

New Hanover County Board of Elections
Special Meeting: Thursday, August 18, 2016 (3 PM)

Board Attendees:

Jonathan Washburn, Chairman; Jamie Getty, Secretary; Thomas Pollard, Member and Parliamentarian

Scheduled attendees:

Derek L. Bowens, Elections Director

The 2016 General Election Absentee One-Stop Implementation Plan was the focus of this special meeting of the New Hanover County Board of Elections. The meeting was moved to the HR Training Room 135 at the New Hanover Government Center in anticipation of public interest in commenting on plans as well as in observing the Board discussion and vote. There were probably over 100 individuals in the audience and, although I didn't keep count, it appeared that about half spoke during the comment period (2 minute limit on each comment). The order of speaking was contingent on when you arrived and checked a box indicating that you wanted to speak. The comment period occurred before the Board's discussion of the 6 plans prepared by Mr. Bowens. The Board heard a wide range of points of view, from an impassioned plea to do the right thing, to assertions of fiscal responsibility (Sunday voting cost, overall early voting costs), to religion (Sunday voting), to increasing number of hours, including Sunday voting, to concerns about voting fraud. For most the interest was in extending hours to vote and inclusion of Sundays. A number urged the Board members to go beyond partisan politics. This had reference to the front page article in the day's Star-News reporting the Raleigh News & Observer article exposing emails sent by NC Republican Party executive director Dallas Woodhouse to county election officials to "make party line changes to early voting" by limiting the number of hours and including no Sunday voting option in their plan. At times public feedback to comments was raucous and on occasion quite disrespectful.

The LWV-LCF was represented in the comment section of the agenda. Gail Bromley, our Voter Services Chair, spoke somewhat early in the comment period about her experiences with the Brunswick and Pender Counties process, and their respective Boards effort at compromise, in determining their implementation plan. Her focus was on supporting agreement, on deciding in a non-partisan way for the good of the essential enterprise of maximizing voting for all. Sandra Sink, who is but did not identify herself as a LCF League member (was a poll worker and judge at the polls for a number of years), spoke on behalf of flexible early voting hours to reduce the burden of poll workers on Election day. I spoke much later and my focus was on presenting a brief review of the New Hanover County 2012 national election / 2016 primary results (the primary did include Sunday voting at the Gov't Center) and advocating for the only two options (4 and 5) that included Sunday hours. And finally, affirming that, from our perspective, option 5 is preferable (see attachment).

The Board discussion consisted, initially, of each member presenting their point of view. Mr. Pollard (Democratic appointee) asserted his vote for option 5 (see attached) with the following changes: Sunday 11am-6pm; the last Thurs/Fri close at 7pm; and last Sat hours 8-5. Ms. Getty (Republican appointee) voted for option 1 with no changes (same as 2012 plan – see attachment). Mr. Washburn (Republican appointee) voted for option 6 (this was emailed to me as well as other "Leaders" at 12:15 pm on the meeting day by Derek Bowens). After some discussion amongst the Board members and clarification from Mr. Bowens on actions regarding the stalemate (Board of

Elections would decide on implementation plan), Mr. Washburn changed his vote to option 1, and Mr. Pollard reconfirmed his vote for option 5, thus the vote was 2-1 for option 1.

The New Hanover County Board of Elections will submit a non-unanimous decision: one plan representing the majority (option 1) and one representing the minority (option 5). The full State Board of Elections will decide the plan to be implemented in New Hanover County.

Submitted by Meredith Glicksman