

DeKalb County Board of Registration and Elections

Meeting Minutes

January 9, 2025
Start Time: 5:02 p.m.
End Time: 6:05 p.m.

Board Attendees: Karli Swift, Chair
Anthony Lewis
Susan Motter

Other Attendees: Keisha Smith, Executive Director
Terry Phillips, Deputy County Attorney
Michael Petty, Assistant County Attorney

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chair Swift called the Board of Registration and Elections meeting to order at 5:02 p.m. Ms. Austin read the roll by calling each board member by name. A quorum was met.

Motion by Ms. Motter, seconded by Mr. Lewis, to approve the agenda with the amendments of moving item 6A and 6B to items for discussion and to add the scheduling of hearing dates for 2024 challenges to items for decision. The motion carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by Ms. Motter, seconded by Mr. Lewis, to approve the minutes of the December 9 scheduled meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Austin read the rules for public comment:

Public comments may be made in person or submitted by sending an email of one printed page or less at a minimum font of 12 to electionspubliccmnt@dekalbcountyga.gov which must be received between 35 and 5 minutes before the scheduled start of the meeting. The body of your email must include your first and last name. By submitting an email for public comment, you agree to have your name and the email broadcast on the UStream and entered into the record and minutes. The DeKalb Board of Registration and Elections reserves the right, at the DeKalb Board of Registration and Elections' sole discretion, to (1) add your email to the record/minutes without reading any of it into the broadcast or (2) read all or a portion of your email into the record/minutes. All public comments will be limited to 2 minutes. Abusive, profane, or derogatory language, holding up signs, clapping, yelling, standing or laying in the aisles to show support for or opposition to a speaker will not be permitted, but a show of hands or quietly standing in place will be permitted to show support for or opposition to a speaker's position.

The following citizens provided public comment:

- Elizabeth Shackelford

- Konrad Hayashi
- Karen Davenport
- Gail Lee
- Bill Henderson
- Bola Tillman
- Janet Grant
- Bethann Frillman
- Liz Throop

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

A) Director's Report

Director Smith reported on registration activities and statistics, the Secretary of State's 2025 elections calendar, ongoing election activities, personnel, facilities, financial updates, outreach, stakeholder, website, and training updates. She noted on the SOS's calendar that there was the potential for up to 8 elections but no municipality had requested a special election to be held in March. She stated that in addition to the municipal elections and the special statewide election slated for 2025, VRE would be facilitating an administrative committee election for the DeKalb County finance department. Director Smith advised that the fiscal year 2025 budget had been submitted and was under review with the Board of Commissioners and that she would provide updates and the final approved budget for the department. She shared that the department received approval from the BOC to procure a mobile unit which would be used in the community to enhance voter education and outreach activities which would be a tremendous resource to assist DeKalb County voters to continue to be super voters. She stated that as a part of the commitment to delivering excellence in elections, the team prioritized training for poll workers, staff, seasonal election workers, as well as the community and was actively developing a comprehensive outreach and training plan. Lastly, Director Smith advised that the website redevelopment was underway along with the learning management system, which was slated to launch in the spring.

B) Precinct Boundary Changes & Polling Place Consolidations

Chair Swift stated that the purpose of the proposed changes was to be more efficient and align with other counties as DeKalb has a significant number of precincts which creates other issues. She further stated that it was the Board's intention to decide on these changes at the next regular meeting in February and that they would work with the community to get feedback as well.

Director Smith stated that in the commitment to deliver the gold standard in elections, the department was proposing a series of strategic changes to optimize polling locations. She said that these updates were part of a broader effort to enhance operational efficiency, maximize resources and ensure an equitable and accessible voting experience for all DeKalb electors. She further stated that over the past several years, the department had gathered data and examined locations that were under-utilized, difficult to access, or had a lack of essential amenities. Director Smith said that by realigning the polling sites, the aim was to provide voters and staff with suitable locations that met everyone's needs. Lastly, she stated that the review ensured that 1- voters impacted by any changes would be re-assigned to nearby polling locations that could accommodate them without adding significant travel burdens and 2- that all areas of DeKalb County would experience minimal and proportional adjustments. She requested Elections Supervisor, Jay Catherwood, provide additional

details on the precinct boundary changes and polling place consolidations and answer subsequent questions from the Board.

