

LUZERNE COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS AND REGISTRATIONS MEETING
MINUTES FEBRUARY 23, 2022
CALL TO ORDER 5:04 PM

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL

Audrey Serniak here, Patrick Castellani here, Denise Williams here APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion by Patrick Castellani 2nd Audrey Serniak, unanimous PUBLIC COMMENTS (4 minutes)

John Frey, Plymouth-Regarding the bilingual ballots, you need to be a citizen to vote and to be a citizen you need to be proficient in English. The application for mail in ballots is bilingual, admitting someone who is not a citizen can vote; seems illogical; ballot is the same principle.

Susan Bartholomew Palmer, Wilkes Barre City-Received an application for a mail in ballot in 2020 but never requested one.

Board advised that many groups were mailing out those applications.

Elaine Maddon Curry, Drums-Commended Luzerne County for offering ballots in English and Spanish since 2012. Hazleton has an 18.2% increase in population; changing to an English ballot would be inconsistent and counterproductive; would like to have Spanish interpreters. It is easier for them to fall back on their native language and there is less chance of them making mistakes on the ballot.

Jessica Morgan, Dallas-The last caller sounds like a George Soros campaign add for illegal immigrant voting and wants to know if she was part of a group.

Elaine Madden Curry replied that she was chair of the Hazleton Advisory Council of Pennsylvania Human Relations Commission.

Cluadia Glennon, Salem Twp-Clarified that it didn't matter what group the 2020 ballot applications came from as the applicant had to be verified as a registered voter to receive a

mail in ballot.

Denise Williams read two letters the Board received in support of the bilingual ballot. The letters from Bob Stevens and Rossanna Gabriel are posted on the website.

MINUTES

Motion to approve the minutes from February 9, 2022 by Patrick Castellani 2nd Audrey Serniak,

unanimous. SOLICITOR'S REPORT

Regarding any investigations into the 2021 primary election, Paula Radick advised to wait for the DA's office to come forward when they have anything to report.

BUREAU OF ELECTIONS REPORT

The licensing bureau has completed their move to the first floor of Penn Place.

Special Election-Mike Susek is looking into parking solutions for Ward 2, Hazleton; a translation option is already available on the county website; a Spanish version of the ballot instructions is being worked on; polling places will be the same. Drop box availability dates are not yet final but tentatively 3/14/22-4/4/22. Mike Susek will check on having notices appear in the Citizens Voice and Standard Speaker.

Campaign Finance Forms-Mike Susek reported that everything received has been posted. If a campaign has shut down there is no need for them to file an annual report.

Poll Worker Letter-The letter went out to about 200 poll workers for the special election.

Election Group Summary Report-The Election Group has asked for a timeline and budget; Patrick Castellani says a 30-45 day timeline is reasonable and that they should give us the cost and scope.

Primary Election Status-Mike Susek says that the Act 77 challenge and redistricting has made the primary complex. The only local offices on the ballot are the Democratic precinct chairs. Mike Susek will check on the state wide questions and the UMOVA (military and overseas ballot) and other public notices.

Spanish/English Ballot Proofing-Mike Susek is following up with Dominion to see if this is included in the contract. Official translators would be needed for local questions. Previous practices are unknown. Does the state provide the translation for state wide questions and

should the audio be in Spanish? The Bureau will look into these questions and any costs.

BOARD OF ELECTIONS REPORT

Dual Language Ballots-Audrey Serniak commented that dual ballots are more efficient and this is a process that will probably be required in the future and that continue.

Patrick Castellani said just because someone could get by doesn't mean they wouldn't be better

off using a native language ballot. He doesn't see how you could justify discontinuing it.

Denise Williams agreed 100%.

Denise Williams moved to continue the English/Spanish dual language ballot for future elections.

Audrey Serniak yes, Patrick Castellani yes, Denise Williams yes; motion passes unanimously.

Translator Assistance at the Polls-Denise Williams said that Hazleton is the second highest in the state with Spanish speakers (Reading is first and Allentown third) and suggested adding a box to check on the poll worker application if the applicant is fluent in Spanish and assign workers to polling places so that there is coverage where needed.

Mike Susek said that the Bureau stopped tracking this as it turned into a non-issue due to many of the poll workers in the Hazleton and West Hazleton precincts being fluent in Spanish. He also said it may not be possible to compel workers to change precincts. Voters can also fill out the voter assistance form (Judges of Elections cannot assist).

Political Signs at Polling Places-Patrick Castellani is looking into this. SCOTUS has found political signs cannot be restricted or prohibited but can be regulated. Municipalities can require a deposit which is forfeited if the signs are not removed. Paula Radick said it was an ongoing issue which hasn't been properly addressed. Patrick Castellani suggested we meet with party chairs for suggested action and that a questionnaire be sent to the polling places asking about their experiences and issues. Denise Williams requested he draw up the questionnaire. Paula Radick said that there is more latitude for private property to restrict signage.

Write in Candidate Information-Will post information for write in campaigns on the website;

it has been cleared with the solicitor.

Fort Orange Press-Ratification of the contract is tabled until it can be reviewed.

PUBLIC COMMENTS (4 minutes)

Susan Bartholomew Palmer-How do we insure that poll workers have complete and accurate information to open the polls?

Mike Susek responded that there is the training component; at the polls, supplies include copies of the training material; poll workers can call for technical support and the county can 'blast'

information regarding countywide issues.

John Frey-Disagrees with the decision to have bilingual language; should encourage people not to revert to their native language but all should use the same procedure. Should work to remove skepticism from the process and not reinforce it.

Mike Susek reminded everyone that this is part of the Federal Voting Rights Act.

Denise Williams said some counties are required to have dual language ballots and others have

authorized them. Luzerne County was at 3.7% in 2015 and is probably over 4% now.

Question Submitted-Do we have a plan to move the printers on the ballot selection devices? The printouts are hard to access and poll workers are not able to assist.

Mike Susek said that this is a known issue; they are trying to see if the printers can be moved forward and up. The printers are bolted down so that they are not damaged in transport.

MOTION TO ADJOURN

Patrick Castellani 2nd Audrey Serniak, unanimous NEXT MEETING Wednesday, March 9, 2022 at 5 PM ADJOURNED 6:51 PM