

Monroe County Election Board Meeting – FINAL
Thursday, Dec 2, 2021 1:00 p.m.
Meeting held via Zoom

I. CALL TO ORDER

The Monroe County Election Board meeting was called to order at 1:00 p.m. by Shruti Rana, Democratic party representative and Chair. Also present: Hal Turner, Republican party representative and Nicole Browne, Board Secretary and Monroe County Clerk.

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

Hal Turner made a motion to approve the minutes from the Nov 4, 2021 Election Board meeting. Nicole Browne seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.

III. OLD BUSINESS

A. Outstanding Candidate Fine & Board Action

Candidate Ryan Maloney was late to file the required CFA-4 paperwork in 2020 and has an outstanding \$400 fine. On Nov 4, 2021, the Election Board approved the action to transfer this candidate history in Monroe County to the State of Indiana. Hal Turner updated the Board that he has transferred this information in writing to Michelle Thompson, Campaign Finance Coordinator for the State of Indiana, and asked for whatever action is appropriate at the State level. This topic may be removed from future agendas.

B. Potential Voter Fraud Allegation Update

Karen Wheeler, Election Supervisor, shared that no update has been received on this election fraud issue in Monroe County since the Sept 2020 Board meeting. Hal Turner made a motion that a letter be sent to the Indiana State Police to formally request an update. Nicole Browne seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously. It was agreed that Karen Wheeler would draft this letter at the request of the Election Board.

C. Update on Statewide Voter List Maintenance

Karen Wheeler shared that this State-level effort to update voter registration records has gone very smoothly. Monroe County Elections is up-to-date with processing all updates. One last shipment from the State is expected during the week of Dec 22, 2021. This topic may be removed from future agendas.

D. Update on “Re-Precincting” Review

Hal Turner shared an update on the work by the bi-partisan “Precinct and District Boundary Advisory Committee.” Boundaries of the 82 county precincts were reviewed and the Commissioners signed the report submitted by the Committee on Nov 3, 2021. The Committee is still available for any census-related activities that may arise.

E. Update on New Precinct – Bean Blossom 3

Karen Wheeler shared that a new precinct, Bean Blossom 3, is being planned. This request for a new precinct was submitted to the State of Indiana on Nov 5, 2021 and is currently pending. Updates on this topic will be provided in future Board meetings.

F. Update on Campaign Finance Software called “Easy Vote”

Karen Wheeler shared that candidate filings begin on Jan 5, 2022. Monroe County is working with our vendor on the “Easy Vote” software to allow candidates and campaigns to file their paperwork electronically (*paper filings are also still accepted in the Elections Office too*). Karen hopes that the software to be deployed and available in time for the 2022 filings. Three counties in Indiana are using this software at this time.

G. Update on Voting Space Allocation

NICOLE BROWNE, BOARD OF ELECTIONS

Nicole Browne shared an update (*the entire update is included in italics below*). A brief summary of Ms. Browne’s update includes:

- There has been very little movement on the original request to the Commissioners to have the entire Johnson Hardware Building for elections. We have a short term offer that prevents advanced planning and we do not have answers to some important questions.
- Commissioner’ communications seem to revise history and lie about elections. The Election team appreciated the renovations before the 2020 Primary but we were not fully satisfied. Elections did extensively use the Nat U Hill room space during October 2020. We never had ballots in the back of a U-Haul as Commissioners stated. We did use the Convention Center during elections and paid for it out of the Election Budget.
- I have proposed satellite voting sites around the county that the Commissioners have mentioned but we only have bi-partisan support to date for a location in downtown Bloomington. Vote centers have not had unanimous support in the past.
- I have agreed on the record to use the Showers space to process absentee ballots and to use the old NAPA space for poll worker training and equipment storage.

Ms. Browne’s entire update:

Good afternoon,

The long and short explanation for the Voting Space Allocation with respect to my original request to the Board of Commissioners, for the entirety of the Johnson Hardware Building, is that the needle has moved very little. You may recall, from the recent working group meeting, efforts made on the record to be sure that the Election Board understood the answer to my original request for the entirety of the Johnson Hardware Building. From my perspective, there were only three possible options in terms of an answer to the question. The options as I see them are yes, no or not yet.

(continued)

Ms. Browne's entire update: (continued)

Chairwoman Rana, I appreciate your efforts to secure one of those responses. My takeaway was that there was nothing but obfuscation on the part of the Board. They wouldn't say yes. They wouldn't say no. They wouldn't say not yet. I understood that the answer was no to the request for 2022 but, of course, that only gets us through 2022. It doesn't allow for advance planning.

