

The regular monthly meeting of the Erie County Board of Elections was called to order by Chairman Thomas Ferrell on Wednesday, December 18th, 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, and Amy Grubbe

Ms. Crescimano motioned to approve the minutes from the following meetings: November 4th pre-election meeting, November 18th official canvass, November 19th official certification and regular meeting, and December 4th post-election audit. Ms. Groot seconded the motion. All board members voted yes; motion carried.

Alex Jones, Director, presented the December bills to the board. He also stated there were a few Then and Now Certificates to review and chargebacks to the subdivisions for the November election. The chargebacks are for the cost of printing ballots and advertising. The board members took a few minutes to review. Ms. Crescimano motioned to approve the bills, the Then and Now certificates, and the chargebacks for the November election. Ms. Groot seconded the motion. All board members voted yes; motion carried. Mr. Jones also asked the board members to sign the reimbursement estimates for the Winter Conference. After conference when we have all the receipts, we will get reimbursed.

For "any other matters to come before the board," Mr. Adams stated that in light of the holiday season and how well our employees have done this year, it would be great if we could give them a bonus. He knows we can't, but as a gesture of goodwill, he is suggesting we close the office. The employees can still come in and check the mail. Ideally we would close the 23rd through the 6th, but if not it could be the 23rd through the 2nd. The employees would burn their time, so it wouldn't cost taxpayers anything.

Ms. Crescimano asked if that was a motion. Mr. Adams stated yes, ideally the 23rd through the 6th. Ms. Crescimano seconded the motion. Mr. Ferrell asked if there was any discussion.

Ms. Groot stated that the clerks have comp time but the director and deputy director do not. Ms. Crescimano stated that Adrienne James, Deputy Director, has plenty. Ms. Groot stated that she's asked several times when the new policy took effect, what happened to the comp time? Ms. Crescimano replied that you can't take comp time away because it was earned. She thinks it is supposed to be used within three years. Mr. Ferrell stated that according to the policy, you have to use your comp time within 180 days of when you earned it. Mr. Hinnners stated that Ms. James' comp time was earned before the policy was in place, so it is treated differently. She's not going to lose it; she will either get paid out or will use it, because she earned it. Ms. Crescimano stated that no one earns comp time now. The clerks get paid overtime and the director and deputy director are salaried.

Mr. Adams stated that in this situation, no one is getting paid extra. They're taking time off that they earned. It's no cost to taxpayers and doesn't add anything to our budget. It also makes the county commissioners happy because we can say we're trying to burn our time.

Ms. Groot stated she thought we had the understanding that the office should stay open with one person. She doesn't have a problem with using comp time, but she does have a problem with the office being closed for that long of a period of time. She feels someone should be in the office in case something weird happens like last time. Mr. Adams asked if she would feel better if it was the 23rd through the 2nd. Ms. Groot stated not really.

Mr. Ferrell stated that when he was a commissioner, he always took a lot of grief when the Board of Elections was closed. Mr. Adams stated that he checked with the commissioners and they don't have a problem. Mr. Ferrell stated that the commissioners don't have any control over this board. He also stated that two former board members voted to go on the county policy on November 7th, 2022. He said if you can find in that book where it allows us to do this, then he'll listen.

Ms. Crescimano stated that to her, it is past practice. Mr. Ferrell said past practice was a vote of the board. Ms. Groot stated that past practice went away when we adopted the new policy. Ms. Crescimano pointed out that we adopted the policy and still closed during Christmas and New Year's last year.

Mr. Ferrell asked Mr. Hinnners if his department is shutting down the 23rd through the 2nd. Mr. Hinnners stated he does not want to get in the middle, because it's a board discussion. He stated his office is not closed during that time, but he's also not asked to work Saturdays and Sundays during the election period. Ms. Groot stated that those who do work in this office Saturdays and Sundays are compensated. Mr. Hinnners stated that if you were to give him the option, more often than not, he'd take Saturdays and Sundays off. Mr. Ferrell pointed out that it is not this board that makes them work Saturdays and Sundays. He also stated that other county departments have different work schedules.

Mr. Hinnners noted that during our previous discussion in November, the question came up of what the policy provides. The policy does allow for board discretion. It specifically states that the county may revise these policies with or without advance notice. Mr. Ferrell stated that at the last meeting, we said we would find a way to man the office. Ms. Groot noted it was also in the minutes. Reading from the November 19th minutes, she said, "Mr. Ferrell asked if we had worked out the holiday schedule. Ms. James responded that the four staff members get along, so we'll be able to work it out."

