

The regular monthly meeting of the Erie County Board of Elections was called to order by Chairman Thomas Ferrell on Friday, June 28th, 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, Rachel Ruffer from Ohio Secretary of State's Office, Amy Grubbe, Stephen Lippert, and Harriet Minich

Ms. Groot motioned to approve the minutes from the May 31st regular meeting, with Ms. Crescimano seconding. All board members voted yes; motion carried.

Alex Jones, Director, presented the June bills to the board. While the board members reviewed the bills, Mr. Ferrell asked about cybersecurity and what the response time would be if we have a problem on Election Night. Adrienne James, Deputy Director, replied that we have not yet had our annual meeting with Bob from Netpoint Consulting to discuss that. Ms. Crescimano commented that during the cybersecurity session at summer conference, the presenter said to call him with any problems. Mr. Jones stated we have a new cybersecurity liaison from the state, Andrew Rosales, who has been proactive. Ms. James stated we meet with him every two weeks.

Ms. Groot motioned to pay the bills, with Ms. Crescimano seconding. All board members voted yes; motion carried.

For the Director's Report, Mr. Jones stated that we would email everyone the PowerPoint slides from summer conference when we receive them. He also stated that the SOS office just announced two grants for the November election. One is for poll worker training and the other is for November readiness. Our office will receive about \$6,000 for poll worker training and about \$8,000 for November readiness. We will use much of the grant money to purchase envelopes for absentee ballot packets. There was grant money four years ago to purchase absentee envelopes, but since then, the design has changed, making the old ones no longer useable.

Ms. Crescimano asked if we were going to get lanyards. Mr. Jones replied that we already have the lanyards and nametags purchased.

Ms. Groot stated that when mailing an absentee ballot, the voter should hand carry it into the post office, otherwise it could get routed to Cleveland and lost. She wondered whether we could include that in the absentee ballot instructions. Mr. Jones stated the SOS office generates the instructions so they are uniform, but we can look into creating an insert.

Ms. Grubbe stated that for clarification, you need to hand the ballot to the clerk. You cannot put the ballot in the box, either inside or outside. If you do, the ballot will go to Cleveland.

Mr. Jones asked about voters who live in Castalia, Vermilion, or Huron. If they drop a ballot off inside, will it still get re-routed? Ms. Grubbe replied that the post office considers Castalia to be a part of Sandusky. If it's Castalia, Sandusky, or Perkins and you hand anything to the clerk, it stays here, but if you drop anything off in the dropbox, it goes to Cleveland. She stated Huron is the same way. If you take it in and hand it to the clerk, they will keep it if it is local, otherwise it goes in the bin that goes to Cleveland.

Under new business was approval of the Election Administration Plan for November, which Ms. James emailed to the board. Ms. Crescimano motioned to approve the plan, with Ms. Groot seconding. All board members voted yes; motion carried. The board members signed the plan to submit to the Secretary of State's Office.

Mr. Jones stated there are five ballot issues to review in bulk and two to review separately. The board members took a few moments to review the first five. Ms. Crescimano motioned to approve the issue filings as listed, with Ms. Groot seconding. All board members voted yes; motion carried. The five issues approved the November 2024 General Election ballot are as follows:

- City of Sandusky, Natural Gas Aggregation Question.
- Village of Bay View, Renewal Levy, Current Expenses, 6 mills, 5 years, commencing in 2024, first due in calendar year 2025.
- Village of Castalia, Renewal Levy, Current Expenses, 4.6 mills, 5 years, commencing in 2025, first due in calendar year 2026.
- Village of Milan, Renewal Levy, Roads and Bridges, 4 mills, 5 years, commencing in 2025, first due in calendar year 2026.
- EHOVE Joint Vocational School District, Bond Issue, \$210,000,000, Buildings and Facilities, 2.2 mills, 36 years, first due in calendar year 2025.

The two issues to be reviewed separately are for Oxford Township. Ms. Crescimano is working as a fiscal consultant for Oxford Township, so she needs to abstain. The board members took a few moments to review the filings. Ms. Groot motioned to approve the issue filings for Oxford Township, with Mr. Adams seconding. Three board members voted yes, with Ms. Crescimano abstaining. The motion carried. The two issues for Oxford Township approved for the November 2024 General Election ballot are as follows:

- Oxford Township, Renewal Levy, Current Expenses, 2.5 mills, 5 years, commencing in 2024, first due in calendar year 2025.
- Oxford Township, Renewal Levy, Fire Protection and EMS, 2 mills, 5 years, commencing in 2024, first due in calendar year 2025.

Mr. Jones stated that we need to have all issue filings approved by August 19th, which is before our August regular meeting. There is a potential for a subdivision to file issue paperwork between our July regular meeting and the filing deadline of August 7th. If that happens, we can either move our regular meeting up, or conduct a special meeting after August 7th. After some discussion, the board decided to reschedule the August regular meeting for August 16th at 9:00 a.m.

For any other matters to come before the board, Ms. Groot asked why Ms. Crescimano still has a sick leave balance on the leave balance sheet. Ms. Crescimano said that it transferred from when she was at the ADAMHS board, even though she can't use it. Ms. Groot said it was her understanding from the Clerk of Court's office that sick leave couldn't transfer. Mr. Jones said his sick leave transferred from the Treasurer's Office. Ms. Crescimano stated it was covered in state law.

Ms. Groot stated she asked Mr. Jones to print time sheets for the last week of December and the first week of January so she could review them. It is her understanding that when the office is closed, then the office is closed. It is also her understanding that if a Republican is in the office, then a Democrat should also be in the office, and vice versa.