Mr. Catherwood advised that DeKalb had significantly smaller precincts than other comparable counties which presented the issue of having limited facilities that could be utilized as polling places. He stated that there were 3 different types of changes that were being requested. First, there were 19 precincts that were being requested to be combined, mostly to address facility issues. Second, that there were 4 precincts that were currently combined with other precincts, however the request was to change the combinations. Lastly, he advised that there were 6 proposals for precinct boundary changes: 3 due to annexations and 3 requests to divide precincts. Mr. Catherwood further stated that it was a best practice to re-draw the precinct boundaries when annexations occurred and that the proposal would also have to go before the Board of Commissioners if it were to be approved by the Board of Registrations and Elections.

Chair Swift clarified for the public, the difference between the terms “precinct” and “polling place” and further clarified which requests were changes to polling places and which were changes to precincts.

Ms. Motter shared concerns regarding ADA compliance specifically for the elementary schools. She stated that she would need to be convinced that there were not ADA compliance issues at Rainbow Elementary, Evansdale Elementary, Rowland Elementary, Kelley Lake Elementary, and Chapel Hill Elementary and that they would be able to accommodate the additional voters.

Mr. Lewis asked Director Smith what her plan was to contact voters regarding these changes if they were to be approved by the Board. Director Smith replied that a robust communications plan would be implemented consisting of direct mail to impacted voters, the publication of notices in the legal organ, posting signage at the former polling locations, and a comprehensive outreach plan consisting of social media, press releases, email communications, and utilization of the mobile outreach unit when it arrived.

Chair Swift asked if alternate facilities needed to be identified at this time to resolve the concerns at the elementary schools. Director Smith replied that the department had looked for other facilities and recommendations from the community were welcomed. She noted that in the past, there had been issues with private facilities complying with VRE requests and requirements. Chair Swift requested a community meeting to be held so input from the public could be received. Director Smith replied affirmatively. Chair Swift stated that this was something that had been discussed and deferred multiple times during her tenure on the Board, but the intention was to make changes this year.

C) Legislative Updates

Mr. Petty advised that the legislative session was scheduled to begin on Monday, January 13th and would last through Thursday, April 3rd and that the law department would provide updates as things developed throughout the session. He stated that each year the Board of Commissioners adopts a legislative agenda, which lists the priorities that the DeKalb delegation was asked to work on, and although it had not been adopted yet, he wanted to provide an overview of the preliminary agenda. Mr. Petty advised that first on the agenda was to support extended early voting through the weekend immediately preceding the November General Election, any primary election and any runoff election and amend state election law to return to the law in effect in 2020 regarding the schedule for early voting, the locations allowed for drop boxes and the time for certification of elections. He

then stated that there were several support statements on the agenda, which are more general priorities. He then listed the support statements; the first, to support the implementation of a countywide polling place program, next to support the suspension of code enforcement sign cleanup activities and county and city right of ways up to 30 days prior to the election, and last, to request the State to issue voter precinct cards for all registered voters at least 14 days prior to Election Day, and upon redistricting for precinct cards to be issued to all affected voters.

ITEMS FOR DECISION

A) 2024 Challenge Hearing Dates

Chair Swift stated that 5 challenges had been received; Gail Lee submitted challenges on September 3rd and 19th and Bill Henderson submitted challenges on August 19th, 26th, and 28th. She further stated that there were requirements around notices for challenges, so the hearings needed to be scheduled. She asked Mr. Lewis if there was a motion he wanted to make around scheduling hearings.

Motion by Mr. Lewis to direct the staff to prepare the information needed to hold a hearing on these challenges a week from today. The motion was not seconded.

Chair Swift suggested to hold the hearings at the February scheduled meeting.

Mr. Lewis said that his concern was that the hearings needed to be held as soon as possible. Further discussion ensued.

Motion by Ms. Motter, seconded by Mr. Lewis to schedule the pending probable cause hearings for the next meeting and direct staff to attempt to hold a special called meeting earlier. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Phillips announced that Mr. Petty would be the new representative from the law department for VRE. He stated that Mr. Petty is an experienced lawyer in local government and had worked with VRE for a while. Mr. Phillips congratulated Mr. Petty for completing his first BRE meeting.

BOARD COMMENTS

Mr. Lewis provided well wishes for the new year.

Ms. Motter said happy new year and thanked public for their attendance, Director Smith and the staff, and Mr. Catherwood for his work on the polling place changes.

Chair Swift closed by providing well wishes for 2025.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Mr. Lewis, seconded by Ms. Motter, to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 6:05 p.m.