

Commissioners

MARISEL A. HERNANDEZ, *Chair*
WILLIAM J. KRESSE, *Commissioner/Secretary*
JUNE A. BROWN, *Commissioner*

CHARLES HOLIDAY, JR., *Executive Director*



Board of Election Commissioners for the City of Chicago
Minutes of the
Regular Board Meeting
April 25, 2023, 10:00 a.m.
69 West Washington Street, 8th Floor, Chicago, Illinois 60602

Board Members:

Marisel A. Hernandez, Chairwoman
William J. Kresse, Commissioner/Secretary
June A. Brown, Commissioner

Staff:

Charles Holiday, Jr., Executive Director
Adam Lasker, General Counsel
Max Bever, Director of Public Information
Kimico Mehta, Community Services
Lance Gough, Consultant
Oscar Peterson, videographer
Trish Sheehy

Guests:

Helene Gabelnick, League of Women Voters of Chicago (LWV Chicago)
Clare J. Tobin, Illinois Ballot Integrity
Lora Chamberlain, Clean Count Cook County
Caroline Koclanes, UChiVotes
Shannon Dye, UChiVotes
Tessa Weinberg, WBEZ
A.D. Quig, Chicago Tribune

- I. Call to Order: The Chair called the meeting to order at 10:07 a.m.
- II. Roll Call: All members were present.
- III. Consideration of Agenda: The agenda was approved as presented.
- IV. Approval of Minutes:
Commissioner Brown made one motion to approve the Minutes listed below, which were itemized by the Chair. Commissioner Kresse seconded the motion.
 - A. Minutes of the Regular Board meeting of January 24, 2023
 - B. Minutes of the Organizational and Regular Board meeting of February 28, 2023
 - C. Minutes of the Canvassing Board Meeting of February 28, 2023 which concluded on March 15, 2023
 - D. Minutes of the Special Board Meeting of April 4, 2023

The motion passed by 3:0 vote of the Board.

V. Executive Director's Report:

Executive Director Charles Holiday provided the following report:

Mr. Holiday thanked the following: Assistant Executive Director Sandra Aspera for all the hard work she put in the last few elections with the staff members and getting things done; Max Bever, the Board's Director of Public Information for all that he did and does in the media and getting the word out to our voters; General Counsel Adam Lasker and Legal Counsel Joan Agnew for what they do to keep us in compliance with the law; Clint Hurde, Christopher Tomecek, John Powell, and the Pre-Election Voting and Logistics Department for all they do with the Early Voting and Jail voting; Brandon Pickens, Christopher Turner and our staff in Polling Places; Karen Chin and our Human Resources Department for their help in finding workers and poll workers; Matthew Lin and our IT Department; Al Chase, Pawel Faryjewicz and Lance Gough for our ballot preparation; Shelia Wetzel-Johnson and Sandra Garner in our Telecommunications Department for keeping our lines open when we're flooded with calls; Audra Lewicki and Steve Cieslicki and others in our Community Services Department and our Language Departments for the job that they do; Paulina Mysliwiec and Yulinda Cal for the staff that they recruit for Judges and Election Coordinators; Jim Carli, Delilah Smith, Carol Triplett and the Registration Department who keep our files together so that the voters know where they should vote; Shawn Simpson of our Mailroom, who on a day-to-day basis goes twice, sometimes three times a day to the post office to get our regular mail and the ballots; Julio Pantoja and his team, our main guys for running VBM ballots through the Agilis machine to make sure they were all in the system; the warehouse folks who kept our equipment together; Keith Carter, Derrick Hurde and Deana Spires did a great job keeping our equipment intact; the Board's many vendors who assisted us in getting this election off; and last but not least, Mr. Holiday thanked his two Administrative Assistants, Kathy Ross and Cassandra Molina, along with Myrna Webb, the Administrative Assistant to Assistant Executive Director Sandra Aspera.

Our staff has started having debriefing meetings, going over those things that worked and improving on those that didn't work so well.

The Chair thanked Mr. Holiday for his appreciation of these individuals and staff. She always says that we're only as good as our team. They're the ones that make us look good and thank God we have a great team behind us. As Mr. Holiday stated, with our stewardship, they get the job done.

A. Assistant Executive Director's Report: Mr. Holiday explained that Ms. Aspera has some matters to attend to and will not be attending today's meeting.

