

# Peoria County Board of Election Commissioners

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

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## The June 2023 Monthly Meeting of the Peoria County Board of Election Commissioners was held at the Election Commission Office at 4422 Brandywine Dr. on Tuesday, June 13, 2023, at 2:00 PM.

PRESENT: James Manning, Chairman  
Jeanne Williamson, Secretary  
Elizabeth Gannon, Executive Director  
Jess Joseph, Assistant Executive Director  
Jennie Cordis Boswell, Assistant State's Attorney

ABSENT: Matt Bartolo, Vice Chairman  
Valerie Timmes, Treasurer  
Ryan Brady, Commissioner

GUESTS: Becky Kelley, Theresa Johanson, Rick Fox, Kevin Stufflebeam

The meeting was called to order at 2:04 p.m.

A Roll Call of the Commissioners was taken by Chairman Manning. Secretary Williamson and Chairman Manning were present. Vice Chairman Bartolo, Treasurer Timmes, and Commissioner Brady were absent from the meeting.

Chairman Manning announced that the Board did not have a quorum for this meeting. As a result, he stated that the Board could not act on any agenda items, such as approving the minutes and expenditures. He expressed that all actions would be deferred until the next meeting.

### **Pledge of Allegiance**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

### **Approval of Minutes**

No action taken due to lack of quorum

### **Public Comment**

Miss Jackie Petty intended to provide a comment, but she requested to move her comment to the next meeting due to the lack of a quorum at this meeting.

Mr. Kevin Stufflebeam introduced himself and noted that he wanted to comment about FOIA requests. He stated that he had sent a FOIA request on December 5th, 2022 requesting video

footage for all of the drop boxes from the November 2022 General Election. He noted this request was denied via the FOIA statute for being too voluminous. Mr. Stufflebeam commented that he could understand why as this request was quite broad.

He expressed that he made another request on March 8<sup>th</sup>, 2022 narrowing his focus to all of the footage from the North Branch drop box for the November 2022 General Election. He stated this request was also denied for being too voluminous. He noted that he was later told that there is a fee of ~\$125 to 225 from either Heart Technologies or Hart Intercivic; he commented he was not sure which one. Chairman Manning commented that it would be from Heart Technologies.

He further commented that back in November of 2020, one of his peers requested footage of that same information and it was all free, but that the peer had to provide a server as it was a lot of data.

He commented that he was not sure what over 4 megabytes meant in terms of video footage for the North Branch Library. He further commented that he was not sure how much it would cost North Branch Library to obtain the footage.

He stated that the fees seem like something that is meant to dissuade or discourage individuals from requesting FOIA information. He stated that the word “free” is literally in the title of the Freedom of Information Act. He commented that a more genuine title would be “Fee of Information Act.”

He also questioned whether there would be fees for all FOIA requests. He asked what the purpose of these fees were. He stated that FOIAs should be free for citizens. He commented that getting the information is not free at all though for him as a citizen as he would have to spend several hundreds of dollars to obtain the information. He stated that he would like to discuss further with the Board ways to provide this information or make it more accessible. Mr. Stufflebeam commented that as a concerned citizen, he wanted to ensure that no mass ballot harvesting or things of that nature were occurring in the county.

Chairman Manning commented that he would look into the situation and get back to Mr. Stufflebeam. He further commented that unfortunately there was nothing “free” about the Freedom of Information Act. Chairman Manning expressed that he just made a FOIA request to the City of Peoria for a client. Only a certain number of pages are free, then after that the charges start to accrue due to the expenses related to producing the information. Nonetheless, Chairman Manning assured Mr. Stufflebeam he would look into the fees, and he thanked Mr. Stufflebeam for providing a comment.

## **Approval of Expenditures**

No action taken due to lack of quorum

## **Report of the Executive Director**

### **Legislative Update**

Executive Director Gannon started her report providing a legislative update. She stated that the omnibus bill that was discussed at the prior meeting has been approved by the House and Senate. She noted it was currently on the Governor’s desk for approval, but that she does not anticipate any issues with it getting approved.

She stated that the bill created a taskforce on Ranked Choice Voting. The report from this taskforce is due in March 2024 to the House and the Senate, with the caveat that the changes would be implemented in the 2028 primary.

Additionally, the bill brings about pre-registration of 16-year-olds. The registration will be held by the State Board of Elections, and when the registrant becomes old enough, the State Board will disperse that information to the applicable jurisdiction.

The bill also allows 17-year-olds who will be 18 by the next General Election to circulate petitions.

Additionally, the bill allows vote centers to be used and removes the sunset clause previously associated with vote centers.

Executive Director Gannon explained that the bill will also clean up the Permanent Vote by Mail Mailing program. The program will now only require the mailing to be sent in even years before the General Election, instead of having to send the mailing in both even and odd years. Additionally, the program will now have an opt-out option.

### **Opex Model 72 Opener and Extractor**

Executive Director Gannon stated that at the last monthly meeting she touched on the costs of opening the vote by mail envelopes and the secrecy envelopes within the vote by mail envelopes. Based on the high costs associated with having election judges open the ballots, she stated that she and the county finance department started to investigate what technology existed that could help the Election Commission lower costs. She explained that there is not a lot out there in the market for our size jurisdiction besides this Opex Model 72 Opener and Extractor. Executive Director Gannon noted that she has corresponded with several jurisdictions that currently use this opener, one being Kane County. She stated that the jurisdictions she reached out to are all very pleased with their purchase and have found that it has drastically cut their personnel costs. She explained that the Opex Machine can open between 2,000 and 3,200 envelopes in an hour. She noted that the machine mills the front and the side of the envelope and uses suction cups to open the envelope, allowing the machine operator to extract the contents.

She explained that the company that owns the machine is a part of the Equalis Group, which is a publicly procured cooperative agreement, meaning the bidding process has already taken place, so the county does not have to go out for a bid for this machine. She noted that our finance department approved joining the group and applied to join.

Executive Director Gannon further commented that she sent information to all the commissioners about the machine.

Chairman Manning asked if the sole purpose of the machine is to open vote by mail ballots. Executive Director Gannon stated that the machine could open any mail technically, but that the purpose for the Commission would be to have it open the 15,000-20,000 vote by mail envelopes that are received each election.

Chairman Manning requested a cost-comparison/savings between opening ballots by hand and using the Opex Machine. He stated that at face-value, it seemed like a big-ticket item, but he also expected that it would pay for itself shortly after the purchase. Executive Director Gannon confirmed she would provide this at the next meeting.

## **Report of the Attorney**

No Report.

## **New Business**

The next Board meeting will be on Tuesday, July 11<sup>th</sup> at 2 pm at the Election Commission Office.

Executive Director Gannon stated that the Commission has an intern for the Summer. She noted that the intern is a current Bradley student that served as an election judge at the last election. She further commented that the intern will be in the office on Mondays and Tuesdays from 9 am to 5 pm, and that her first task is organizing the old election results from the 1900s. Executive Director Gannon remarked that the Commission is very excited to have her onboard this summer and hopes to have her back in 2024 as either an intern or temporary employee.

## **Adjournment**

As there was no quorum at this meeting, Chairman Manning adjourned the meeting at 2:16 pm.