

## May 10, 2022 Meeting Minutes

---

The meeting was called to order on May 10, 2022 at 5:00 p.m. at the Cumberland County Board of Elections by the Chair.

**Present:** Helen Nelson - Chair  
Linda Devore - Member  
Irene Grimes - Secretary

Billy King - Member  
James Baker - Member

**Staff:** Angela Amaro, Vicki Hilburn, Mitzie Roberts

**Guests:** Amanda Turnmire, Sandra Walker, Peter Apone, Harlan Devore, Jeremy Reinoehl, Donna Davis, Jackie Warner, Charles Ferguson, Matthew Davis, Joy Potts, Bobby Swilley, Brooke Hunter, Bree Eldridge, Susan Chapman, Nina Morton, John Zimmerman, Kim Zimmerman, Amy Cannon, Susan Mills, Mildred Bowl, Shamike Bethea, Diane Wheatley, Rudy Smart, AnnMarie Swilley

**ACTION:** Member Grimes moves that the Board Move item IX. (Invocation Policy) on the agenda forward and place it at V.

Second: Member Devore

Vote: Unanimous in favor

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** (each speaker has 1min. 15 sec.)

Gail Morfesis, 404 Valley Road, Fayetteville, NC - advocates for prayer. Glad we are still saying the pledge of allegiance.

Andy Morfesis, 404 Valley Road, Fayetteville, NC - is a physician and states that it is a well known fact that people who believe in a higher being live longer and are happier. People who don't want to participate in prayer can just stand and don't have to participate.

Roberta Waddle, 3941 Gainey Road, Fayetteville, NC 28306 - You have the most important job in conducting our elections and are responsible for protecting our democracy. Never had occasion to question the integrity of our elections in Cumberland County. Urges to continue to have a drama free election process and be kind to particularly absentee voters as getting two signatures can be a challenge.

Donna Davis, 7653 Spurge Drive, Fayetteville, NC 28311 - Please keep the invocation; just do it.

Ron Ross, 6542 Celestial Pine Drive, Hope mills, NC 28348 - No prayer is the wrong direction to take.

Shamika Bethea, 1919 Woodsworth Drive, Fayetteville, NC 28304 - America is a judo Christian nation; it is because of Christian God that we won wars; the first congress opened with a prayer and continue that spiritual heritage.

Bobby Swilley, 18904 Nantucket Court, Fayetteville, NC - I am a previous board member of this Board and has always started with a prayer. (Recites Lord's Prayer).

Efrain dela Cruz, 240 Sommertime Rd., Fayetteville, NC 28303 - Mindboggled that he has to discuss prayer. It is a fact that this is a Christian country, that is just a fact. Surprised why the media is not here looking over this meeting.

Michael Morrison, 1045 Rim Road, 28314 - keep prayer; everyone in this area has a faith and we need to keep prayer.

Diane Wheatley, 9774 Ramsey Street, Linden, NC - Has served this community for 30 years and all boards open their meetings with a prayer to a higher power.

Bear Dewberry, 2115 B Street (?), - served 23 years in the military, believes in God but it is not his decision for others. A moment of silence is appropriate because it allows him to pray but does not force others to.

Susan Mills, 4158 Bent Grass Drive, Fayetteville, NC 28312 - Country was founded on Christian values; prayer needs to be part of the meeting. Consider rotating different ministers.

J. Antoine Miner, 4020 Baywood Point Drive, Fayetteville, NC 28312 - recites bible verses. Prayer is an intricate part. (Recites bible verses).

Member Devore suggests that the responsibility for prayer be rotated (as it is done in other county/city entities). References Hope Mills' ministerial council and also thinks that the 15 churches that are precincts can be invited to give the invocation.

Member King asks how we got here and how the word got out that we are doing away with the invocation.

Chair Nelson explains that this Board has been holding a moment of silence as the invocation since this Board was sworn in. Chair Nelson clarifies that she was not the person that asked that the invocation be removed.