B. Public Information Director's Report:

Director Max Bever provided the following report:

Mr. Bever echoed the Executive Director thoughts and thanked the hundreds of staff members and thousands of poll workers who made both the February and April Municipal Elections a smooth and orderly process for our city's voters.

A special thank you to our Early Voting and Vote-By-Mail teams, who were under tremendous pressure under a nearly impossible timeline between Feb 28th and April 4th, and yet broke new records for both Voting-By-Mail and Early Voting in our Municipal Elections. For example, we had more than 30,000 people Early Voting in one day - Monday, April 3rd - an all-time record for Early Voting in our Municipal Elections.

Together with our Community Services team, we worked with media to secure hundreds of stories with important election information.

Mr. Bever was proud to say that for the past two elections our advertising budget spent nearly 70% on non-English publications, as well as on digital ads.

Now that we are past four elections in less than a year, we are moving forward with our next big Communications project. We're moving forward with overhauling our ChicagoElections.gov website throughout this summer.

We released a website survey to gather information and feedback from Chicago's voters on their preferences and needs. The survey is now live. Our purchasing team has released a Request for Information (RFI) for qualified vendors through the next week. These two steps will help us build an RFP to be released in mid-May, with a final decision on a vendor in late June. Ideally, we will have a new website live by early Fall.

We continue to prepare our budgets ahead of the next election season.

We have a lot of work to do in the next few months and through the Summer, but now that we have passed through four elections in less than a year, we've got some time to plan. We are looking forward to doing so.

The Chair thanked Mr. Bever for all the work that he has done, stating that the communications outreach was very good during these past three election cycles. She pointed out that she and Mr. Bever talk often and are always looking to see what else we can do to improve Communications. She added that we are always looking for suggestions.

Mr. Bever thanked the Chair and added that he had forgotten one last important historical element. While our Municipal Elections see lower turnouts than our other elections, the number of ballots cast in this past election, just over 613,000, is the most ballots cast from a Municipal Election since 1987, that is, since the Harold Washington years. So, we did see a better turnout than in previous election cycles for these two Municipal Elections.

Commissioner Brown echoed what Mr. Bever, Mr. Holiday and Mr. Lasker said, and she specifically wanted to thank Max. Because of his outreach and the responsiveness of his staff, there are several people who are now better informed and connected with us. Ms. Gabelnick of the League of Women Voters is always connected with us. Commissioner Brown knows personally that Mr. Bever reached out to some groups she had mentioned to him and she thanked him for that.

Mr. Bever said that he and the Executive Director think the future looks bright heading into 2024.

VI. Old Business

- A. Infrastructure Projects and Changes in Election Administration – nothing to report.
- B. Electronic Poll Books - Mr. Holiday stated that we're working on an RFP-RFI for new e-pollbooks with a timeline indicating vendors presentations around July or August.
- C. Voting Equipment – nothing to report.
- D. Legislation:

General Counsel Lasker reported:

This week our office, in conjunction with the Office of the County Clerk, submitted a letter to the legislative leadership in support of legislative initiatives to allow emailing ballots for overseas voting, to allow certain notices to be sent via email rather than by a personal

service by the sheriff, to simplify Vote-by-Mail certification language, to increase the fees for statutory Discovery Recounts from \$10.00 per precinct, and to require security deposits for Election Contests.

There are a few other pending bills that we're monitoring including a bill to institute Ranked Choice Voting for the Presidential Primaries.

Again, there's another bill pending to make General Election Day a State holiday. There was the law recently but there was a sunset clause on that legislation.

There are two bills pending, Senate Bill 2304 and House Bill 2903, which would make permanent the ability to use the Universal Vote Centers on Election Day.

Finally, there are two other bills of note. One would have the State Board of Elections reimburse the County for the cost of up to \$50 per election judge if the judge is paid more than \$100 per day, which they are here. The other bill is Senate Bill 2306 that would change the date of the petition filing for candidates. The current time period is 106 to 113 days before the election, this would push it back by 28 days to beginning 141 days before the election. This would essentially be giving an extra month for Electoral Board decisions, something this Board has been asking for, for some time.

Mr. Lasker said it looks like all bills have been assigned to committee so they may become part of an omnibus bill by Spring or Summer.

VII. New Business

A. Approval of contract amendment and extension with Runbeck Election Services, Inc.

Mr. Lasker noted that the Manager of the division that uses the Runbeck services, Clinton Hurde, is present at today's meeting if the Board has any questions. Mr. Lasker continued to present the item to the Board.

