

DeKalb County Board of Registration and Elections

Meeting Minutes

February 13, 2025
Start Time: 4:41 p.m.
End Time: 6:46 p.m.

Board Attendees: Karli Swift, Chair
Vasu Abhiraman, Vice-Chair
Nancy Jester
Anthony Lewis
Susan Motter

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

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chair Swift called the Board of Registration and Elections meeting to order at 4:41 p.m. Ms. Austin read the roll by calling each board member by name. A quorum was met.

Motion by Mr. Lewis, seconded by Vice-Chair Abhiraman, to approve the agenda. The motion carried unanimously.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by Mr. Lewis, seconded by Vice-Chair Abhiraman, to approve the minutes of the January 9 scheduled meeting and January 16 special called 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:

APPROVED 03/13/2025

- Betsy Shackelford
- Marisa Pyle
- Cheryl Dudley
- Gail Lee
- Clint Monroe

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

A) Director's Report

Director Smith reported on registration activities and statistics, ongoing election activities, outreach, website, training, and budget updates. She noted that each municipality confirmed that there was not a need for a special election to be held in March; however, VRE would be facilitating an administrative committee election for the DeKalb County finance department on April 1st. Director Smith reported on the budget and advised that of the \$16M that was requested, \$13.9M was recommended to the Board of Commissioners with the reduction primarily coming from the mobile unit for outreach efforts that was previously approved by the BOC and the 6 salaries of the new full-time positions that were requested. She stated that she would advocate and work with the administration to add those items back to the recommended budget for approval by the BOC.

Mr. Lewis asked for clarification on the exclusion of the 6 requested positions from the recommended budget and if a reduction in overtime was expected due to the new positions. Director Smith replied that she provided the necessary information for the new positions, however, the salaries were not included by finance in the recommended budget and that she would go back and ask for them again. She also stated that there would still be a requirement for overtime but not as much as the department was continuing to build internal operations.

Ms. Jester asked if the 2024 budget had been reconciled. Director Smith replied that 2024 expenses paid through mid-January 2025 would be charged to the 2024 budget and the fully reconciled report would be available at the end of the month. Ms. Jester discussed the revisions to the budget request with Director Smith and asked that she let the Board know if she needed their assistance advocating for funding.

B) Legislative Updates

Mr. Petty advised that the final day of the legislative session would be April 4th and that the only bill of note was HB215, named The Voter List Integrity Act. He stated that it had been assigned to the House Government Affairs Committee and that the legislation prohibits the Secretary of State, the Election Superintendent or any other state entity from joining or participating in any multi-state voter list maintenance organization that contacts unregistered individuals with the intent to register them or share voter data, except for the purpose of removing deceased, duplicate, and otherwise ineligible voters. Discussion ensued surrounding the legislation.

ITEMS FOR DECISION

A) Precinct Boundary Changes & Polling Place Consolidations

Chair Swift began by providing an overview of the decision item and reminded the Board that this item was on the agenda at the last scheduled meeting and was tabled to receive feedback from the public prior to deciding.

Director Smith stated that the department led a robust outreach effort to engage the county's residents and gather critical feedback. She advised that based on data analysis from public feedback, responses were categorized into the following themes: communication, parking, and overcrowding. Director Smith went on to speak to each of the themes and noted that the overall sentiment was positive. She then presented the precinct boundary changes and polling place consolidations by going through each proposed change individually.

Ms. Jester reported that she received feedback from the mayor of one of the municipalities and asked if that feedback was considered. Director Smith replied affirmatively.

Mr. Lewis thanked Director Smith for reporting on Election Day turnout as that was one of his concerns. He asked how the proposed changes would affect staffing levels on Election Day. Director Smith replied that staffing levels would be adjusted accordingly based on the new registered voter population levels. She further stated that there would be some attrition as the number of polling locations would be reduced. Mr. Lewis expressed concerns on the potential travel burdens and wait times for voters. He recalled that in the past, a formula was used to calculate the maximum number of voters a polling location could support before long wait times occurred and asked if this formula was used in the analysis of these changes.

Ms. Motter advised that several of the elementary schools were removed from the proposal, noting that most of those were due to accessibility concerns that had all either been resolved or were being resolved. She asked if the department could work with the high schools to alleviate potential parking issues on election days. Ms. Motter then produced a piece of mail that she received that looked similar to a precinct card and inquired if the department could print precinct cards on different color paper to limit voter confusion. Director Smith replied that the Secretary of the State procured the vendor that prints the precinct cards for the state but she would look into Ms. Motter's request.