Ms. Crescimano stated we had this discussion a few meetings ago. We agreed to always having a Democrat and a Republican in the office during election time. Ms. Groot said it's always been the policy of this office to have an R and a D in the office at all times. Mr. Jones stated that is incorrect. Ms. James stated that is the policy when we have live ballots in the office, but it is not the policy during down times. Ms. James mentioned she was out sick last Thursday and Friday. Had we been following that policy, the Democratic clerk would have been required to be here all day. Mr. Jones also pointed out that the Republican clerk was in the office by herself earlier this week when the other staff members were at summer conference.

Ms. Groot asked aren't there confidential records in the office that can be tampered with if there's not both an R and a D present. Mr. Jones said he would make the argument that records can be tampered with even if there is an R and a D. He said there is a certain amount of trust and professionalism you need to have when you hire people. Ms. Crescimano stated she has trust in our staff. If we don't trust our staff, then we're in big trouble.

Ms. Groot pointed out that the office was closed the week of Christmas, except we did have a board meeting on December 29th. Other than that, she's not sure why someone would have been in the office working. She read from an email that Mr. Jones sent on December 27th: "Today, as the office is closed, I came in to check the mail and the emails." Ms. Groot thought that meant he was in the office for a few minutes and then left, but his timesheet indicated he worked 5.75 hours that day.

Ms. Crescimano asked if Ms. Groot asked Mr. Jones about his time sheet. Ms. Groot said she did not. Ms. Crescimano said before it came to the board, she should have talked with him. Ms. Groot said she was under the impression that an R and a D should be in the office at all times. That's why it concerned her, and the office was technically closed. Ms. Crescimano said if Mr. Jones did not come in that day, we would not have gotten the complaint about Steve Kraus. She said we would have been in violation of the rules if he had not come in and found the complaint. Ms. Groot questioned why he had to work for 5.75 hours. Mr. Jones stated he had to call the Prosecutor's Office and review the Elections Officials Manual.

Mr. Adams said it sounds like you're saying you don't trust him. Ms. Groot said that's not what she's saying. She's saying she would feel more comfortable if there was an R and a D in the office at all times. Mr. Adams stated that that is not policy. Ms. Crescimano pointed out that one of the clerks was manning the office earlier this week when everyone else was at conference. Had she not been here, subdivisions would not have been able to file issues. Ms. Groot stated that we have temporary employees, both Republicans and Democrats, who can be called in.

Mr. Ferrell asked Mr. Hinnners for his opinion. Mr. Hinnners indicated he was not aware of a written policy that states a Democrat and Republican must be in the office at all times. He said from a board perspective, you can certainly make that policy, but you need to make sure you have funds available to pay for employees' time. You also need to have someone on standby in case someone is sick. He doesn't know that it's feasible, but guesses anything is feasible if you have enough money. Mr. Hinnners also stated there is having trust in your employees.

Ms. Crescimano pointed out that we have cameras. Mr. Jones stated that there is a time stamped signature to any changes made. If you do anything in our voter registration system, it says this employee made this change at this time.

Ms. Groot stated that is why she wants to have the meeting on standards for the office. Mr. Ferrell mentioned the issues Ms. Groot addressed at our last meeting, like the part-time time sheets. Mr. Jones stated that we have made changes to our time sheets to reflect what was discussed at the last meeting. He also stated that when the part-time staff start working for the November election, their time sheets will also reflect the changes discussed last meeting. Mr. Ferrell pointed out that we have a small staff, and suggested that Ms. Groot call Sandusky or Ottawa County to see how they operate.

Mr. Adams stated he is not against change, but it has to be for a purpose. Mr. Adams also stated that as far as he knows, with any of our employees, whether R or D, he's never seen anything that would give us pause for distrust. In all his interactions with the staff, whether as a candidate or now as a board member, they've always done it par and above. As someone who has been in supervisor capacities for his entire career, he always operates on the basis of trust unless someone breaks that trust.

Ms. Groot stated it is not about distrust. She said there is so much debate over accuracy and what is going on in the political world. She does not want anyone to say anything bad about Erie County. Ms. Crescimano stated that during election time, there's a D and an R in the office, but during the slow times, she doesn't think it is necessary. She stated the staff is a good team, and she believes our team is honest.

Ms. Groot stated that's not her point. She is worried about election integrity with everything going on. She said they're talking about wanting to hand count ballots. Ms. Crescimano stated she hasn't heard that from the SOS office. We wouldn't need to hand count unless our equipment doesn't work, and it does. Ms. Groot stated there was a group challenging the equipment. Ms. Crescimano said at least we vote on paper so that we have a backup.

Mr. Lippert shared a letter with the board that touches on some of these issues. He stated that the United Sovereign Americans put together a template to make sure elections are valid and transparent. They have used this template in 17 states, including Ohio. Mr. Lippert quoted statistics from the letter, such as 6,300 registrants with a different date of birth in 2022 than in 2020. Mr. Lippert asked how we can monitor the data from Erie County and ensure it is accurate. Ms. Crescimano stated that the DATA Act is about to be rolled out and that will answer some of Mr. Lippert's questions.

Mr. Ferrell stated he has been involved in elections since 1986. He has always had great respect for the Erie County Board of Elections, no matter who was in charge. Mr. Adams mentioned that at the summer conference, Secretary of State Frank LaRose stated that we want Ohio elections to be so accurate and transparent that even the losers know they lost. He thinks that is a great standard.

Mr. Adams motioned to adjourn, with Ms. Groot seconding. All board members voted yes; motion carried. Board adjourned at 9:45 a.m.

Alexander W. Jones, Director

Attest:

Thomas M. Ferrell, Chairman