Runbeck is the vendor that provides the software, maintenance and support, and training for our two Agilis Vote-by-Mail sorting and processing machines. We have had at least one Agilis machine since about 2016. We obtained the second machine in 2020, when we anticipated the massive influx of Vote-By-Mail ballots due to the pandemic. With Vote-by-Mail numbers remaining high, we continue to need two machines. This amendment and extension would extend the service agreement and software licensing for up to four years for a grand total of \$272,433.30 for four years.

Commissioner Kresse moved to approve the contract amendment and extension with Runbeck Election Services Inc. for software licensing, equipment maintenance and support for the Board's two Agilis Vote-by-Mail processing machines with an amended term of February 10, 2023 through February 9, 2027 with a total cost of \$272,433.30 over the entire term of the four-year contract. Commissioner Brown seconded the motion. The motion passed by 3:0 vote of the Board.

VIII. Legal Report

General Counsel Adam Lasker reported that he wished to echo all the kind statements that were made by so many people in the room about our staff who've been working four elections in nine months. Mr. Lasker noted that while there have been challenges, from a legal perspective, he has never encountered any resistance to doing things in a way that he believed was correct with the Election Code. Mr. Lasker is proud of the community that we have, starting from the Chair and all the way on down, who have not challenged him throughout this entire process. There were so many changes since the pandemic started in early 2020. We forget that the 2020 primary was the election

when we rolled out our brand-new election equipment. Things continue to go smoothly these last three election cycles. Mr. Lasker is very pleased about that.

From a legal perspective, regarding the election results that we just proclaimed, there are no races within the statutory requirements for a Discovery Recount. Mr. Lasker has not received any notice from any attorney about a challenged to an election contest. So, Mr. Lasker thinks we're in good shape to move on from the last election, and start focusing on the 2024 Presidential election cycle.

IX. Financial Report

- A. Balance Sheet and Voucher Listings for the City of Chicago – 2022 Appropriation – 22-13 dated April 25, 2023 in the amount of \$ 299,951.02

Commissioner Brown moved to approve the Balance Sheet and Voucher Listings for the City of Chicago – 2022 Appropriation – 22-13 dated April 25, 2023 in the amount of \$ 299,951.02. Commissioner Kresse seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous vote of the Board.

- B. Balance Sheet and Voucher Listings for the County of Cook – 2022 Appropriation – 22-12 dated April 25, 2023 in the amount of \$ 5,925.00

Commissioner Kresse moved to approve the Balance Sheet and Voucher Listings for the County of Cook – 2022 Appropriation – 22-12 dated April 25, 2023 in the amount of \$5,925.00. Commissioner Brown seconded the motion. The motion passed by 3:0 vote of the Board.

- C. Balance Sheet and Voucher Listings for the City of Chicago – 2023 Appropriation – 23-02 dated April 25, 2023 in the amount of \$ 6,847,288.46

Commissioner Brown moved to approve the Balance Sheet and Voucher Listings for the City of Chicago – 2023 Appropriation – 23-02 dated April 25, 2023 in the amount of \$6,847,288.46. Commissioner Kresse seconded the motion. The motion passed by 3:0 vote of the Board.

- D. Balance Sheet and Voucher Listings for the County of Cook – 2023 Appropriation – 23-02 dated April 25, 2023 in the amount of \$ 560.00

Commissioner Kresse moved to approve the Balance Sheet and Voucher Listings for the County of Cook – 2023 Appropriation – 23-02 dated April 25, 2023 in the amount of \$560.00. Commissioner Brown seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous vote of the Board.

X. Public Comment

- A. Caroline Koclanes, UChiVotes:

Ms. Koclanes began by introducing herself. She is an undergraduate at the University of Chicago and Co-Director of UChiVotes, the student-led, non-partisan voting group on campus.

Ms. Koclanes noted that since the 2018 midterm elections the University of Chicago has held an on-campus Early Voting location for the Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday prior to Election Day. However, during both the 2022 midterm election and the 2023 runoff elections there were significant difficulties at the polling location that prevented students from voting. Ms. Koclanes wanted to bring to the Board's attention some of these difficulties that they encountered last year at the polling location, which included a shortage of voter registration forms and pens, technical difficulties that caused the location to open over two hours late.