Member Grimes says that she is uncomfortable with public prayer and that people following their faith is a positive. But public christian praying within the context of a government meeting is inappropriate and unfair. Agrees with the speaker that said we need to get out of the God business; our business are elections. Another speaker referenced the inclusive nature of their town (Hope Mills) but for the past ten years their invocation have been done by Christian clergy 100% of the time and 85% of the time they were done by the same six pastors. Calling people of different denominations is not inclusive; inclusive is calling people of different faiths. Surprised at Member Devore's insistence, since the member is also an attorney. Suggests that

a moment of silence satisfies the constitution and is inclusive. Another Board that Member Grimes sits on does not start their meetings with a prayer and that whether other county boards do is irrelevant since they do not govern us. Member Grimes proposes that everyone follows their faith ritual individually before they enter the room before the meeting.

Member Baker remarks that the Commissioners' policy sounds like a good, common sense policy and inquires whether the county attorney validated that policy.

Member King says he assumes that the policy was vetted by the county attorney but he does not know; we could check.

Member Devore offers a document from the UNC School of Government; discusses prayer in government meetings and recommends that members of the community be included. Member King remarks that he thinks that that is what makes it ok.

**ACTION:** Member Devore moves to adopt a constitutionally compliant policy for invocation as the first item on the agenda of each meeting of this Board specifically, following the practice of the County Commissioners whereby members rotate the responsibility for either offering an invocation or inviting a clergy from the community. Staff would remind members when it is their turn in the rotation at least three days before a meeting and a member may decline and staff may move to the next member in the rotation.

Member King recommends that there be consultation with the County Attorney.

Member Devore agrees.

Second: Member Baker

Vote: 3/1/1 (in favor: King, Devore, Baker; opposed: Grimes; Abstain: Nelson)

Interim Director Amaro informs.

Discussion among the Board members on invocation.

Staff member Hilburn reports that there are 62 absentee ballots that were returned (60 military, 1 civilian, 1 overseas). Chair Nelson inquires if the staff saw any issues with any of the returned ballots. Staff member Hilburn recommends approval. Board members spot check the envelopes.

**ACTION:** Member Grimes moves to approve the 62 absentee ballots as recommended by staff.

Second: Member Devore

Vote: Unanimous in favor.

Interim Director Amaro reports that logic and accuracy testing on all machines has been completed.

**ACTION:** Member Grimes moves that machines that will be used for this election be certified.  
Second: Member Baker  
Vote: Unanimous in favor

**ACTION:** Member Grimes moves that the minutes of the April 12, 2022 (regular & absentee), and the April 19, 26 and May 3, 2022 (absentee) meetings.  
Second: Member Devore  
Vote: Unanimous in favor.

Interim Director Amaro presents a precinct official list for appointment, noting that 15 precincts are out of compliance as to precinct officials assigned to work in them (meaning that the statute requires that the precinct officials working in a precinct should be from that precinct but that we have many that are working out of precinct due to a shortage of workers).

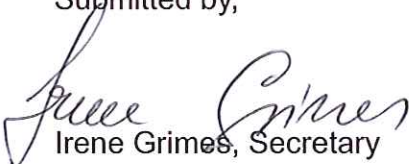
**ACTION:** Member Grimes moves that we appoint the precinct officials as recommended by staff.  
Second: Member King  
Vote: Unanimous in favor

The 62 ballots were entered into the tabulator, bringing the total absentee ballot count on the DS200 to 130.

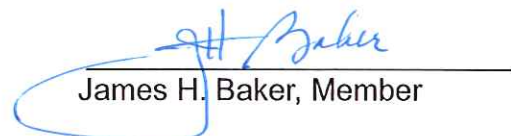
Interim Director reports that from the last meeting (3pm) to today (3pm) 3946 voters cast their ballots at early voting.

Adjournment  
Motion: Member Grimes  
Second: Member Baker  
Chair Nelson adjourned the meeting at 6:01 p.m.

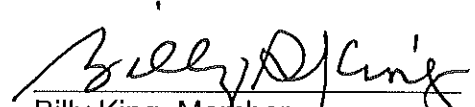
Submitted by,

  
Irene Grimes, Secretary

  
Helen Nelson, Chair

  
James H. Baker, Member

  
Linda Devore, Member

  
Billy King, Member