

**BERKS COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS
MEETING MINUTES
February 20, 2025 – 11:00 A.M.**

Michael S. Rivera, Chair
Christian Y. Leinbach, Vice Chair
Dante Santoni, Jr., Commissioner– not present
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 January 23, 2025, Election Board meeting as presented.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON AGENDA ITEMS

None.

Agenda Items

1. Polling Place Change for the 2025 Municipal Primary

Ms. Norton explained that the Bern Township Municipal Building had been under construction, so Victory Baptist Church served as a temporary polling place for Bern 1. The construction project is now complete, so the polling place can return to the Bern Township Municipal Building.

Commissioner Rivera thanked Victory Baptist Church for serving as a polling place location during the construction project.

On the motion of Commissioner Leinbach, seconded by Commissioner Rivera, the Board approved the following polling place change for the 2025 Municipal Primary.

Bern Township – Precinct 1 (Return to Permanent Location)

From: Victory Baptist Church
1059 Victory Circle
Reading, PA 19605

To: Bern Township Municipal Building
1069 Old Bernville Road
Reading, PA 19605

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

Ms. Norton said that by law, Election Services must wait 50 days before each election to begin processing mail-in and absentee ballot applications, unless otherwise approved by the Election Board due to operational need. She said the office has received about 10,000 applications thus far and therefore was requesting permission to begin processing them now, instead of waiting until March 31.

On the motion of Commissioner Leinbach, seconded by Commissioner Rivera, 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.

3. Drop Box Location Discussion

Ms. Norton explained that the lobby of the Agricultural Center is expected to be under construction during the Municipal Election in November, so the County is looking to move the drop box to another location. She noted that the decision before the Board was whether to also move the drop box for the upcoming primary, to help voters adjust to the new location.

On the motion of Commissioner Leinbach, seconded by Commissioner Rivera, the Board approved moving the drop box from the Agricultural Center to the Reading Regional Airport, effective for the May 2025 Municipal Primary.

Commissioner Rivera noted that moving the drop box for the primary would allow voters to become familiar with the change. He said this also will allow the Board to have a full election year of information about how much the drop box is utilized at the temporary location versus the Agricultural Center to make future decisions about where it should be placed.

4. Election Day Additional County Staff Workers

Ms. Norton said Election Services was asking the Board to approve of the plan for additional County staff working on Election Day. She said the request was similar to prior elections, with 67 employees assigned to work at the SAM building helping with the processing of mail-in and absentee ballots, 16 in the Call Center and 20 rovers. The employees would receive their normal pay plus the \$200 poll worker pay and paid training as needed.

On the motion of Commissioner Leinbach, seconded by Commissioner Rivera, the Board approved the request for additional County staff workers for Election Day for the Municipal Primary on May 20, 2025.

Commissioner Leinbach noted that he will be attending a National Association of Counties (NACO) legislative conference in Washington D.C. on March 2. He said he would be doing a presentation with a Philadelphia County Commissioner asking NACO to support a change in the law that would allow the pay given to poll workers to be non-taxable. He said Berks pays poll workers the maximum allowed in the Election Code.

Election Director's Report

Ms. Norton shared that the period to circulate and file nomination petitions began on Tuesday, February 18 and will end on March 11. She said prospective candidates can drop off their petition paperwork in the Election Services office during regular hours, Monday through Friday, 8:00 am to 5:00 pm. She added that there are detailed instructions, links to all necessary documents and the unofficial list of offices on the Election Services website.

General Comments from the Board regarding current election-related issues

Commissioner Rivera reminded everyone that Election Services sent out roughly 76,000 permanent mail-in and absentee ballot applications. He highlighted that voters who wish to receive mail-in ballots for the full calendar year should return that application.

Public Comment

Dave Weaver, Cumru Township, said that when he voted in person during the 2024 General Election, his selections were not showing up correctly on the machine. He said he would select the rectangle for his choice, but it would instead select the candidate in the box above. He said it took him several attempts to get it to work correctly. He said he did not report it to any poll workers that day, but later filed a complaint through the Department of State online hotline, but never received a response.

Jeffrey Wolfe, Brecknock Township, reiterated concerns he shared at prior Election Board meetings related to the potential of voters who had provisional ballots denied attempting to "double vote." He said he now has new requests for the names of all voters who had to vote a provisional ballot because they had already signed the poll book or had returned a mail-in ballot and then had the provisional rejected. He also asked how many ballots were set aside because the voter's signature was determined to not be genuine and how those ballots were processed.

Commissioner Leinbach responded to Mr. Weaver's comments, noting that what he described sounded like a calibration issue on that machine and that Mr. Weaver was able to correct it before printing his ballot card. He noted that the printed ballot card is a crucial part of the process because it allows the voter to review that the selections were correct before casting the ballot into the tabulator. He said it is a very well thought out system that then has a paper ballot backup.

Ms. Norton agreed, saying Election Services encourages voters to review the paper ballot before putting it into the tabulator. She said all voting machines are tested and calibrated before each election so if voters notice any issues like this, they should inform a poll worker so that the machine can be recalibrated.

ADJOURNMENT 11:22 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Anne Norton, Chief Clerk

