

The regular monthly meeting of the Erie County Board of Elections was called to order by Chairman Thomas Ferrell on Friday, January 26th, 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) Nancy C. McKeen, Member	Present

Guests in attendance: Rachel Ruffer from Ohio Secretary of State's Office, Jason Hinnners from Erie County Prosecutor's Office, and Amy Grubbe

Ms. McKeen motioned to approve the minutes from the December 15th regular meeting and December 29th special meeting. Ms. Groot seconded the motion. All board members voted yes; motion carried.

Alex Jones, Director, presented the January bills to the board. Ms. Groot asked what the biggest expense was. Mr. Jones stated it was our annual contract with NetPoint for about \$14,600. Ms. Groot also asked if all the bills were in line with what was budgeted for the year. Mr. Jones stated that all the bills were normal expenses except for the \$65 we had to pay for the court reporter. The board members took a few moments to review the bills. Ms. Crescimano motioned to approve the January bills as submitted, with Ms. Groot seconding. All board members voted yes; motion carried.

For the Director's report, Mr. Jones asked Mr. Hinnners for an update on the Schreiner case. Mr. Hinnners stated that all briefs have been filed with the Supreme Court, so it's now in the court's hands to issue a decision. He also stated he would email the board members a link to the Supreme Court docket which contains all the documents related to the case. Ms. Groot asked if there was a timeline for the court to issue a decision. Mr. Hinnners replied it is in the court's hands, but he anticipates quicker than a normal case because this is an election case and everything has been expedited.

Mr. Jones stated he put everyone's W-2s in their folders, and also confirmed with the board members that they submitted their continuing education forms from Winter Conference. He also described how we plan to rearrange the conference room for early voting. We plan to push the table off to one side of the room for seated voting and place a few podiums on the other side of the room for standing voting. The way it was set up previously with the scanner right next to the table, we lost a few seats, and it was a tight fit.

Mr. Jones stated we are starting the process of obtaining new electronic poll pads for November. Our current iPads are seven years old and almost to the point where Apple will no longer support them. Ms. Crescimano asked if we budgeted for this. Mr. Jones replied that we did. The state is contributing about \$55,000, while we will need to spend between \$15,000 and \$20,000. We will be receiving 72 new pads.

Mr. Jones also stated that the next time we convene, it will be all hands-on-deck for early voting. He said if any of the board members would like to take some time to help us, we would welcome that. Ms. Groot asked what would be required. Mr. Jones replied that there are no requirements, but the board members could sit in the conference room to assist voters who are scanning their ballots. If they want to be behind the counter and assist with check-in, we could teach them the software.

Ms. Groot asked what the dates would be. Mr. Jones stated that early voting begins February 21st and ends March 17th. We'll have Saturday voting the two Saturdays before the election from 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., and we'll have Sunday voting the Sunday before the election from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m.

Mr. Ferrell stated that if a board member helps, there needs to be a Republican and a Democrat behind the counter. He also stated that a previous board decided that no board members should touch ballots. Ms. Groot said she was surprised at conference to hear that board members in other counties open ballots. Mr. Jones stated that boards help a lot in the smaller counties.

Mr. Ferrell asked if there was any new business. There was none. Ms. Groot stated she had some comments for “any other matters to come before the board.” She spoke with Matt Wilson in H.R. about the county policy book. Even though the cover page indicates the policy book was revised March 8th, 2023, the Board of Elections is not listed as a department on the cover page. Ms. Crescimano stated that is because we are not a county commissioner department. Ms. Groot stated that her follow up question is do we have to follow all the policies in this book. Ms. Crescimano stated that we adopted it. Ms. Groot stated that Mr. Wilson said we can make changes and there are always exceptions.

Ms. Crescimano stated that when she worked for the Treasurer’s Office, they adopted the county policy but had four pages of changes. Ms. Groot stated that Mr. Wilson said we need to have a “work rules” section. Mr. Ferrell said that was correct. Ms. Groot asked if that was what the old policy books were. Mr. Ferrell stated those were the policies of previous boards.

Ms. Groot stated she thinks we should come together and talk about work rules that are in addition to the county policy. She said it was her understanding that a Democrat and a Republican must be present at all times in the office. However, she noted that over the Christmas break, Mr. Jones was in the office by himself to check mail and email. She is not saying he did anything illegal, but she thinks we need to be consistent.

Ms. McKeen asked about counties where you only have a couple people working. Do you shut the place down? Ms. Groot said that is something to address in the policy. She feels it is important especially in this time when people are saying things are being done illegally. We need to be above board and transparent.

Ms. Groot also commented on minutes from a previous meeting. She stated she was a guest and remembers an elected official saying that anyone with the title of director can make their own hours, come to the office on weekends, or work from home. Ms. Groot asked Mr. Wilson where that is in the policy handbook. He said on page 46 there is a teleworking policy. Ms. Groot asked Adrienne James, Deputy Director, to find the board meeting minutes and recording where this was discussed.

The board members then talked about different department policies. Mr. Ferrell stated that our department was different. Ms. Crescimano commented that the Auditor’s Office and Treasurer’s Office have separate policies added on to the county policy. Ms. Groot spoke on the policies at the Clerk of Courts.

Mr. Ferrell suggested scheduling a work session for everyone on setting up work rules. Ms. James asked if that would be considered a public meeting. Mr. Ferrell stated that yes, it would be a special meeting. Ms. Crescimano stated we would record it and have minutes.

Ms. Groot stated that in reviewing old minutes, there was an issue with signs on the property and how many can be put up. She said Gery at the Prosecutor’s Office was supposed to do some research and follow up with the board. Mr. Ferrell replied that the board does not control the property; the commissioners do. If there is a rule on signs, it needs to come from them. Ms. Groot asked if we could request that of the commissioners. Mr. Ferrell stated yes, but we don’t want to run into a position where they say no signs on the property. The board members commented on how there were a lot of signs out last November, and how there will be a lot this year.

Ms. McKeen asked when signs can go up. Mr. Ferrell stated it depends on who owns the property. Ms. Crescimano stated usually they go up when early voting starts. Mr. Hinnens stated that time frames don't really work anymore because it's political speech. It's more about where you can put them, like the right-of-way. Also, rules on signs need to apply for all signs, not just political signs.

Ms. Grubbe asked if the candidates received a paper on signs. Mr. Jones stated it's in the packet we give them. It contains phone numbers for the different subdivisions. Ms. Grubbe asked if we just give them the phone numbers. Ms. Crescimano stated it's up to the candidates to check the rules. We're giving them the contact information, and they need to take the responsibility and do their job.

Next, the board members decided they should schedule their working group sometime after the primary election.

Ms. Groot motioned to adjourn, with Ms. Crescimano seconding. All board members voted yes; motion carried. Board adjourned at 9:28 a.m.

Alexander W. Jones, Director

Attest:

Thomas M. Ferrell, Chairman