Vice-Chair Abhiraman expressed his concerns on the calculations of the change in distance between the current polling locations and the proposed new polling locations. He asked if the precinct names would change as they had previously aligned with the polling location names. Director Smith replied that precinct name changes would be proposed at a later date.

Chair Swift asked what factors were considered when preparing this proposal. Director Smith replied that accessibility, parking, the physical space of the polling location, bathroom and water accessibility, and electrical capacity were all considered. Additionally, Director Smith reported that she had a meeting with a member of the DeKalb County Board of Education scheduled for the following day to discuss options. Chair Swift asked if a formula was used to determine the allocation of equipment and resources per precinct. Deputy Director Henry replied that the number of active registered voters and voter turnout were used to determine the equipment allotment. Chair Swift asked if additional early voting facilities could be explored to ensure that there were more options to vote. Director Smith replied that additional options would be explored.

Motion by Ms. Motter, seconded by Vice-Chair Abhiraman to approve the polling location consolidations as presented by staff with changes to Stone Mountain and allow staff to determine the appropriate polling place.

Mr. Lewis stated that he preferred to take the motions individually as he was not in favor of approving Toney Elementary, Winters Chapel, and Panola Way Elementary. Further discussion ensued.

Substitute motion by Mr. Lewis, seconded by Ms. Jester to approve the polling location consolidations as presented by staff with changes to Stone Mountain and allow staff to determine the appropriate polling place with the amendment of removing Toney Elementary, Winters Chapel and Panola Way Elementary from the proposal. The motion passed unanimously.

Motion by Vice-Chair Abhiraman, seconded by Ms. Motter to approve the Winters Chapel polling location change.

Vice-Chair Abhiraman said it's a small turnout on Election Day and that the change made sense.

Ms. Jester asked Mr. Lewis the basis of his objection. Mr. Lewis replied that his main concern was the travel burden on the voters. Ms. Jester asked if any public feedback was received on this location. Director Smith replied that she did not recall receiving specific feedback on Winters Chapel and elaborated on prior election day turn out.

The motion passed 3-2 with Mr. Lewis and Ms. Jester voting nay.

Motion by Vice-Chair Abhiraman, seconded by Ms. Motter to approve the Panola Way Elementary proposed change.

Chair Swift stated that Panola Way Elementary currently votes out of precinct and that this change would be moving the polling place back inside the precinct boundaries and that the total number of voters was still reasonable, so the change made sense.

Mr. Lewis said that he thought it was reasonable to move the polling location back inside the precinct boundary.

The motion passed unanimously.

Vice-Chair Abhiraman asked Director Smith for the rationale for the changes to Toney Elementary. Director Smith replied that it was due to equity as it related to the number of people voting in one location and the resources that were utilized to ensure an excellent voter experience.

Motion by Ms. Motter, seconded by Vice-Chair Abhiraman to find that the precinct boundary changes recommended by staff promote the convenience of the electors and the public interest, and recommend that the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners adopt the precinct boundary changes as presented by staff. The motion passed unanimously.

B) Polling Place Change

Director Smith reported that the department was notified that the Doraville Civic Center was being torn down, so the department proposed permanently moving the Doraville North and Doraville South polling locations from the Doraville Civic Center to the Forest Fleming Arena.

Motion by Ms. Motter, seconded by Ms. Jester to move the Doraville N precinct designated as DA and Doraville S precinct designated as DB from the Doraville Civic Center to the Forest Fleming Arena and take such action to post the required notice of proposed polling place changes. The motion passed unanimously.

BOARD COMMENTS

Ms. Jester apologized for being late due to traffic conditions and expressed appreciation in seeing all of her colleagues, the public, and the lawyers.

Mr. Lewis thanked the staff for putting everything together and expressed his appreciation for the amount of work done to assist with decision-making.

Ms. Motter expressed appreciation to the staff and thanked the public for being present and providing feedback on the changes. She then clarified that when she mentioned earlier that there were several background conversations around the polling place changes, those were one-on-one conversations that she had with the Board Chair and the Executive Director. She stated that no meetings were held, and no votes were taken. Ms. Motter said that she wanted to make sure that the ADA issues received attention.

Vice-Chair Abhiraman thanked the public, the department, and the lawyers for the work that was put into the proposal. He acknowledged Mr. Phillips for his diligent work and thanked everyone for staying.

Chair Swift thanked the staff and the community and wished everyone a great evening.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Ms. Jester, seconded by Mr. Lewis, to adjourn. The motion carried unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 6:46 p.m.