

## OCTOBER 8, 2019

The Cumberland County Board of Elections met at the Board of Elections Office at 5:00PM for their regular monthly meeting and consideration of absentee ballots.

**Present:** Floyd W. Johnson, Jr., Chairman      Linda Devore, Secretary  
Bobby Swilley, Member                              Helen Nelson, Member  
Irene Grimes, Member                                Terri Robertson, Director

**Staff:** Angie Amaro and Vickie Hilburn

**Guests:** Meta A Weaver Coaxum, Val Applewhite, Kristian Carlyle, Matthew Davis, Kiante Bennett, Valencia Handy, Devon Newton, Wesley Fountain, and Shakeyla Ingram.

Chairman Floyd Johnson called the meeting to Order at 5:00PM and presented the Agenda.

**ACTION:** Member Grimes moved to adopt the agenda as presented.  
Seconded and passed unanimously.

Chairman Johnson opened the Public Comment Session.

**Val Applewhite, 5813 Mondavi Place, Fayetteville, NC.** Disappointed that your meeting time was moved from 1:00 to 5:00. There were students here at 1:00. Here to advocate on behalf of those students for Early Voting in 2020 at Smith Rec Center. Voter ID may impact students, and we don't know yet if FSU student IDs will qualify. Not only students, but the area around the RC is a predominantly African American, under-served community with more than 6000 students and faculty. NC has a history of disenfranchising HBCU students by closing EV sites near HBCU campuses, and at AppState. Asking that you consider making Smith Rec Ctr an EV site for primary and general in 2020 to make this process easy for young people.

Chairman Johnson inquired of Director Robertson about the notice of our meeting time change from 1:00 to 5:00.

Director Robertson reported that the 5:00 meeting time was published, including in the newspaper.

Member Grimes reported that though our Agenda for this meeting shows a 5:00 time, she observed the 1:00 time was circulated on social media by some civic groups. Grimes messaged them in an attempt to correct the information that she saw.

Chairman Johnson apologized for the misunderstanding, and we will ensure that this does not happen again.

**Kristian Carlyle, 3961 Rosehill Rd, Fayetteville, NC,** a senior at FSU representing the student body. I am here today because in the past few primary elections Smith Rec Center was not used as an early voting site. Smith Rec serves FSU and surrounding communities. There are over 6000 students, faculty, and staff who could use this site between classes, meetings, and appointments. For many students this will be the first time they will be able to vote in a national election. It is critical that this first experience is positive so that the habit of voting

becomes normalized. I appreciate your consideration to make Smith Rec Ctr a primary and general election early voting site. HBCU students are feeling disenfranchised even now.

Chairman Johnson thanked the speakers for their comments.

**ACTION:** Member Nelson moved that the minutes from October 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> meetings be approved as presented.  
Seconded and unanimously approved.

Staff reported that there have not been any additional absentee ballots approved since our last meeting. Absentee vote abstracts were presented and signed by Board members.

Director Robertson reported that there have been concerns reported for HM2B and HM3 precinct sites subsequent to our September 10<sup>th</sup> Election Day. Both of these voting locations are public schools. HM2B votes at Gallberry Farms Elementary School, and HM3 votes at Hope Mills Middle School. Just need to make you aware of this, and recognize that all schools are now concerned with security. HM Middle School has installed a security fence around the perimeter of the school, and the gate must be left open where our voters normally enter. Someone who did not leave their name called to express their concern that there are student lockers in the hallway where voters enter. One of our precinct officials has provided pictures of the gate area. We also received a call from a Hope Mills Town Commissioner with the same concern. There is an entrance on the other side of the building, but it is not handicap accessible. Director Robertson has spoken with the school principal, and they will be monitoring.

Secretary Devore suggested that since we have at least two dozen schools serving as polling sites on general election days, perhaps we should approach the School Board about a teacher's workday on election days so that students would not be in class those days.

Director Robertson also reported following up on a September 10<sup>th</sup> Election Day complaint from a member of the public concerning our HM2B site at Gallberry Elementary. This was the first large election we have used this site, and there is an issue we need to work out with busses in the parking lot used by voters. We have met with a person with transportation from the school board, the security officer, the principal and the assistant principal. We do not want to compromise the security of children, and we need a plan that will also accommodate our voters.

Member Swilley asked whether there was time to do this before the November election, or are talking about 2020?

Director Robertson reported that she will be meeting with School Board facilities staff next week to consider options available for addressing the school site concerns. There would not be time to modify the school schedule before November.

Secretary Devore suggested we need to identify a baseline solution since the security concerns are not unique to these schools. Perhaps we might ask the School Board to position a School Resource Officer at each of the schools used as a polling site on election days.

