

\*\*\*DRAFT --FOR APPROVAL\*\*\*

## LUZERNE COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS

WEDNESDAY JANUARY 20, 2021

(Via TELECONFERENCE)

4:30p.m.

- MINUTES

### **MEMBERS PRESENT:**

JEANETTE TAIT -- CHAIRWOMAN

PETER OUELLETTE -- VICE CHAIRMAN

JOYCE DOMBROSKI-GEBHARDT -- SECRETARY

KEITH GOULD

AUDREY SERNIAK

**Also Present:** Michael Butera, County Assistant Solicitor; Romilda Crocamo, County Chief Solicitor; Jerrod Gutowski, I.T. Dept. and Paula Radick, Esq.

**Absent:** Dino Ninotti, Deputy Director of Bureau of Elections and C. David Pedri, County Manager and David Parsnik, County Administrative Services Division Head.

**CALL TO ORDER--** At 4:32p.m. Chair, Jeanette Tait calls the meeting to order and asks everyone to join her in the....

### **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE --**

Chair Tait requests a Roll call. All five Board members are present on the meeting.

### ***A brief background:***

[ Romilda Cracamo speaks saying that she's stating for the record there was just an Executive session and personnel issues were discussed. ]

Chair Jeanette Tait then asks for a Motion to Amend the Agenda for her to now read aloud County Manager Pedri's statement in his absence:

**MOTION: Peter\_ 2nd: \_Audrey\_**  
*Ayes were in favor. Motion passes.*

***Statement -- We scheduled interviews with the top 4 candidates for this position. The interview committee was myself, Dave Parsnik, Paula Radick, Keith Gould, and Peter Oulette. One candidate dropped out before the interview and another withdrew their name after their interview leaving us with two candidates. After discussions with the interview Committee and consultation with the election board in executive session as well as a review of the Luzerne county personnel policy, the decision has been made not to offer the position to any current candidate. The position will be reposted after the Luzerne county elections inquiry committee releases its final report next week so that the new director will have a full understanding as to the potentially changing responsibilities of this position.***

***Until a new director is selected, I have appointed Andrea Hill, a 25 year employee of the elections bureau as the interim director. Ms. Hill is an incredibly knowledgeable and hard worker and has our full confidence in this time of transition. She will also receive assistance from our division head David Parsnik as well as support from the solicitors office as we prepare for the 2021 primary election.***

***We will be reopening the search and all candidates who have previously applied are considered to have their applications as active and do not have to reapply.***

---C. David Pedri, Luzerne County Manager

#### **PUBLIC COMMENTS -- Limit 4 minutes per person**

Chair Tait asks for the first caller at 4:37p.m.....

Rich Manta -- Mr. Manta begins by asking Chair Tait, From what you just read in that letter from David Pedri two applicants withdrew and two were disqualified and so were the qualifications posted before they wasted their time? Vice-Chair Peter Ouellette interjects and says, Of course they were. He adds that he and others on the interview committee determined one of the remaining two applicants was not qualified and that the other would not be appropriate for this time.

Chair Tait then asks for the next caller....

Sean Donahue -- He asks, has the Election Board come up with if write ins will be counted in the May primary election? Peter begins saying, The protocol for write ins... Sean interjects, Does the County have a formal protocol? Chair Tait responds, the state sets up the criteria to count write ins. Sean says he wishes it was the **same** every time.

Chair Tait asks for the next caller....

Walter Griffith -- He says he sees on the agenda Limiting minutes from four minutes to three minutes and that the Board needs to read the Preamble of our Home Rule Charter. It's imperative that this Board do this. He continues, Another item on the agenda i.e., Can only comment on agenda items? This board needs to be transparent!

Also, the webpage still says you're looking for a Chair, he states. Read the preamble. And, you're not in compliance with the meeting minutes being posted online. Chair Tait responds that she personally looked and the minutes are there. Walter retorts, No. The minutes are not there. Jeanette says the November 23, 2020 and the November 25, 2020 minutes are online. Walter then says, the Sunshine law says people have the right to speak. Chair Tait interjects, the meeting was posted in the newspaper. Walter says, Myself and Mr. Shiner have been coming to these meetings for a long time as Peter Ouellette knows.

Chair Tait then asks for the next caller... .

Brian Shiner -- He says that Section 209-B-3. of our Home Rule Charter states the following...

