

Peoria County Board of Election Commissioners

4422 Brandywine Dr., STE 1 · Peoria, IL 61614

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The May 2023 Monthly Meeting of the Peoria County Board of Election Commissioners was held at the Election Commission Office at 4422 Brandywine Dr. on Tuesday, May 9, 2023, at 2:00 PM.

PRESENT: James Manning, Chairman
Matt Bartolo, Vice Chairman
Valerie Timmes, Treasurer
Jeanne Williamson, Secretary
Ryan Brady, Commissioner
Elizabeth Gannon, Executive Director
Jess Joseph, Assistant Executive Director
Gregory Siepel, Assistant State's Attorney

GUESTS: Becky Kelley, Theresa Johanson, Rick Fox

The meeting was called to order at 2:00 p.m.

A Roll Call of the Commissioners was taken by Chairman Manning finding all Commissioners present.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Approval of Minutes

Commissioner Brady moved to approve the minutes from the April 11, 2023, Monthly Meeting. Treasurer Timmes seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Public Comment

No public comment.

Approval of Expenditures

Executive Director Gannon explained the bills (see attached) to the Board. Vice Chairman Bartolo moved to approve the bills. Secretary Williamson seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Report of the Executive Director

2023 Consolidated General Election

Executive Director Gannon started her report by providing an update on the 2023 Consolidated General Election. She provided two bar graphs to the Commissioners. The first bar graph (see Graph 1 below) compared voter turnout by method in the 2019 and 2023 Consolidated Elections. Executive Director Gannon stated she was curious to find out if the implementation of permanent vote by mail would increase turnout in odd year elections. Based on the data from these two elections, voter turnout did not increase. Turnout was similar across the two elections, but more individuals who previously opted to vote at the polls now vote by mail. Executive Director Gannon commented that early voting turnout was also quite similar across the two elections. Executive Director Gannon noted that she would continue to watch these numbers in future consolidated elections to gauge how turnout is affected.

Executive Director Gannon then explained the second bar graph (see Graph 2 below). She stated that the second graph compares the daily vote by mail returns for the 2020, 2022, and 2023 General Elections. The table below Graph 2 shows the amount of vote by mail ballots issued, the amount of vote by mail ballots returned, and the return rate. Executive Director Gannon noted that it is important to keep in mind that in the 2020 election, all voters were encouraged to vote by mail due to the impact of COVID-19. She stated that this is why the 2020 vote by mail numbers appear inflated. In 2022, permanent vote by mail was implemented in Illinois. As a result, Executive Director Gannon stated that she expects vote by mail turnout to continue to increase. In 2020, the Election Commission implemented a system that allows the Commission to scan vote by mail envelopes and capture the signature in our voter registration system, allowing the Commission to streamline the signature verification process for vote by mail ballots. After the signature is verified, the rest of the process for vote by mail ballots is done by elections judges by hand. She explained that election judges open the envelopes, extract the ballots, and lay the ballots in stacks of fifty.

Executive Director Gannon noted that the opening process becomes quite time-consuming. She estimated that it would cost \$30,800 to pay elections judges to open 25,000 ballots by hand. Executive Director Gannon came to this number by taking the number of judges and hours that it took to open the ~500 vote by mail ballots that were processed after election day and multiplying by \$14 as minimum wage is increasing to that amount in 2024. Using this as a baseline, she was able to calculate the fiscal impact of opening 25,000 ballots. As a result of the large, expected expenditure, Executive Director Gannon noted that she has been looking at companies and vendors that can help streamline the process of opening vote by mail ballots. She stated these have just been preliminary conversations to see what machines exist that could assist with this process and fit within our budget. Executive Director Gannon stated she wanted to inform the Board so they are aware that she is looking into this possibility. If a vendor does exist that would suit the Commission's needs, Executive Director Gannon would start the bid/RFIP process with county's finance department. As our budget for 2023 was for the full election cycle, she noted that the Commission does have extra funds due to the primary election not being needed this year.

Executive Director Gannon then noted that regarding the implementation of the styluses, the Commission has not been able to gather the data necessary to make an informed recommendation. She confirmed that this recommendation would be coming in the next couple of months.

Executive Director Gannon asked if there were any questions thus far. Vice Chairman Bartolo asked if she had an estimate as to how much the technology or machine would cost that would help with the opening process. Executive Director Gannon responded stating that she does not have an estimate at this point. She noted that when the Commission went out for a bid in 2020 and implemented the

process that we have now, there were companies that continued that process further down the line. Those products ranged anywhere from \$50,000 to \$250,000. In the last three years, there has been an acquisition between two of these companies that resulted in a product that is more tailored to the size of our jurisdiction. Executive Director Gannon noted that she will be receiving a demonstration on this product. She expanded on the topic, noting that some of our current technology is from a local company (Walz) and that the Commission is also planning to see if they have anything that would fit our needs.