Member Grimes reported that when she was located in school polling sites, the schools seemed to make it a priority to have the Resource Officers there.

Member Nelson asked whether these are the only two schools we use that have this issue with voters coming to vote where there are students present.

Director Robertson explained that this is true with a number of our sites, but in the cases where we are located on school property we are working toward placing our voting site in a library or gym with a separate outside entrance to the room. We are always looking for other public buildings as alternatives to school sites.

### **Director Robertson requested guidance from Board Members for the March 2020 Early Voting**

**Plan.** We need to get our plan done and submitted to the state by early December. Staff needs to understand where the Board wants to begin.

Member Grimes reviewed that we are required to be open 7AM-7PM at early voting sites during the 17 or 18 days of EV, and equal numbers of hours on weekends across all sites—not necessarily the same hours on weekends, but the same number of hours at each site. While the Director has indicated that it would be a good idea to open Grays Creek in addition to Hope Mills, North Regional, Cliffdale RC, East Regional and BOE, I believe we should also consider adding Smith Rec Center. All of the disadvantaged groups in Fayetteville and Cumberland County are along that corridor, and there is one bus route that serves the area along Murchison Rd. Anyone who lives within a few blocks of Murchison can get on a bus and get to the Smith Center. The transit center is 0.2 miles from our site at BOE, but it can be difficult.

Secretary Devore suggested that based on historical voter data we should expect somewhere around 20,000 early voters in the March primary, and perhaps 80,000 early voters in November. We should consider the number of early voting sites to be somewhat proportional to those numbers while still taking into account regional placement. Member Grimes is suggesting seven early voting sites while we are anticipating 10-12 for November, so that seems to be considerably out of proportion. Half as many in the primary would seem more reasonable. Common sense.

Member Grimes suggested that it is not always about the money and the finances, but about doing what is right for that group of voters. That may be more of an emotional argument.

Secretary Devore suggested that we need to be able to look at the turnout numbers after an election, and ask whether our decision made sense, or did we open a site, or for weekend hours, and have very few voters. Smith has never been open for a primary. Smith has been open only for presidential general election early voting.

Member Grimes expressed that we should consider precedent and consistency, so that voters are not confused.

Chairman Johnson stated that we will always be making a good decision when we provide an opportunity for our voters to vote. We should not consider low turnout or that it is going to cost us money to open sites. Always keep in mind that if one or two people show up at a voting site, it has done what it was supposed to do. Provide access and opportunity for our voters to vote. And, if we don't do that, then that is a form of voter suppression.

Secretary Devore commented that she does not believe anyone on this board would support any plan for voter suppression, however, we also have a responsibility to the voting public as well as taxpayers. We know that opening an early voting site for 2-1/2 weeks costs between \$20,000 - \$30,000. We always look at numbers. If we weren't looking at numbers, we could open all 77 precincts for 2-1/2 weeks.

Chairman Johnson stated that we do not have a financial responsibility.

Member Swilley asked for clarification of the early voting dates.

Member Grimes stated February 12-28.

Director Robertson reported that the legislature is currently considering a change to mandatory daily early voting hours. Possibility of 8AM-8PM.

Member Swilley stated that in the general election in 2008, 2012, and 2016 it appears that Smith Rec Ctr had the lowest turnout numbers except for Spring Lake. Director Robertson reminded that Spring Lake was open for only one week during that election.

Secretary Devore noted that the turnout for early voting at Smith has declined for each presidential general election year beginning in 2008, which is the history we have here.

2008 - 6534

2012 - 5731

2016 - 4716

Grimes suggested this could be the result of Voter ID. Devore reminded that Voter ID was not used during the general election in any year.

Member Grimes asked when Smith Rec Center last opened for early voting. Director Robertson stated that Smith has not been open for a primary in any recent years—maybe once a long time ago.

Devore reminded that March is party primaries only, so there is not a partisan advantage to whatever we decide.

Member Nelson suggested that we need to consider that voters get used to voting at an early site, and are more likely to return to vote there later.

Member Grimes suggested we consider opening early voting sites on the middle Saturday and Sunday for the March primary. Saturday 9-1 and Sunday 2-5.

Director Robertson suggested that we can hold a special meeting to discuss this further, or consider a plan at our November 12<sup>th</sup> meeting. Would like to hear from board members before our meeting about what they would like to have included for consideration. We can wait until next summer for our November 2020 early voting plan.

Secretary Devore asked Director Robertson for any additional data from past presidential primary elections that could help us understand what percentage of voters vote early from individual precincts.

**ADJOURNMENT:** There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 6:18PM.

Submitted by,



Linda Devore, Secretary

*Alpa P. Das*

Chairman

*Jane C. Fines*

Member

*Jeri S. Robertson*

Director

*Bobby J. Smiley*

Member

Member