B. Further, County Council shall have and may exercise, but shall not be limited to, the following powers:

3. To create, combine, alter, and/or abolish any County department, division, bureau, office, agency, other administrative unit, authority, board, or the commission, and the functions, powers, and duties thereof in accordance with applicable law and this Charter, except those not subject to change under the terms of this Charter or applicable law.

Mr. Shiner continues on and says, the ability of this Board, and Mr. Ouellette. . . this Board represents the cornerstone of our Democracy, and should get direction from him and Walter Griffith, and also from the people who this Board is representing.

Stephen J. Urban, Luzerne County Councilman -- Says he agrees with Walter Griffith and Mr. Shiner that this Board of Elections is supposed to be a non-partisan board. He asks if each Board member was given a copy of Title 53 which deals with municipalities? Romilda responds that she is in the process of getting copies of Title 53 to the Board members. Stephen says there's policies and procedures to follow, and 2020 was the worst he's seen and that the Board's job at the end of the day is to have and exercise all powers and duties stated in Section 8.04 of the Luzerne County Home Rule Charter, and shall provide general supervision over all elections conducted by the County in accordance with the PA State Bureau of Commissions, Elections and Legislation and then certify.

Jason Carr -- Says he agrees with Mr. Urban that there's a lack of enthusiasm with the Board and feels that Peter Ouellette and the entire Board should resign and let the people decide. It's hard to listen to you, Jason states.

Ronald Knapp -- He says he concurs with Walter and Stephen and Mr. Shiner and Jason Carr. He then questions if this is a deliberate act by the Board?

Denise Williams --- She begins by saying Jeanette runs an excellent meeting. Denise then asks her if she gets paid for doing this? Chair Tait responds No. Someone had said you knew when you took the position it was a volunteer position. Well, instead of attacking you everyone should thank you for all you're doing. Denise then speaks on the importance of following election code's sections, etc. as she read several of the sections.

Brian Dwyer -- He says the last woman caller was correct and that he agrees with her. Brian continues that he was a poll watcher in Larksville and that you got to do it right! Says he wasn't a poll watcher for Republicans and not for Democrats and then continues with saying people were legitimately disenfranchised here in Luzerne County. He states further that he is 51 years old and is tired of it happening!

Thomas Shubilla -- He says he was able to find the Agenda online, and that he feels making those changes mentioned is important.

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At 5:10 pm Chair Tait, states that Public comments are now over and that the Draft of the Monday, November 23, 2020 **Special** meeting Minutes has been received by the Board members and posted on line under Agenda and Minutes. She then asks if there are any additions or deletions. There being none, Chair Tait requests a motion to accept the draft of the Monday, November 23, 2020 **Special** meeting Minutes as written.

**MOTION: Peter\_ 2nd: Keith\_**  
*Ayes were in favor*

Motion passes.

Chair Tait then asks if there are any additions or deletions to the draft of the Wednesday, November 25, 2020 meeting minutes. There being none, she asks for a motion to accept the draft of the Wednesday, November 25, 2020 meeting Minutes as written.

**MOTION: Peter 2nd: Keith**

*Ayes were in favor*  
Motion passes.

**Solicitor's report** -- at 5:12p.m. Chair Tait asks for Mike Butera to speak, but he's having issues with his audio. Romilda responds that he's handling issues right now with audio. Keith Gould then questions Romilda, Will there be a final report on the investigation conducted by the FBI and prosecutors from the DOJ (Dept. of Justice)? Romilda says, Not sure if we will get a report from the U.S. Attorney's office. Peter Ouellette then states, No criminal charges from Pedri (recent email).

Next, Chair Tait requests that Paula Radick read aloud the Bureau report in the absence of Dino Ninotti.....

**Bureau of Elections report --**

\*\* The Electronic Poll Books are sent out for maintenance and repair as of today and will be returned to the office in two weeks.

\*\*The Permanent status letters of voter data for voters who still request to remain permanent to receive mail-in ballots will be sent to all voters on Monday 1/25.

\*\*The Department will also receive supplies for candidate affirmations, petitions, etc. on 1/21/ Thursday and will prepare packets for candidates.

\*\*The correspondence sent to all municipalities and school districts concerning open elected positions for the 2021 primary is due back by Feb. 1 to the bureau. The Bureau will then begin to assemble available positions to prepare the ballot for the primary election.