Ms. Groot stated that three of the employees have comp time, but one does not. Ms. Crescimano pointed out that they have vacation time. Mr. Adams stated we're not forcing this on them. They would like to do it. If we have the authority to do it, then we should. It's a gesture of goodwill. Ms. Ruffer stated that if Ms. Groot wants to keep the office open, she's welcome to come in and staff it. Ms. Groot stated she could come in one day. Mr. Adams asked how the employees felt. Eliza Link, Adrienne James, and Alex Jones all indicated they would prefer to have the time off. Mr. Ferrell stated it was a board decision and asked for a roll call vote on Mr. Adams' motion.

Mr. Ferrell – no
Ms. Crescimano- yes
Ms. Groot- no
Mr. Adams- yes

The motion did not carry.

Ms. Link asked if we stayed open on the 23rd, if we could close the office the 24th through the 2nd. Mr. Ferrell asked how many other offices under the commissioners would be closed during that time. Ms. Groot asked, "And don't their employees work just as hard?" Mr. Adams replied that he's not concerned about their employees. These are our employees. We have the ability to reward them with zero cost, and he doesn't understand the resistance to that. The public would still be served. Ms. Groot asked if we would be informed who comes in on what days. Ms. Crescimano replied that it's not up to us; it's a management decision. Ms. Groot is not saying we have to approve it; she's just asking if we would be informed.

Mr. Adams motioned to close the office December 24th through January 1st, and come back on the 2nd. Ms. Crescimano seconded the motion. Ms. Groot asked if employees would take comp time. Ms. Link stated it would either be vacation or comp. Mr. Ferrell stated that we would be off the next week for conference. Ms. James stated that the two clerks are not going to conference, so the office would be open.

Ms. Ruffer asked Mr. Adams if he would like to see which other boards are closing. Mr. Ferrell stated that doesn't pertain to us. He also stated that the other boards probably have their own personnel policy. Ms. Ruffer replied that she doesn't know, and that other boards don't have the control issues that we have here. Mr. Ferrell asked if we could find out how the other boards operate and under what personnel policies. Ms. Ruffer stated it was possible for him to call them. Mr. Ferrell stated he can do that, then asked if there was any other discussion.

Ms. Groot asked if we could change the dates the office is closed. She suggested the 24th through the 27th, and then the employees would come back the 30th. Mr. Adams replied that it's ridiculous we're arguing about these days. It is for the employees' benefit. The public will still be served. A roll call vote was taken on Mr. Adams' motion.

Mr. Ferrell- no
Ms. Crescimano- yes
Ms. Groot- no
Mr. Adams- yes

The motion did not carry.

Ms. Groot motioned to close the office on the 26th and 27th, and those that have comp time use comp time and those that have vacation or personal use that. Then, the employees would return to the office on December 30th. Mr. Hinnens stated he knows the commissioners have provided the 24th off, so he would include the 24th in the motion. Ms. Groot stated she'll amend the motion to approve the 24th as a holiday. Mr. Ferrell asked why she wouldn't include the 23rd, too. Ms. Groot stated it was just in case something comes in over the weekend. Mr. Ferrell seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken.

Mr. Ferrell- yes
Ms. Crescimano- yes
Ms. Groot- yes
Mr. Adams- yes

The motion carried.

Mr. Ferrell asked if there was anything else. Mr. Adams stated, just for the record, this is sad. He would have assumed that as well as our employees work, Rs and Ds with no difficulties, that the board could do the same thing. It's unfortunate that that doesn't seem to be the case. Mr. Ferrell stated he doesn't think it's an issue of R and D. It is an issue about keeping the office open. Mr. Adams asked why we need to keep the office open if they can still take care of things? Mr. Ferrell replied that a lot of other employees who operate solely under the county policy do not have that opportunity. He also iterated that when he was a commissioner, he took a lot of grief. Mr. Adams stated that's why he talked with the commissioners, to make sure they wouldn't have a problem with it. We're not going to get grief because they already know. Mr. Ferrell stated it came from other employees throughout the county.

Ms. Crescimano motioned to adjourn, with Ms. Groot seconding. All board members voted yes; motion carried. Board adjourned at 9:34 a.m.

Alexander W. Jones, Director

Attest:

Thomas M. Ferrell, Chairman