Secretary Williamson commented that the return rate on the second graph appears to be off. Executive Director reviewed the math and confirmed this was a typo. Executive Director Gannon confirmed that the correct rate was 50.845%.

Legislative Update

Executive Director Gannon then provided a legislative update. She noted that over 95 election bills have been introduced in the House of Representatives and Senate. From these bills, an omnibus bill is currently being drafted. The omnibus bill is expected to drop late this week or early next week. The Spring session is ending on May 19th. She noted that some possible outcomes within the omnibus bill, based on the 95 current bills, is dropping the sunset clause for vote centers, the potential for a pilot program for digital signature collection for petitions, increasing the state reimbursement for election judges, pre-registering 16 year olds at the Secretary of State's office, making an opt out program for permanent vote by mail, and altering the permanent vote by mail mailing to only require it to be sent in even years. Executive Director Gannon also noted that there were quite a few bills introduced on rank choice voting. She noted that the consensus that she has heard thus far is that this will likely not move forward this year, but that there is a strong possibility of it being pushed out in the next couple of years. Executive Director Gannon ended this topic noting that she will have more information at the next meeting once the omnibus bill has dropped.

Chairman Manning asked for more information on ranked choice voting. Executive Director Gannon noted that the bills are pushing to create ranked choice voting in Illinois. She explained that with ranked choice voting, if you had five candidates, you would rank them in order (1-5). If no candidate receives 50% or more of the vote, the least vote getter drops off. And whoever voted for that individual, their next in line candidate gets those votes. This process is continued until a candidate has over 50%.

Executive Director Gannon noted that she was approached by the county administrator as his lobbyist posed questions about ranked choice voting. She stated that there are currently a lot of unknowns surrounding the process. The current voting system, Verity, that we have through Hart InterCivic, can create a ranked choice voting ballot, but cannot tabulate this type of ballot. Furthermore, she noted that she does not believe there is currently any software or system that is certified in Illinois that can do the tabulation. Thus, the State Board will have to either work with current vendors to create a product that can achieve this, or they would have to create a software that can tabulate ranked choice voting. The price tag associated with this is also unknown.

Vice Chairman Bartolo asked for more information on the sunset clause pertaining to vote centers. Executive Director Gannon noted that right now it is possible for a jurisdiction to have implemented vote centers in 2022 and 2023. However, this legislation was sunseting (i.e., ending) in July of 2023. The current bill would remove this sunseting clause, allowing for jurisdictions to always have vote centers. Executive Director Gannon also stated that a vote center is like an early voting location, where voters can go to any location to vote. If we had vote centers on election day, a voter would be able to go to any of the vote centers to cast their ballot.

Chairman Manning asked if ranked choice voting was implemented, would the Commission need to buy new equipment again or would our current system be modified? Executive Director Gannon noted that she does not believe the Commission would need to buy new equipment again. She believes either the state will require current certified vendors to handle ranked choice voting or the State Board will have a system that is created that all jurisdictions in the state would use for tabulation. Executive Director Gannon commented that is very “up in the air” with how the State Board would handle this and with how the legislation will be written surrounding ranked choice voting. Chairman Manning commented that he hoped the State Board and the legislators will consider what is currently possible while creating these bills.

Chairman Manning asked if there were any further questions for Executive Director Gannon. Seeing none, the Board moved on to the next agenda item.

Report of the Attorney

No Report.

New Business

The next Board meeting will be on Tuesday, June 13th at 2 pm at the Election Commission Office. Treasurer Timmes noted she may be unable to attend.

Chairman Manning noted that the County’s consideration of purchasing this building is temporarily on hold. He explained that the County Board is currently focused on finishing up the new Health Department building.

Secretary Williamson asked what the purchase price of the building was. Chairman Manning noted the purchase price was around \$550k previously. Secretary Williamson commented that the Commission has probably paid over ~\$300k in rent and taxes. She further commented that this expenditure seems like a fiscally irresponsible use of tax-payer dollars.

Chairman Manning encouraged all commissioners to reach out to County Board members to have conversations surrounding the purchase of the building.

Vice Chairman Bartolo commented that with the way permanent vote by mail is increasing, the Commission will likely need more space sooner rather than later. He asked what the cost would be to rent the whole space. Executive Director Gannon noted she did not have a number. Assistant Executive Director Joseph stated it would likely be around ~\$6,500 based on what we currently pay in rent for 55% of the building. Chairman Manning noted that he would talk with Administrator Sorrel about obtaining this information.