Board secretary Joyce Dombroski-Gebhardt then says Madam Chair, I would like to request that Paula Radick pass along the following to David Parsnik as part of the Bureau report, an experience that I had while I was seated and observing inside of the Bureau of Elections back on October 29, 2020 around 4:30p.m. Go ahead Joyce, Chair Tait says. Joyce then states she was seated at the second desk inside the side entrance door into the Bureau and had been just observing the process that the workers were going through when a female middle aged worker walked across the office and up to Joyce and introduced herself as a temp worker. She also wanted Joyce to know that she had just finished retrieving almost 200 voice messages from telephones within the Bureau, and that she still had to retrieve even more messages from other telephones within the Bureau.

### **Board of Elections report --**

Discussion and adoption of 2021 Board of Elections meeting calendar (see below)

-- Chair Tait asks for a motion to adopt the 2021 Board of Elections meeting calendar:

**MOTION: Joyce\_ 2nd: Peter\_**

*Ayes were in favor.*

Motion passes.

**Posting of Campaign Finance Reports** -- Chair Tait speaks to David Parsnik that the Board of Elections requests that Campaign Finance for the 2020 General Election be added to the website, and that it be updated after each election. Mr. Parsnik says he hopes to get it on the website where one can just click on Campaign Finance Reports. Peter Ouellette then says, it's the Board's responsibility to make sure it's accessible and done, and done well.

**Monthly Poll Worker trainings** -- Chair Tait refers to a recent email she had sent to David Parsnik requesting having poll worker training once a month, for example the 2nd Wednesday of the month. A pool could be created instead of the big rush before an election. Also, a trial of evening trainings should be explored. Additional training help is much needed in the absence of the former Director of Elections and also the soon to be absence of the Deputy Director. Keith Gould suggests having the recent past Judges of elections come in and train workers. And, Keith says the training for Judges of election should be more intense because they have the most complicated job. He also suggests board members make basic videos explaining how to fill out provisional ballots and other voting steps, saying they could be posted online since the board discovered some provisional ballots were not in the correct envelopes and missing affidavits last year, Keith added.

Board member Joyce Dombroski-Gebhardt says some citizens may be willing to help produce the videos for free as a public service.

Peter then states we have to encourage the public to step up and run in the Primary for worker positions i.e., to inform them that they can actually do that.

Chair Tait suggests that Luzerne County Democrat chairwoman, Kathy Bozinski would probably help in the training of poll workers.

Chair Tait then asks if Mike Butera is on the meeting now. Romilda says No, he's still having audio issues.

Chair Tait then asks for a motion on the following item....

**Motion and vote to limit public comment to 3 minutes per person** -- Keith Gould says, No. Keep it at 4 minutes.

\*\*\*There was no motion made.

**Motion and vote to limit public comment to one time per person** --

Walter Griffith says

\*\*\*There was no motion made.

**Motion and vote to limit public comments to items on the agenda** -- Motion by Peter. 2nd None

\*\*\*Motion fails.

**Motion and vote for posting a draft of the Board of Elections meeting minutes within 7 days after the meeting** -- Chair Tait asks for a motion to get a draft of

meeting minutes posted within seven days after a meeting. Romilda interjects, and says, No time limit on posting of minutes; you want accuracy. Board Secretary, Joyce Dombroski-Gebhardt then states, I'm sorry but I can't meet that deadline and if that's not acceptable then you will have to find someone else to be the secretary and I will just resign. Chair Tait says, Well, we don't want you to resign.

\*\*\*There was no motion made.

Chair Tait then says, Moving on to the next agenda item.....

**Further discussion and adoption of a policy by the Board of Election members regarding all communications with Board members regarding elections** -- Peter Ouellette says that the Board should be able to share all communications with members regarding elections. No further discussion needed, Keith says... against making it a policy. Where is the line drawn?, Audrey Serniak asks.

\*\*\*There was no motion made.

Chair Tait moves on to the next agenda item....

**Discussion and vote on establishing a supplemental remote location in Pittston to be solely an extension of the Bureau of Elections and provide related assistance to voters** -- Chair Tait asks Joyce to speak on this since she was the member who had submitted it for discussion as unfinished business from March, 2020. Peter says, yes, this was discussed back in 2020 along with Hazleton location and it kinda got dropped. Romilda interjects, Any real estate through a lease agreement is for approval by the County Council.

\*\*\*There was no motion made.

**Adjournment** -- Chair Tait then asks for a motion to adjourn the meeting....

**Motion to Adjourn - 5:50p.m.**

**MOTION: Keith 2<sup>nd</sup> Audrey**

Ayes were in favor.

Respectfully submitted,

Joyce Dombroski-Gebhardt  
Secretary