June 20, 2016 Board of Elections Meeting

All three members of the board were present as were Gail Bromley, several members of the League, the chair of the Republican Party, a few Brunswick citizens and I.

The first item on the agenda was Sunday voting. In the current system the board must provide at least as many hours of early voting as was provided in 2012 which is 885 hours unless all three members of the board are unanimous in voting to reduce hours. Since the time for early voting has been cut from two weeks to one, poll workers and election staff must work very long hours to keep the polls open that many hours. Up to now the two Republican members of the board have refused to consider Sunday voting, and the one Democrat has said that while there is no Sunday voting, he cannot agree to drastically shortening voting hours and making it even harder for people to vote. He submitted a plan with one afternoon of Sunday voting in the Bolivia office only which would cut the total hours that polls were open by 140 hours to 734 which clearly would have been a boon to staff.

During the time for public comment, Gail spoke to the many excuses given for no Sunday voting in the past, and clearly showed that they were not valid. I referred to the success of Sunday voting in New Hanover and used figures from the U.S. census which proved that Brunswick County even more than New Hanover, needs a Sunday available for elders and hourly workers who do not have transportation or would be forced to lose pay to leave work on other days. Several individuals including a retired civics teacher and a retired U.S Army officer and U.N Peace Keeper spoke in favor of Sunday voting to serve all citizens right to vote and move toward a more perfect union.

There were several speakers who opposed Sunday voting stating that working on a Sunday was much too stressful for election staff, that minorities were privileged to be allowed to vote and should find a way to do it if they really wanted to, or repeating the objection that Sunday is a religious or family day.

The board’s discussion was brief. The chairman stated that he was very concerned that if staff were too stressed by Sunday voting, mistakes would be made. The Democratic member said he could not believe that four hours of Sunday voting would be more stressful than 140 more work hours. The other Republican member said that people who couldn’t make it to the polls could use an absentee ballot, and that he didn’t know why he could not agree to Sunday voting, but he could not. He also offered to reimburse the postage for anyone who could not afford it. As you already know, the vote was two to one against.

In other matters, staff is still working on locations for one stop voting. They need at least 10 polling places which they do not yet have. It is very difficult to find locations with enough space and parking where polling is welcome. The former Leland Community Center is about to be torn down. They may be able to switch to a Parks and Recreation building, but do not have confirmation, yet.

A change was considered for the polling place currently in the Leland Junior High which has very little parking. They would like to combine precincts for Belville I and II with both voting in the Leland Cultural Arts Center which has the space and sufficient parking. The Democratic board member said that those people who comprise “Old Leland” would not be comfortable traveling to the Art Center to vote. Splitting the precinct so that Old Leland could still vote closer to the center of town is complicated and cannot be done by November. It was decided to postpone that for after the election. The vote to combine Belville I and II was two to one.

The June 7 election for Judges had very low turnout, but was successful in that all numbers and records matched.

The Federal Court is looking at the ID requirement, again, but has made no decision as of yet. Staff must wait for the directive.

The meeting was adjourned. Gail and I would like to thank all those League Members who came to support us when we spoke and to show the League’s concern about Sunday voting. We’ll keep trying.

Beth Kirschner