Chairman Manning also stated he had a conversation about property tax exemptions with the County Assessor, Dave Ryan. The conversation led him to believe that there may be a way to achieve the tax exemption. Chairman Manning asked Assistant State’s Attorney Siepel why the county was not able to exempt us from the taxes when we are the sole occupant of the space. He further commented that it could be due to only leasing 55% of the space. Assistant State’s Attorney Siepel replied noting that he was not sure about the circumstances of the situation, but that he was happy to investigate the matter further with the County Assessor.

Commissioner Brady asked if the taxes were included in our original lease agreement. Vice Chairman Bartolo noted it was not and that it was a surprise to the county initially, resulting in conflict regarding the taxes for about 2.5 years. Eventually the county agreed to pay 55% of the tax bill.

Executive Session to discuss the Appointment, Employment, Compensation, Discipline, and Performance of Specific Employees pursuant to Section 2(c)(11) of the Open Meetings Act.

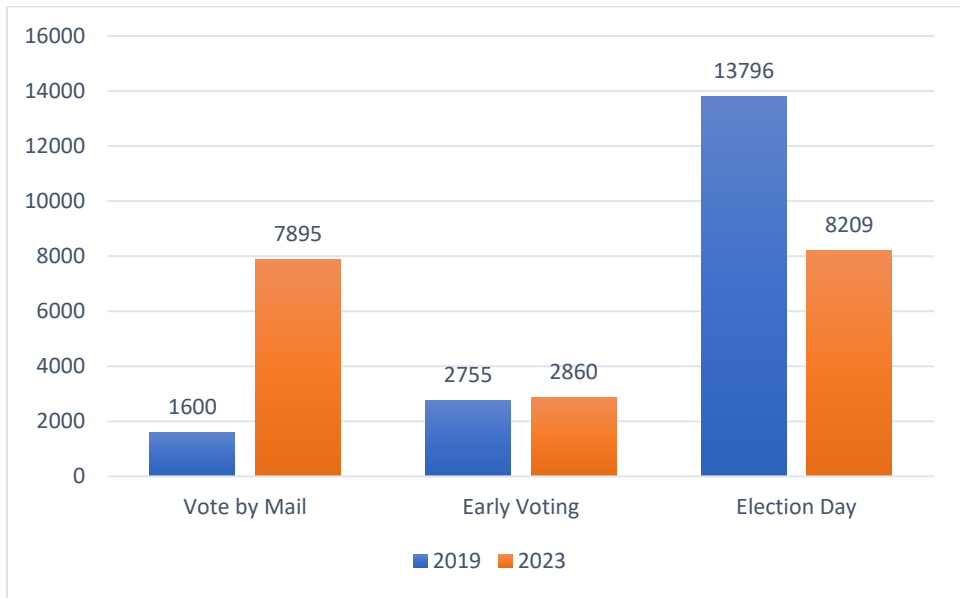
Commissioner Brady moved to enter Executive Session to discuss the pending litigation and the appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, and performance of specific employees pursuant to Section 2(c)(11) of the Open Meetings Act. Vice Chairman Bartolo seconded. Motion passed unanimously. The Board entered Executive Session at 2:29 pm.

Treasurer Timmes moved to come out of Executive Session. Secretary Williamson seconded. Motion passed unanimously and the Executive Session was adjourned at 3:08 pm.