- B. Ms. Koclanes stated that UChiVotes is hoping to work with the Chicago Board of Elections to correct these mistakes ahead of the 2024 elections. Shannon Dye, UChiVotes:

Ms. Dye introduced herself as a Co-Director of UChiVotes at the University of Chicago.

While they have expressed their concerns with some of the technical issues of the Early Voting location on campus and have seen how having a voting site that is easily accessible and in a central location to students increases participation and creates a culture of voting on campus.

Ms. Dye feels that the next logical step is for the Chicago Board of Elections to add an on-campus polling location for Election Day.

They would like to advocate for the 24th precinct in the 5th Ward to be moved to an on-campus location such as the McCormick Lounge in the Reynolds Club where Early Voting is currently held. Ms. Dye asked the Board to please consider this and let them know what next steps they can take to help ensure that on-campus Election Day voting happen.

Ms. Dye also suggested that UChiVotes could pilot a program to train college students as poll workers.

UChiVotes welcomes the opportunity to collaborate further with the Board.

The Chair thanked Ms. Dye and Ms. Koclanes for bringing all these concerns out and the recommendations. The Chair is sure the Board will be in touch with them to see how we can improve this situation.

- C. The Chair stated that Max Bever would be the person to following up with. Clare J. Tobin, Illinois Ballot Integrity (IBI)

Ms. Tobin thanked Mr. Holiday, Mr. Bever and “everybody for cooperating with” Illinois Ballot Integrity to get extra information during the last two elections.

Ms. Tobin stated that she just had a couple of recommendations based on things her group observed as poll watchers:

- 1) During Nursing Home voting, Illinois Ballot Integrity poll watchers experienced reluctance, and sometimes actual hostility, from either the Judges of Election or the Investigators regarding allowing the poll watchers to observe the conduct of the voting process. This resulted in poll watchers being unable to determine if voters were being assisted or prompted.
- 2) Also, during Nursing Home voting, at two different locations, the nursing home Activity Director announced that there were two candidates for Mayor, without mentioning that there were also two candidates for Alderman.
- 3) Ms. Tobin noted that sometimes it seemed that the Board Investigators didn't always understand the function of poll watchers.

Ms. Tobin said that the Illinois Ballot Integrity recommends that all judges and investigators to be educated on the rules regarding allowing poll watchers to observe elections. IBI also recommends that investigators receive training as judges.

Mms Tobin noted that regarding the post-election canvass, the Illinois Ballot Integrity were allowed to observe. Christopher Tomecek was very helpful. The group observed some of the processing of the mail in ballots. However, IBI was never allowed to see the actual date stamp on the Vote-by-Mail ballots and Ms. Tobin really feels that that is part of being transparent about the actual date when Vote-by-Mail ballots are received.

IBI is concerned about in the Vote-by-Mail postmarks. Ms. Tobin also feels that there should be better explanations of the details of the various stages of the signature verification and the date stamp tracking through the Post Office and the envelope drop-off centers. IBI also wishes to have poll watchers be allowed to observe the signature verification and the date stamp tracking of actual envelopes.

Illinois Ballot Integrity is also concerned that for the February 28th election there were 51,000 Vote-by-Mail ballots not returned. The figure was 31,000 for the April 4th election.

D. Lora Chamberlain, Clean Count Cook County (CCCC)

Ms. Chamberlain acknowledged that the Board had a really significant run of election in the past nine months and that Clean Count Cook County wants to thank the Board for all its work.

Ms. Chamberlain stated that she agrees with everything that Ms. Tobin had said and that they work really closely together. Ms. Chamberlain wants to encourage the Board to build transparency in even more into its processes.

Per Ms. Chamberlain, both the Illinois Ballot Integrity Project and Clean Count Cook County are extremely concerned about the recent bills in the state legislature promoting Rank Choice Voting (RCV).

Ms. Chamberlain stated that she would really like to work with Mr. Bever and thanked the Board very much. She also asked Mr. Lasker to share with Clean Count Cook County the Board's statement regarding SB 145. Mr. Lasker said that he would share with CCCC the public document.

XI. Executive Session: none needed.

XII. Adjournment: Commissioner Brown moved to adjourn the meeting. Commissioner Kresse seconded the motion. The motion passed by unanimous vote of the Board. The meeting was adjourned at 10:51 a.m.

Submitted,



Commissioner William J. Kresse
Secretary