

DeKalb County Board of Registration and Elections

Meeting Minutes

December 12, 2022
Start Time: 12:00 p.m.
End Time: 1:22 p.m.

Board Attendees: Chair Dele Lowman Smith
Anthony Lewis
Susan Motter
Karli Swift

Other Attendees: Keisha Smith, Executive Director
Terry Phillips, Deputy County Attorney
Irene Vander Els, Assistant County Attorney

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chair Lowman Smith called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m. Mr. Catherwood read the roll by calling each board member by name. Mr. Lewis, Chair Lowman Smith, Ms. Motter, and Ms. Swift were in attendance.

Motion by Ms. Swift, seconded by Ms. Motter, to approve the agenda subject to two modifications. The motion carried by a vote of 4-0.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Motion by Ms. Motter, seconded by Ms. Swift, to approve the minutes of the November 15 meeting subject to the inclusion of additional comments received by email. The motion carried by a vote of 3-0-1. Mr. Lewis abstained because he had not been present at the meeting.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mr. Catherwood read the rules for public comment:

Public comments may be made in person or submitted by sending an email of one page or less to electionspubliccmnt@dekalbcountyga.gov which must be received between 12:00 P.M. and 12:30 P.M. on the day of the meeting. The body of your email must include your first and last name, followed by your address. Abusive, profane, or derogatory language will not be permitted. By submitting an email for public comment, you agree to have your name, address 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.

The following citizens provided public comment:

- Liz Throop
- Naomi Bock

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- Haqiqa Bolling
- Foris Webb III

Two comments were also received by email between 12:00 and 12:30. Their contents are included at the end of the minutes.

ITEMS FOR DECISION

A) Certification of the December 6, 2022 General Runoff Election

Motion by Ms. Swift, seconded by Mr. Lewis, to certify the election results. The motion carried 4-0.

B) 2023 Meeting Schedule

Motion by Mr. Lewis, seconded by Ms. Motter, to approve the posted meeting schedule.

Director Smith explained that the proposed calendar included scheduled meetings on the second Thursday of each month at 4:30 p.m. with the exception of months when the dates might need to be changed to accommodate certification of elections. There was currently no election scheduled for March, but the calendar allowed for the possibility of one arising.

Mr. Lewis asked if the calendar would be sent to the mailing list. The Director responded that it would.

The Board discussed whether it would be better to leave the March meeting on the 27th or move it back to the second Thursday if no March election was scheduled.

Motion by Mr. Lewis to approve the proposed calendar with the provision that the Board may change the March meeting to the second Thursday in March if appropriate. The motion was seconded by Ms. Motter. The motion carried 4-0.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

A) Director's Report

Director Smith presented the post-election report for the December 6 runoff.

Mr. Lewis asked what the common reasons were for rejecting election day provisional ballots. The Director responded that the most common rejections were out of precinct before 5:00.

B) Lessons Learned from the 2022 Elections

Ms. Swift proposed a meeting to consider the lessons learned from the 2022 election cycle. She suggested discussing advocacy to fix areas of SB 202 impacting voters; expansion of advance voting; voter education surrounding mail ballots; and unfunded mandates.

Ms. Motter commented on voter frustration that she had seen surrounding frequent polling place changes. She explained that the availability of a facility was outside the department's control; but she stated that the department would be looking for more permanent solutions for facilities that seemed to be unavailable too frequently.

Ms. Motter also commented on the need for full time communications staff; ways to speed up the check-in process during advance voting; and reaching out to community groups to design new signs.

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Mr. Lewis asked members of the public who wanted to see increased services from the department to visit Board of Commission meetings to advocate for funding those initiatives. He mentioned staffing levels and staff pay in particular.

Chair Lowman Smith commented that 2023 would be an opportunity to focus on process improvements that had been difficult to make during the busy 2022 election season. The Chair also called for support from the state commensurate with the demands made by state law and state policy.

Director Smith gave an overview of public communications efforts during the election. She also discussed the budget process which was underway. She announced an upcoming risk-limiting audit of the runoff.

Chair Lowman Smith highlighted that the department had already conducted two risk-limiting audits this year and both had found no errors.

BOARD COMMENTS

Ms. Swift thanked the staff, the Director, the county government, and the public. She asked for the public to advocate for their priorities to the County Commission and the General Assembly.

