

**TRANSYLVANIA COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS**  
**MEETING MINUTES**  
April 8, 2021

The scheduled meeting of the Transylvania County Board of Elections was called to order by Chair Champion at 10 am on Thursday, April 8, 2021 at 150 South Gaston Street, Brevard, NC 28712.

**Present**

**Board Members:**

**Staff Members:**

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Chair: Sara Champion	Director: Jeff Storey
Secretary: Lee McMinn	Deputy Director: Laura Owen*
David Morrow	Deputy Director: Julie Dennis*
Michael Wainwright*	
Sandra Watson	* Remotely via Zoom

Visitors: Ruth Harris\*, Bernard Groseclose\*, John Ciriello\*, Elizabeth Davis\*

**Review and Approval of Previous Minutes**

The board was presented with the minutes from the previous meeting. **Secretary McMinn made a motion to approve the board meeting minutes for February 11, 2021. The motion carried unanimously.**

**Resolution regarding COLA for election staff**

The board reviewed the proposed resolution for cost-of-living adjustments. Chair Champion explained the resolution makes clear the board's intention to accept the cost of living for election staff that was approved by the county commissioners for all county employees. The question was raised by the board about the necessity of the resolution. Chair Champion responded that the finance director had asked for it. **On a motion by the chair, the board unanimously approved the resolution.**

**Assessment of the East Fork precinct**

Director Storey presented the board with data to evaluate the long-term viability of the East Fork precinct. Options for the board to consider included making no changes to the precinct, changing locations within the precinct, splitting the precinct, or merging the precinct. This was prompted by several factors in 2020 including limited spacing at the fire substation, limited availability of sites within the current precinct, COVID-19 related issues, and availability of workers within the precinct.

Possible sites the board could consider within the precinct included the East Fork Baptist Church, Pisgah Girl Scout Camp, and the existing Connestee Fire Rescue Substation. Chair Champion indicated the Girl Scout Camp could be problematic since they are closed in November.

Mr. Ciriello asked about surrounding precincts in the area. Chair Champion indicated that is one of the options the board is considering and explained how census blocks could not be split.

The director outlined the procedures involved if the board recommends splitting the precinct.

There was considerable board discussion regarding travel distance, potential polling sites, current and historical voter turnout statistics for early voting, Election Day, and absentee by mail. Chair Champion asked the board to consider going forward whether East Fork Baptist Church or the Girl Scout Camp were viable options as polling sites. Mr. Morrow felt the church was more feasible than the Girl Scout Camp, but it had been moved to the fire substation due to perceived conflicts of interest with ballot issues regarding the marriage amendment and alcohol referendums.

Mr. Ciriello asked the board to repeat why the East Fork Baptist Church was not an ideal polling site. Chair Champion reiterated the conflicts of interest and added churches are generally not interested in having political signage, etc. on their properties.

Chair Champion asked if staffing the East Fork precinct has been an issue. The director indicated staffing all precincts in 2020 presented a challenge, but with regards to East Fork, it can be problematic to have a majority of judges "in precinct" as required by statute.

Ms. Watson asked about the current issues with the Conestee Fire substation polling site. Chair Champion mentioned the small size and limited parking were factors. Director Storey added that county maintenance had to move items into the bay each election to allow for voting equipment into the room.

The director provided the board with an interactive map of the East Fork precinct with census blocks. The board reviewed the map data and discussed possible options with splitting the precinct. Chair Champion asked for thoughts on how the board should proceed. Secretary McMinn stated that with the limited sites available within the current precinct and recent turnouts on Election Day he was inclined to split the precinct into adjacent precincts. The board asked if splitting the precinct would create any issues with total registration numbers in surrounding precincts. Based on the scenarios the board discussed, the director did not feel the total registration numbers for each proposed move would cause concern with the State Board. Director Storey said the board would need to consider if the current polling sites in Rosman, Cathey's Creek, Dunn's Rock, and Cedar Mountain would be adequate to handle any increase in former East Fork voters.