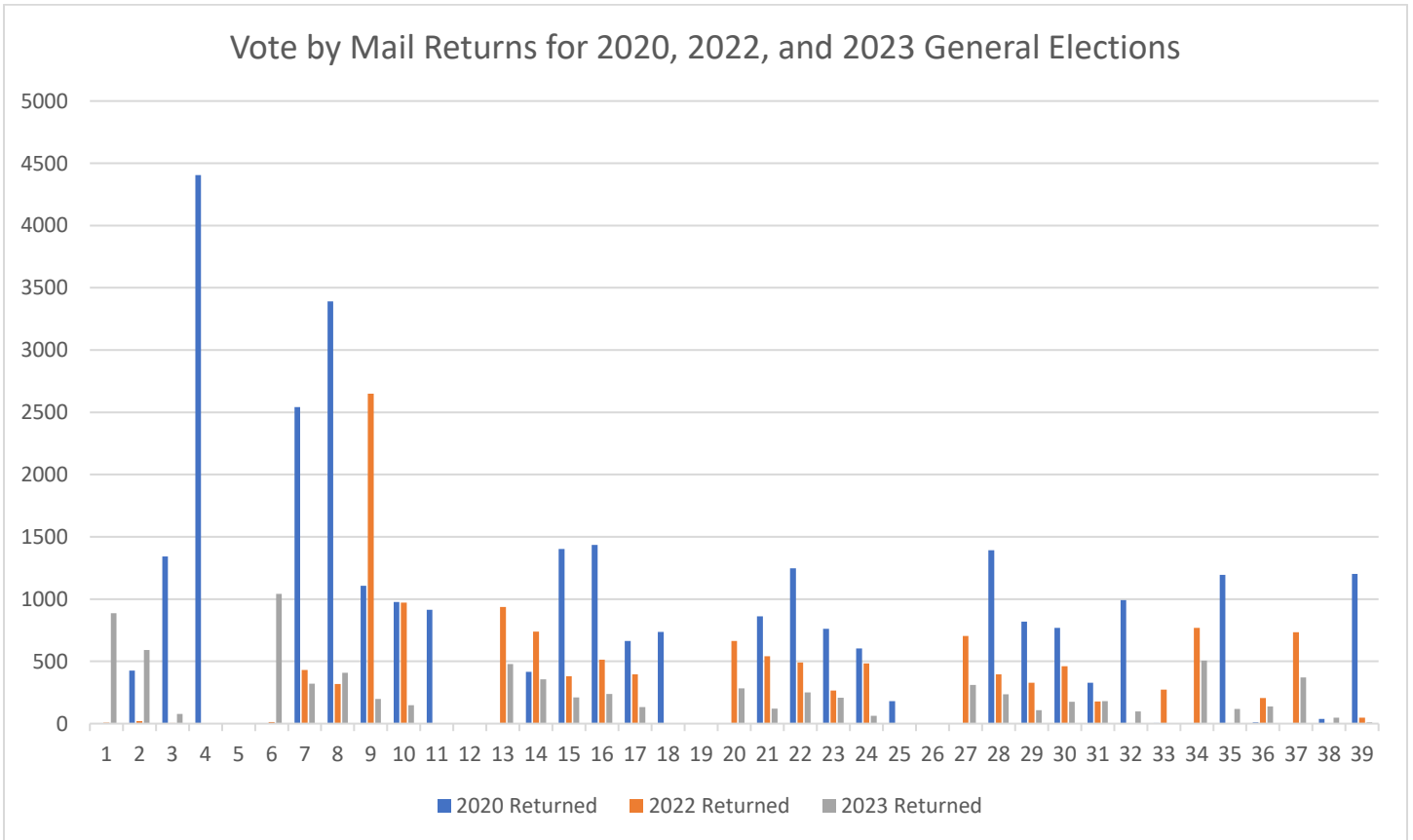
Adjournment

Vice Chairman Bartolo moved to adjourn. Secretary Williamson seconded. Motion passed unanimously and the meeting was adjourned at 3:09 pm.

Graph 1



Graph 2



	2023	2022	2020
Issued	16343	15923	34769
Returned	8309	13924	30165
Return Rate	50.84%	87.45%	86.76%

Monthly Expense Summary

Monthly Expenses	Description	Amount
Calpine Energy Solutions	Energy Charges	\$290.19
Ameren	Gas & Electric	\$371.24
Ludy's Cleaning	Office Cleaning	\$316.67
Digital Copy Systems	Copier Lease	\$111.00
Illinois American Water	Water for Brandywine	\$275.97
GFL	Garbage Service	\$34.76
Stratus	Phone Service	\$295.83
Verizon	Wireless Phones	\$36.01
Verizon Mifi	Mifis	\$2,250.09
Ziad A. Musaitif	June Rent	\$3,566.06
Ziad A. Musaitif	June Cam	\$200.00
	Total	\$7,747.82
Misc		
Heart Technologies	Testing Ballot Box Cameras	\$224.00
i3logix	Ballot Trax for 2023 Consolidated General Election	\$835.55
Ziad A. Musaitif	Real Estate Taxes (55% of Tax Bill)	\$8,334.67
	Total	\$9,394.22
Pcard		
Avantis	Avantis for Election Night	\$126.88
Home Depot	Lock Box for Office	\$39.78
Crumbl Cookies	Cookies for Field Support Staff Meeting	\$42.88
	Total	\$209.54
Payroll		
Staff	4/21/2023	\$11,507.58
Staff	5/5/2023	\$11,605.01
Overtime	4/21/2023	\$1,320.02
Part-Time	4/21/2023	\$770.61
Part-Time	5/5/2023	\$700.56
Commissioners	4/21/2023	\$615.40
Commissioners	5/5/2023	\$615.40
Medical Benefits	4/21/2023	\$3,818.22
Medical Benefits	5/5/2023	\$3,818.22
* Awaiting Invoice		
	Total	\$34,771.02
	Total Expenditures	\$52,122.60