Mr. Lewis asked the Board to consider allowing members who are out of town to attend meetings virtually. He asked the department to use its email distribution list to keep the public up to date. He thanked the staff and volunteers for their hard work. He recommended increased efforts to educate the public on election day procedures.

Ms. Motter thanked the voters, community leaders, the staff, her colleagues on the Board, and volunteers for the Vote Review Panels. She asked the public to continue advocating for their priorities.

Chair Lowman Smith thanked the staff and the poll workers and commented on the difficulty of beginning advance voting a week after certification of the general election. She thanked other departments around the county for their assistance. She reiterated the need for support from the General Assembly and the Secretary of State, noting that the counties were required to use hardware, software, and programming provided by the state and criticizing obstacles and administrative failures at the state level. She commented that although enthusiasm had been high, there were some who had been prevented from voting and called for changes to the law. She called for the state to help fund the items it dictated. She looked forward to the Board's opportunity to advocate for legislative changes and asked the public to do the same. She concluded by thanking the Board and the Director.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Ms. Motter, seconded by Mr. Lewis, to adjourn. The motion carried 4-0. The meeting was adjourned at 1:22 p.m.

EMAILED COMMENTS

A) Judy Sophianopoulos

I would like to thank the Board for doing one of the most difficult jobs in the world: managing an election efficiently and with concern for the voters.

Thank you Board officers and members, poll managers and poll workers for making it possible for thousands of voters to vote and have their votes counted accurately despite the shortened runoff period.

I wish everyone a Happy Holiday Season.

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B) Hannah Joy, Crystal Greer, and Britt Burns

We hope this letter finds you well. We first want to thank you for your continued service to support Georgia voters across the county.

We are writing to you on behalf of Protect the Vote, a nonpartisan nonprofit organization which works year-round to mobilize voters and increase civic engagement. We are based in DeKalb County and our target areas are multiple counties in the Metro Atlanta area, including DeKalb.

We want to take this moment to provide you with constructive feedback from the 2022 senate runoff election. We all saw the long lines wrapped around buildings during early voting which fell on one of the coldest weeks of the year. On one hand, the lines represented the resilience, determination and passion among voters to make sure their votes were cast despite the circumstances. On the other hand, the lines represented a flawed system with serious issues that need to be addressed because no one should have to wait almost 3 hours in line to vote, especially in the cold. There were little toddlers waiting, mothers who were 9 months pregnant, elderly senior citizens under 75 and many others. We need to take a hard look and examine how we can prevent this from happening in the future.

We recognize the impact felt from SB202 had major effects this voting cycle, and we also recognize that both the state and county had a significant role in the way elections were conducted.

Several DeKalb County voters approached our team with grievances and concerns and we would like to hear directly from you regarding the following questions:

- What is your response to the long lines during runoff early voting?
- We understand there were budget cuts in the county which led to fewer poll workers working the polls. While not solely responsible, this in turn contributed to long 2 hour + waiting times. Do you all plan to restore some of that funding?
- Poll workers in DeKalb are one of the lowest paid poll workers in the state from what we understand. Are you all considering raising their pay? We also want to take this opportunity to thank all the poll workers for their hard work and doing what they could to execute in a voting system that needs tremendous improvement.
- There were many people ready and willing to work the polls who either trained and did not get placed or never got trained after completing the application. How do y'all plan to strengthen the poll worker placement system?
- There were at least 100 voters who went to the wrong DeKalb precinct on Election Day, causing them to have to travel again creating inconveniences, especially for families with little ones, seniors and individuals with a disability. What outreach measures regarding My Voter Page and other tools are in place to rectify this moving forward? And how do you all plan to notify people more efficiently when their precincts change?
- Can you all commit to offering and expanding Saturday and Sunday voting moving forward because clearly there is a huge desire for both of those days as those days saw some of the highest numbers of voting?

We would like to work closer together to see how we as community members, organizations and leaders can improve the voting system in DeKalb County and across other counties in the state of Georgia. While there were record-breaking early voting turnouts to celebrate, there was also lots of frustration and

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disappointment among many voters. We recognize that many of you are doing the best you can with what you have, and our aim is to build upon the foundation to strengthen the process collectively.

Thank you for your time, service and commitment to DeKalb County and Georgia. We look forward to hearing back and will continue to be in touch.