

COUNTY OF CARTERET BOARD OF ELECTIONS
1702 Live Oak Street, Beaufort, NC 28516
Regular Monthly Meeting Minutes, February 1, 2023
9:00AM

I. Meeting Called to Order

Chair Susan Cuthrell called the meeting to order at 9:00AM.

Board Members Present: Chair Susan Cuthrell, Secretary Jeanette Deese, Member Dale Gillikin, Member Gerald Godette, and Member Lucia Bond

Staff Members Present: Director Caitlin Sabadish, Deputy Director Margot Burke

Others Present: Steve Norton; Precinct Official, Lynn Carraway; Carteret County Votes Count Committee (CCVC), Norma Hall; League of Women Voters (LWV), Barbara Smith; CCVC, Ralph Hall; LWV, Lori Nash; LWV, Michael Struempf; citizen

II. Approval of Agenda

Member Gillikin made a motion to approve the February 1, 2023 regular meeting agenda as presented. Member Bond seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

III. Public Comment

Steve Norton recommended that anyone questioning the elections or the processes involved should become a precinct official and participate in the training to really learn the process and see how much work is involved to have a successful election and also see firsthand all of the security measures that are in place to ensure the integrity of our elections. Steve also thanked and complimented staff on doing a great job serving the citizens of Carteret County while working weekends and late evenings to make sure that Carteret County Elections are successful and secure. In mentioning this fact, Mr. Norton referenced an article published on the cover of the Carteret County NewsTimes in December that showed the County Department head salaries. Mr. Norton expressed that he was dismayed when he saw that the Elections Director was the third lowest paid Department Head in the County, noting that it is a shame and a miscarriage to the 55,000 registered voters in Carteret County and salary gaps in the County are nearly 300%. Steve reiterated that the staff works tirelessly and should be compensated with salary increases not only for their efforts, but also for retention and the overall success of the Elections Department.

Lynn Carraway questioned the duplicate votes that occurred in the November 8, 2022 Election noting a possibly correlation between the two voters that committed voter fraud. Lynn expressed her concerns regarding the lack of law enforcement put forth by the State Board concerning the two duplicate votes and also the lack of consequences imposed as a result of their actions. Lynn closed by thanking the Board and the staff for their due diligence, attention to detail, and dedication to their jobs.

Norma Hall mentioned that the League of Women Voters (LWV) will be continuing to work on their voter outreach and education programs leading up to the November, 2023 Municipal Election working with municipalities across the County. Norma asked Director Sabadish to send her a list of seats up for election in the 2023 Municipal Election; Director Sabadish agreed to send a list of contests.

Barbara Smith mentioned that she has been trying to contact the State Board in reference to the duplicate votes that Carteret County had in the November, 2022 Election and in regards to the margin of error during canvass for each County. Barbara expressed her concerns about the threshold that the State Board has concerning verifiable errors and noted that she feels that these margins have the potential to influence election results.

IV. Approval of Minutes

Minutes from the January 4, 2023 Regular Meeting were presented for Board approval. Member Gillikin made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Member Godette seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

V. FY23-24 Budget Recommendations

Director Sabadish presented the recommended budget for fiscal year July, 1, 2023 through June 30, 2024 including all operating line items to fund the November, 2023 Municipal Election and 2024 Presidential Primary Election. Director Sabadish reviewed each line item in relation to the election schedule and provided the Board with comparable budgets and expenditures to support staff's recommendations. Staff noted that the recommended budget is due to the finance department by February 17, 2023, the recommended budget is set to be presented to the Board of Commissioners on May 15, 2023, and the public hearing to adopt the budget is set for June 5, 2023. Director Sabadish noted that she did her best to accommodate changing factors in the economy such as gas price increases and supply shortages that may have an effect on the budgeted line items. Member Gillikin made a motion to approve the FY23-24 requested budget as presented. Member Bond seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

VI. Director's Report

a. Elections Specialist position hiring update

Director Sabadish noted that the vacant Elections Specialist position was advertised from January 4, 2023 through January 16, 2023. Director Sabadish said that staff called the references for the top five candidates and plans to begin interviews the first week of February. Director Sabadish agreed to keep the Board updated throughout the interviewing process.

b. 2023 NCSBE Conference Dates

Director Sabadish advised the Board of the 2023 State Board of Elections Conference to be held in person on August 14, 2023 and August 15, 2023.

Location to be determined.

VII. Board Comments

Chair Cuthrell opened the floor for Board comments. No formal action was required by the Board.

Member Bond

Member Bond thanked the public for their interest in the elections process and speaking during public comment. Member Bond also thanked the staff for their hard work and for a job well done on the FY23-24 budget preparation. Member Bond commended staff for advocating for the Precinct Officials and working to get them a raise and also expressed her excitement for the implementation of the Precinct Official texting service, pending approval of funds. Member Bond also thanked the League of Women Voters for their public education and outreach efforts.

Secretary Deese

Secretary Deese thanked the public for their participation in the open meeting and also thanked the staff for doing a great job compiling the requested budget. Secretary Deese asked Director Sabadish to get a copy of the warning letter that was sent by the State Board to the voters who voted twice. Director Sabadish agreed to ask for a copy of the letter and share it with the Board.

Member Godette

Member Godette thanked the public for their interest in the elections process and also thanked the staff for their hard work and dedication to the job.

Member Gillikin

Member Gillikin noted that staff did an excellent job compiling the FY23-24 requested budget and asked the Director to keep the Board apprised of any budget updates. Member Gillikin thanked the members of the public who attended the meeting and participated in public comment noting that education and getting citizens involved is the way to ensure the integrity of our election processes. Member Gillikin reiterated her support for staff salary increases and precinct official wage increases and is hopeful that the Board will get the requested budget approved.

Chair Cuthrell

Chair Cuthrell reiterated the other board members' comments and thanked the staff for their hard work. Chair Cuthrell referenced the concerns expressed by members of the public concerning the duplicate votes and the margin of error for canvass results noting that the errors that were found make up a very small portion of overall votes cast in the election as a whole. Chair Cuthrell noted that the next regular board meeting is scheduled for March 1, 2023 at 9:00AM.

VIII. Closed session in accordance with GS 143-318.11 (1) for the purpose of discussing personnel and performance reviews

Secretary Deese made a motion to move to closed session in accordance with GS 143-318.11 (1) for the purpose of discussing personnel. Member Gillikin seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

IX. Return to Open Session

Secretary Deese made a motion to return to open session. Member Gillikin seconded the motion and the motion passed unanimously.

X. Adjournment

Member Gillikin made a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion to adjourn was seconded by Member Godette and the motion was passed unanimously.

Susan Cuthrell, Chair

Jeanette Deese, Secretary

Dale Gillikin, Member

Gerald Godette, Member

Lucia Bond, Member