Chair Champion asked Mr. Morrow if his party leadership wanted to retain East Fork as a precinct on Election Day. Mr. Morrow responded that if a suitable location were available within East Fork that the party would prefer to keep it there, but having said that, the possible sites were extremely limited.

Chair Champion asked if the public had any thoughts. Republican Party Chair Ruth Harris stated the party does want to preserve the convenience of location and that after the pandemic voters will likely prefer to vote on Election Day. Ms. Harris was not opposed to splitting the precinct as long as any changes did not significantly increase the driving times for the current voters in East Fork.

Ms. Davis indicated she would like to see the precinct preserved but wasn't strongly opposed to splitting up East Fork contingent on it remaining convenient and accessible to voters. Ms. Davis agreed the current polling site was extremely small.

Mr. Morrow stated any changes should be tabled until the new census data is released. Chair Champion mentioned the board could still consider options since the current registration numbers are available. Chair Champion asked the board if it was worth further investigation based on what was presented. Secretary McMinn asked if there would be a public comment period before a decision is made. The director indicated a public comment period could happen and suggested the board have a workshop to work through the details if a decision is made to split the precinct.

The board agreed to continue exploring the options in splitting up the East Fork precinct and asked the director to gather materials for a proposed workshop on a date to be determined.

## **DIRECTOR UPDATES**

Director Storey informed the board the State has created "hubs" similar to the former SMART teams with representation from large, medium, and small counties. The director will be on the voting systems hub and Deputy Director Laura Owen is on the voter registration hub. The teams will work in conjunction with the state on procedures, policies, and communications.

The director mentioned there has not been any further updates regarding delays with the Municipal, which means it is currently scheduled for November.

Director Storey updated the board on proposed legislation affecting absentee ballots and funding sources for the state and county boards of elections.

In other updates, staff can resume normal records retention schedules as the lawsuit that required holding election records from 2010 to 2018 has been resolved.

Brevard College is reluctant to commit returning to the Porter Center at this time for the Brevard #4 precinct. It will be a wait and see approach with COVID-19, but they are interested in keeping it at the college. Chair Champion mentioned the former location at the Presbyterian church could be a backup for the Municipal.

## **BOARD COMMENTS**

Secretary McMinn asked if the board was interested in pushing for Ranked Choice Voting in North Carolina. The director commented he would ask the State Board for further details, but any changes would have to be made at the legislative level.

Chair Champion asked to consider re-evaluating the staffing for curbside voters. The chair had received feedback concerning the accountability with one worker helping a curbside voter versus having a staff person from each party. Staffing would be an issue, but the director indicated he would research how other counties address curbside voting.

Chair Champion brought up challenges balancing the staffing of precinct workers from each party with unaffiliated registrations continuing to increase. There was board discussion of how

to address it, but it was concluded that the trend will continue as long as there are open primaries in North Carolina and voters disenfranchised with both parties.

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

Ruth Harris asked if the board was suggesting that only voters registered with a party would be eligible to serve as precinct officials. Chair Champion responded that photo id rules in the past were designed with the two majority parties in mind and did not take into account the increased reliance on unaffiliated workers at the precincts. The chair was concerned it could become problematic if registrants are not committed to a party.

**On a motion by the chair, the meeting adjourned at 11:13 am.** The next scheduled meeting will be at 10 AM on May 13, 2021, at 150 South Gaston Street, Brevard, NC 28712.

Respectfully submitted,



Lee McMinn, Secretary



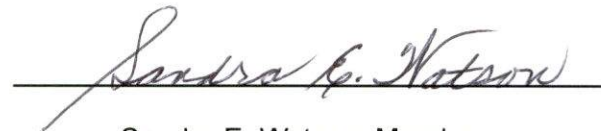
Sara G. Champion, Chair



David P. Morrow, Member



Michael Wainwright, Member



Sandra E. Watson, Member

Approved by Board on: 5/13/21