

**BERKS COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS
MEETING MINUTES
August 1, 2024 – 11:00 A.M.**

Michael S. Rivera, Chair
Christian Y. Leinbach, Vice Chair
Dante Santoni, Jr., Commissioner
Anne Norton, Chief Clerk
Christine M. Sadler, County Solicitor – not present
Cody L. Kauffman, First Assistant County Solicitor

CALL TO ORDER: 11:00 A.M.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES

The Board approved the minutes for the July 25, 2024, Election Board meeting as presented.

Commissioner Rivera welcomed Alexa Antanavage, a new Assistant County Solicitor who will be handling election matters and Right to Know matters.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

Annette Baker, Brecknock Township, thanked the Election Board for putting on the agenda to process the mail-in applications earlier, allowing for extra time to process applications sooner with the likelihood that there will be so many applications.

Agenda Items

1. Permanent Polling Place Change for the 2024 General Election

On the motion of Commissioner Santoni, seconded by Commissioner Leinbach, the Board approved the following permanent polling place change for the 2024 General Election.

Marion Township

From: Marion Township Building
420 Water Street
Stouchsburg, PA 19567

To: Marion Fire Company
4127 Conrad Weiser Parkway
Womelsdorf, PA 19567

2. Early Processing of Mail-in and Absentee Ballot Applications

Commissioner Rivera explained that, per the PA Election Code, the processing of mail-in and absentee ballot applications begins 50 days before an election, unless otherwise authorized by the Election Board due to operational need. Ms. Norton said Election Services has received more than 4,000 ballot applications so far, and therefore was asking the board to authorize the staff to begin processing.

Commissioner Rivera explained this allows the staff to process and approve applications within the SURE system so they can receive a ballot as soon as it is approved.

Commissioner Leinbach stressed that this action would not resolve the issue faced in the 2024 Primary that delayed the final approval of the ballot. That issue was related to ongoing court hearings for potential candidates. He said this is an issue that CCAP has pressed the legislature and governor about addressing so that voters have enough time to return ballots.

On the motion of Commissioner Leinbach, seconded by Commissioner Santoni, the board authorized the Office of Election Services to begin processing mail-in and absentee ballot applications as they are received, due to operational need.

Election Director's Report

Anne Norton encouraged voters to apply for their mail-in and absentee ballots now so they can receive their ballots in the first mailing. Voters can apply online through the Department of State's portal, which is linked on the County's website, or request a paper application from the elections office. She said today is the last day to circulate and file nomination papers for third party candidates.

She said there are still several other deadlines and milestones that will occur in the next several months before the ballot is finalized.

Ms. Norton encouraged voters who were concerned about getting their ballot in time to contact the elections office. The staff can check on the status of their application. Once the ballot is finalized, voters can also stop by the office to get their ballot over the counter."

She also noted that voters who provide an email address will receive notifications at each stage of the process.

Ms. Norton also noted that today is National Poll Worker recruitment day. She said anyone that's interested in working Election Day as a poll worker can apply online, or email or call the elections office.

Commissioner Rivera said that the County is also looking for interpreters and encouraged anyone who is bilingual to contact the Election Services office.

General Comments from the Board regarding current election-related issues

Commissioner Leinbach shared about recent conversations he had with individuals who were questioning various procedures. He said that even though he calmly shared facts with them, they still called him a liar. He asked voters to not merely believe something they see on social media or hear from other people, but to research matters themselves to find the facts.

Commissioner Santoni again said that voters should feel confident that the election system is safe and secure.

Commissioner Rivera said the County received a letter in relation to the discussion from the July 25 meeting about the removal of electors based on a list from a resident. Commissioner Rivera noted there were several questions from the letter, so he reiterated that no action was taken based solely on the list, but instead the staff reviewed the names on the list to confirm they were at the correct stage of the process. He said all the names on the list were eligible to be on the voter rolls at some point and that there were no names left to review.

Public Comment

Lazaro Castellon, Shillington Borough, thanked the Election Board for looking into the 1,100 names from the resident's request for removal. He said that by taking concerns seriously, the Board reaffirmed its commitment to transparency and thoroughness.

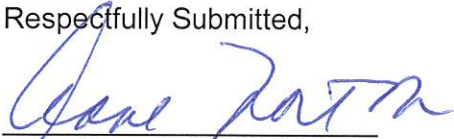
Jeffrey Wolfe, Brecknock Township, said he is in agreement with many who are deemed election deniers. He said he is against PA House Bill 847, which would allow prec canvassing of mail-in and absentee ballots to begin 7 days before the election. He said he believes allowing this could open the door to more fraud.

Abner Higginbotham, Oley Township, submitted an online comment. He said, "To address the concerns raised by Mr. Wolf and other, perhaps it is time to dispense with the secret ballot, or follow the example of third world countries and have every voter vote with their fingerprint."

Jon Miller, Bethel Township, submitted an online comment. He said, "Thank you Commissioner S. for explaining the abhorrent contents of that flyer and standing up for the truest of American values. In addition, thanks to our other 2 Commissioners for in general being fair and non partisan."

ADJOURNMENT 11:34 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Anne Norton, Chief Clerk