

**BERKS COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS  
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES  
May 5, 2022 – 11:00 A.M.**

**Kevin S. Barnhardt, Chair**  
**Michael S. Rivera, Vice-Chair**  
**Christian Y. Leinbach, Commissioner**  
**Paige Riegner, Chief Clerk**  
**Christine M. Sadler, County Solicitor (not present)**  
**Cody L. Kauffman, First Assistant County Solicitor**

**CALL TO ORDER- 11:00 A.M.**

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

The Board approved the minutes for the April 28, 2022 Election Board meeting as presented.

**PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS**

None

**AGENDA ITEMS:**

**1. General Primary 2022 Poll Worker Authorization**

Elections Director Paige Riegner noted that about 600 vacant poll worker positions have been filled, 25 of those vacancies were filled by student poll workers. Riegner also discussed the transition to Tenex software which will assist the Elections office in tracking poll workers, as well as candidate petitions, campaign finance reports, polling places, and more. On a motion by Commissioner Rivera, seconded by Commissioner Leinbach the appointment of non-elected poll workers was approved.

**2. Election Night Results Website Layout Authorization**

Elections Director Paige Riegner explained the proposed layout. There will be a “hot links” drop down menu with all countywide and state races, as well as city questions. The drop-down menu will be broken down by Democrat and Republican.

Commissioner Barnhart added that election night results may not include Absentee, Mail-In, or Provisional ballots, whatever is not reported election night will be provided once counted; election night count is unofficial until everything is canvassed.

On the motion of Commissioner Leinbach, seconded by Commissioner Rivera, the Board of Elections approved the Election Night website layout.

**3. General Comments from the Board of Elections Regarding Current Election Related Issues**

Commissioner Rivera initiated a discussion on the current Drop Box security protocol. As explained by First Assistant County Solicitor Cody Kauffman, there are only two County approved ballot drop boxes. The first is located at the Services Center, the second is at the Agricultural Center. The drop boxes are monitored by two sheriffs when in use. When not in use, the drop boxes are locked and secured by a double locking mechanism – sheriffs have one key, county officials have the other key. When performing ballot retrieval, ballots are counted, recorded, and sealed for transport back to the Election Services office. Individuals are only allowed to return their own ballot unless they have a designated agent form signed and authorized by the voter and by the person acting as their agent.

Commissioner Rivera commented that the Board’s decision to have sheriffs guarding the drop boxes is a better option to using cameras. Cameras may not accurately capture what is being dropped off. In the 2021 Primary election, 16,240 Absentee and Mail-in ballots were returned, 2,761 returned through the drop boxes.

Commissioner Leinbach issued a warning: misinformation is circulating stating there may be unauthorized ballot drop boxes in the county. If someone is placing “phantom boxes” throughout the county, they should be prepared to face legal penalties. Commissioner Leinbach reiterated that Berks County cares about elections and election security.

Commissioner Barnhart ended the discussion by urging voters to only use the County approved ballot drop boxes.

**CITIZEN COMMENT**

In person comment:

1. Debbie Noel, Robeson Township:

As a Berks Democratic committeeperson she believes everyone’s vote counts and the integrity of the voting process is essential. She understands Election staff has been working hard however two issues are being raised:

- a) Timing of sending out Mail-in ballots – Concerns have been raised regarding voters not receiving their ballot
- b) Signature mismatches and declining applications based on this. Voters have been speaking to voter protection programs and they may reach out to the Elections office

Elections Director Paige Riegner responded that because of redistricting, the Elections office is operating on a shorter time frame. Building a ballot is time consuming and did not begin until April 12<sup>th</sup>. Three ballot batches have gone out, and about 14,000 ballots should be hitting mailboxes today. As for signature verifications, this is the Election

office's last line of defense and must be checked. If it's not accurate, voters will receive notification in the mail. It's important the Elections office has the most updated information, including signatures.

Ms. Noel questioned if a voter whose signature was declined will still be able to vote? Looking forward to a smoother process in November.

Commissioner Barnhardt mentioned the possibility of using the county print shop for mailing ballots in-house in the future.

Online comments:

1. John Archer, Spring Township  
Can you please confirm how many ballot drop boxes are being utilized in Berks County and are they all monitored by Sherriff's Department when the drop boxes are open for public use?

Commissioner Barnhardt responded that this has been address in the meeting.

2. Michelle Raymond, Caernarvon Township  
Does drop box location have video surveillance? Also how is the communication going out on Electronic Poll book to the public?

Commissioner Barnhardt responded that the first part of the question has been addressed – there are no cameras on drop boxes; Stephanie Weaver will address the second part of the question.

Public Relations Officer Stephanie Weaver stated there is a media event to which local media was invited. Videos are on the Election Services website, and a press release will be going out today.

3. Heather Berger, Hamburg Borough  
As someone who does mail in balloting because I work elections, I am concerned about the rejection of ballots for signature. I have issues with hand surgeries and arthritis. My signature can be ever changing.

Elections Director Paige Riegner stated we are not denying a ballot based on signature, only the application. Commissioner Leinbach noted that at the end of the day, this is about election integrity.

Final note by Commissioner Barnhardt to please be sure to keep the parking spots in front of the Services Center available for ballot drop box.

**ADJOURNMENT** – 11:41 A.M.