive feedback from voters about the Kirbo Center.

Coliseum poll manager Carla Robinson said there are some disruptions at the Coliseum while voting was taking place, it’s less secure and the facility is not as nice. Robinson said with the voting at the Kirbo Center’s Solarium, there seemed far fewer disruptions even with several events taking place at the Kirbo Center. Robinson said the voting at the Kirbo Center worked better.

CEO Heard said the director of the Kirbo Center was very accommodating, and in fact said she would like to have voting at the Kirbo Center.

Chairman Sellars asked the board members and members of the audience if they had any reservations about relocating the polling location. Hearing none, Chairman Sellars said for the CEO to begin investigating and formulating an outreach plan for relocating the polling location.

1. **Discussion of letter concerning costs associated with paper ballots.**

Chairman Sellars read portions of a letter written by CEO Heard to State Elections Director Chris Harvey concerning proposed legislation to replace the current voting system with either paper ballots or ballot-marking devices.

The findings showed the county having to pay more than $138,000 for paper ballots during 2020, and those costs could be re-occurring and substantial in each ensuing election cycle. Chairman Sellars said he would like to inform state elected officials of these costs and agreed that CEO Heard should attend the Election Officials Legislative Day on Feb. 26.

1. **Discussion of Elections Office activities.**

CEO Heard said staff completed the matching of approximately 15,500 voter registration cards with what ENet is showing. The staff now is going through every voter certificate from the General Election to see if each voter’s address and/or name is current. CEO Heard and Tasia Porter will be trained on Arcview to ensure voters are assigned the right combo number based on their address on a Geographical Information System program.

**Adjournment --** The meeting adjourned at 7:48 p.m.