Board of Elections Observations August 15, 2016- Brunswick County

The regular meeting of the Brunswick County Board of Elections was held at the Board Office in Bolivia and attended by all three board members, Stuart Smith (chairman), Randy Pelton, and Boyd Williamson, and by election office staff. Gail Bromley, Barbara Burrell, and Beth Kirschner represented the League of Women Voters, and the meeting was also attended by representative of both the Republican and Democratic Parties and citizens of Brunswick County.

During the time for public comments, the Chairman of the Republican Party asked that a resolution passed by the Brunswick County Republican Party be read into the minutes. The resolution stated the party’s opposition to the recent Federal Court decision overturning North Carolina 2013 voting law. It also demanded that monitoring be increased inside the polls to prevent the voter fraud that they believe may ensue.

Gail Bromley spoke regarding early voting and urged the implementation of a plan that would offer voting hours serving all voters’ needs while reducing hours where there is little or no turnout to reduce pressure on staff. Several citizens spoke for and against Sunday voting and for more evening hours to aid those who cannot get to the polls during week day business hours. Beth Kirschner refuted claims that New Hanover Sunday voting has proven to be of little value.

Two options were presented for early voting neither of which included Sunday hours. Two voting sites have been added making the total 10 sites. At the start the plans contained no hours later than 7PM. One plan offered limited hours on two Saturdays; one plan offered only one Saturday.

Stuart Smith urged the use of absentee ballots for those who are unable to get to the polls.

Randy Pelton explained the recent court decision and changes that must be implemented with only 6 permanent staff members. Changes must be made not only in policy and procedure, but in the training of the 200 to 300 poll workers. Their goal, he stated is to serve the law, tax payers, and voters, keep lines short and protect the sanity of the staff and workers.

Boyd Williamson made a motion that in the interest of compromise, he could accept a plan without Sunday voting if changes were made to the plan with two Saturdays. He suggested extending hours on Friday, November 4th and Saturday, November 5th and reducing other times with low turnout. After further negotiation, it was settled that voting would be extended until 8PM on November 4 at all satellite locations. The motion carried.

In other business Director, Sarah Knott is working with the Board of Education to involve 17 year old Civics and U.S. History students as trained assistants at the polls. This would be educational for the students and might provide some much needed help from a group that is likely to be more technologically skilled.

The board has still not received a response from the state with regard to merging Bellville Precincts 1 and 2. If the change is allowed, affected voters must be notified.

At Mr. Pelton’s suggestion they are working with the Public Information Officer to increase outreach to the public with regard to where and when to vote. Posters, twitter, and face book are being considered.

Past figures suggest a 70% turnout in the November election. This means that 64,000 voters will participate with an estimated 45,903 voting early.

At this time the meeting moved into closed session.

Beth Kirschner