

The regular monthly meeting of the Erie County Board of Elections was called to order by Chairman Thomas Ferrell on Friday, September 27th, 2024 at 9:00 a.m.

Roll Call:	(D) Thomas M. Ferrell, Chairman	Present
	(R) Lisa M. Crescimano, Member	Present
	(D) MaryAnn Groot, Member	Present
	(R) John C. Adams, Member	Present

Guests in attendance: Jason Hinnners from Erie County Prosecutor's Office, Amy Grubbe, Stephen Lippert, and Harriet Minich

Ms. Crescimano motioned to approve the minutes from the August 16th regular meeting, with Ms. Groot seconding. All board members voted yes; motion carried.

Alex Jones, Director, presented the September bills to the board. Ms. Groot asked if there was anything unusual. Mr. Jones said nothing out of the ordinary. Ms. Crescimano asked about the iPad supplies. Mr. Jones stated that our new poll pads did not come with styluses or microfiber cloths, so we ordered some. The new styluses will hook directly onto the iPads. Mr. Ferrell asked if the new iPads come with USB plugins. Mr. Jones stated that the new poll pads are all self-contained as one unit and that he thinks it's still lighting cables. Ms. Groot motioned to pay the September bills, with Ms. Crescimano seconding. All board members voted yes; motion carried.

For the Director's report, Mr. Jones stated it's been a busy month in the office. We did our National Change of Address, or NCOA process earlier this month to make our voter rolls as accurate as possible. Our ballots have been formatted and our test deck has been printed so we can test our voting machines next week. We estimate there will be 7,500 ballots to mail on October 8th, and our part-time employees are helping us prepare for that.

Adrienne James, Deputy Director, reviewed absentee requests so far. We've received 6,072 requests for a mail-in ballot, four requests for an accessible ballot, and 19 requests from nursing homes residents. We've sent 108 UOCAVA ballots to military and overseas voters. Mr. Adams asked how that compared to previous years. Mr. Jones said it was hard to say. The last presidential election year was an outlier because of covid. We estimated we would mail between 10,000 and 12,000 ballots this election, but it may be closer to 8,000 to 10,000 mail-in ballots.

Mr. Jones provided an update on the ballot dropbox. House Bill 458 requires protections against ballot harvesting. The practical implication is that only an immediate family member can drop off a ballot for you, and that person has to come into the Board of Elections to sign a paper stating they're an immediate family member and that they have the voter's permission. A lawsuit stated you can't force a disabled voter to only use a family member. Mr. Jones deferred to Mr. Hinnners for further explanation.

Mr. Hinnners created a document summarizing who can return an absent voter's ballot, based on Directives 2024-21, 2024-24, and statute. The four types of people who can return a voter's ballot are the voter, a voter's relative, someone on behalf of the post office if it's mailed in, or a person selected by a disabled voter. The next section is how the ballot can be returned. The voter can use the dropbox but an authorized relative cannot. The relative would have to come in and sign the form. A postal employee would deliver the ballot by mail. Any person selected by a disabled voter is the new addition based on the lawsuit, but that person would also need to be come into the Board of Elections and sign. They could not use the dropbox. The directive states the Board of Elections must post a sign on the dropbox informing people of this.

Ms. Groot asked how do we know it's the voter who dropped off the ballot? Mr. Hinnners replied that there is a security camera on the dropbox. Ms. Groot asked if the voter is in the car, is that okay. Mr. Hinnners replied that if the voter is in the car, then that's the intent. The whole point is that it's not someone with a bunch of ballots dropping them in the dropbox.

Ms. Groot asked if we let the voters know this. Mr. Jones replied that Form 12 is instructions for absent voters. Any new Form 12 that we print will have the updated instructions. Any old Form 12 that has already been printed will have an insert. Eliza Link, Clerk, printed copies of Form 12 to show the board members. Ms. Groot noted that the form says dropboxes can only be used for the voter to return their personal ballot. She thinks another sentence needs to be added that if you are disabled and are accompanying the driver, then the driver can put your ballot in the box. Or maybe we can put something in the newspaper or on Facebook. Mr. Jones stated that once the ballots go out, we'll inform the Register.

Ms. Grubbe asked if we spoke with the post office. Mr. Jones replied that we did and had a good conversation with them about logistics. The postal employee confirmed that if a voter brings their ballot to the counter in Sandusky, then the ballot stays in Sandusky. She could not confirm whether that was the case for outlying areas such as Vermilion or Kelleys Island. Ms. Grubbe asked how often the post office delivers. Mr. Jones stated that our mail is delivered in the morning, but the post office picks up mail in both the morning and the afternoon. Ms. Grubbe said she noticed outgoing mail from the Board of Elections in the foyer. Mr. Jones replied that all outgoing mail in the building goes in the foyer, but ballots stay in our office, behind the counter. The letter carrier who picks up in the afternoon stops by our office to retrieve ballots.

Mr. Ferrell asked if there were any other matters to come before the board. Mr. Lippert stated that he and Ms. Minich sent a letter to the Board of Elections. They value the effort the board is making, but there were problems with the 2022 election. Mr. Lippert passed out an updated letter from United Sovereign Americans which details the issues and the lawsuits the group has filed in nine states, including Ohio.

Mr. Adams stated that one of the topics that came up during the employee manual discussion was information coming out before it's public. He stated that as soon as the polls are closed, a report is printed and then taped to the door of the polling location. At that point, it's public. Is that correct? Mr. Hinnners stated that was fair. He mentioned people driving around and looking at the numbers. Mr. Adams said so the public could get the information before the board. Ms. Groot stated you're talking by polling location. She's talking aggregate. Mr. Ferrell stated that people can drive around and see the results, while the board members can't do that.

Ms. Groot asked when we are doing the public test of voting equipment. Mr. Jones stated it would be sometime after our logic and accuracy testing. Ms. James said she would send an email of when the public test would take place and an email of the poll worker training schedule. Mr. Ferrell asked for a list of issues on the ballot; Ms. James stated she would email that, as well. Ms. Groot commented that it was difficult to print the certificate of completion for the required fraud training. Other board members had trouble printing it, too. Mr. Jones stated that if it didn't print, just save the certificate and email it to him. Ms. Crescimano motioned to adjourn, with Ms. Groot seconding. All board members voted yes; motion carried. Board adjourned at 9:29 a.m.

Alexander W. Jones, Director

Attest:

Thomas M. Ferrell, Chairman