

**BERKS COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS
MEETING MINUTES
May 11, 2023 – 12:15 P.M.**

Lucine Sihelnik
Honorable James E. Gavin
Honorable Jill Gehman Koestel – not present
Anne Norton, Chief Clerk
Christine M. Sadler, County Solicitor – not present
Cody L. Kauffman, First Assistant County Solicitor

CALL TO ORDER: 12:15 P.M.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

On the motion of Judge Gavin, seconded by Commissioner Sihelnik, the Board approved the minutes for the May 4, 2023 meeting as presented.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

None

Agenda Items

1. Emergency Temporary Polling Place Change Due to Structural Issues

On the motion of Judge Gavin, seconded by Commissioner Sihelnik, the Board approved the following Emergency Temporary Polling Place Change. The County learned of structural issues from construction at the prior precinct location earlier this week and therefore needed to find a new location for Election Day. Anne Norton stated notices will be mailed to affected voters. Signage in English and Spanish approving the emergency change will be posted as well.

a. Reading Ward 12, Precinct 3

From: Olivet Boy's and Girl's Club #4
722 Mulberry Street
Reading, PA 19604

To: Grace Bible Fellowship Church
1128 Hampden Boulevard
Reading, PA 19604

Election Director's Report

Anne Norton stated that the deadline to apply for a mail-in or absentee ballot had passed. She said the office issued approximately 18,000 mail-in and absentee ballots and had received back roughly 7,300 ballots as of the time of the meeting. Norton said the electronic pollbooks had been loaded with the data for the Municipal Primary and were being prepared to be transported to the Services Center for the poll workers' supply pickup day on Saturday, May 13. She added that the staff has been busy packing up the other supplies that are sent out to the precincts.

Commissioner Sihelnik acknowledged that there is a lot of work happening behind the scenes and that the elections staff is putting in lot of hours to ensure a successful election. She thanked Ms. Norton for her leadership and for everyone who was working hard in preparation for May 16.

Public Comment

Debbie Noel, of Robeson Township, asked about how voters would be informed if they forgot to date or put the wrong date on their mail-in or absentee ballot. She said in past years these voters were never informed or received emails that did not fully explain the issue. She said last year, Kevin Barnhardt had tried to establish a procedure for notifying voters but the board did not support it. She said she believed this year, with a new board, would be a good time to bring it up again and asked the Board to reflect on giving grace to voters who made a mistake.

Jeff Wolfe, of Brecknock Township, gave several general recommendations, including a request that the Election Board comment on the comments from the public. He also recommended that poll workers should “overlearn” how to deal with issues with the voting machines and be non-partisan while in the polling place. He also asked that the list of voters be audibly read at the precinct. Finally, he suggested that complaints made to the Election Board and Office of Election Services be made public. He ended by saying that electoral justice can be achieved only when legal voters are able to vote.

Assistant Director Stephanie Weaver noted that the statewide system had been updated to include new categories for the disposition of mail-in and absentee ballots. Those categories now include options for ballots that are not dated or have the incorrect date. She explained that any voter that has an email address on file would receive that email through the state system if their ballot was cancelled.

First Assistant Solicitor Cody Kauffman added that the 2022 General Election was also different in that Berks County was originally planning to count undated and incorrectly dated ballots, but the orders from the Pennsylvania Supreme Court in the Ball v. Chapman matter were issued days before the 2022 General Election. The orders instructed County Boards of Election to refrain from counting undated and incorrectly-dated ballots. Due to the issuance of the Ball v. Chapman orders days before the 2022 General Election, some voters received two different email notifications about their ballots.

Commissioner Sihelnik called attention to the County’s website and the many resources available under Election Services for the public to utilize in preparation for Election Day.

Adjournment: On the motion of Judge Gavin, seconded by Commissioner Sihelnik, the meeting was adjourned at 12: 30 p.m.