There continues to be a couple of things that give me pause for concern. We, too, have asked questions, as a result of their September presentation for which we've had no answers. Instead, my place on the agenda was moved to the very bottom of the agenda and then I would be told to keep it short because they had other meetings to attend. On one meeting, I was cut off before I even had a chance to get a sentence out and the work session was adjourned. Or, as in yesterday's case, my request was completely removed from the agenda despite my having submitted requests for either myself or a person in my stead to present at each Wednesday's work session through the end of 2021.

Other presenters are encouraged to present as long as they like and I am asked to be brief. If the topic is playgrounds and parks or projects that would make the county more beautiful (and I'm not saying those things are not important), you get the happy, smiley, agreeable Commissioners nodding their heads in affirmation. When I present about expanding the footprint at the Johnson Hardware Building, I am met with the resting tough faces.

I don't know if this is serendipitous or not but, following the last working group meeting, I was copied on an e-mail exchange that took place between a voter who takes advantage of Early Voting opportunities at Johnson Hardware and the Board of Commissioners. It appears that the voter is supportive of my request before the Board of Commissioners. I wasn't copied throughout but added at the very end when the voter wanted some clarification on the Convention Center space used during the Presidential elections.

I received this e-mail just prior to the Thanksgiving holiday and I have not yet responded to the voter but it is my full intention to do so and I will copy both of the Boards on my response...and include the original exchanges between the Commissioners and the voter. You may read it differently than I but, as I read through the thread, I find the Commissioners to have responded with revisionist history and outright lies.

They continue to say that we said the renovations provided all of the space we needed when the truth is that the Election Supervisor remembered something she meant to ask for and was told, by the Commissioners representative, that she would get what was asked for...but no more.

They continue to trot out the lie that we did not utilize the Nat U. Hill meeting room when I visited the Early/Absentee workers in the Nat U. Hill room on several occasions. I also have confirmation, from my Chief Deputy Clerk, that the space was utilized for 20 days in October. The problem, if you can call it that, was that there was no evidence of their having been there because they cleaned up after themselves...including taking out their own trash. They amended their correspondence to say that we only used it a handful of times. I would not consider twenty days a handful of times.

(continued)

Ms. Browne's entire update: (continued)

During their September presentation, one Commissioner even intimated that we had ballots in the back of a U-Haul truck once I noted that (due to the limited capacity for people to be in the building due to the pandemic) my employees had to work out of the back of the truck when the truth is that the truck contained PPE (personal protective equipment) provided to every County Clerk by the Secretary of State for use during the elections.

They continue to bring up vote centers and satellite locations when there is no bipartisan support for either at this time.

They talked about our not taking advantage of space at the Monroe County Convention Center when, actually, we did. We were forced to utilize that space for poll worker training and equipment practice because the 915 square feet of space we'd been using for years in the North Showers building was not conducive to training 450 poll workers and allow for the necessary social distancing due to the pandemic. Previously, we'd been cramming people into multiple trainings in that small room and making do. As I've previously stated, the pandemic only magnified that this was an untenable environment. By the way, I will be forwarding the Commissioners and the voters a copy of the invoice we received from the Convention Center for payment for utilization of that space.

It was also in that correspondence that I realized that they were expecting me to offer a suggestion as to where our Johnson Hardware neighbors should be moved should the Johnson Hardware Building be turned over to my office for Elections. I hadn't realized that was conditional upon my decision but my immediate response would be that if the spaces they have offered to me are good enough for my office, why would they not be good enough for our current neighbors.

With all of that being said, one Commissioner did (in the correspondence) provide the answer that the Commissioners would not state on the record at the working group meeting in response to Chairperson Rana's question...that she was not in agreement with my request for the entirety of the Johnson Hardware Building.

I know that vote centers and satellite facilities could be of inestimable value to elections but I am only one vote. I've made clear that I would vote in favor of both. At this time, it takes a unanimous vote by the members of the Election Board who were appointed by their Party's chairpersons to represent the interests of their respective parties.

There is no point in my bringing anything before the Board for which I do not believe I would secure a unanimous vote. Quietly and behind the scenes, knowing that I could not communicate with either of you, I have met with Allen County Clerk Nancarrow and his team for satellite options in an effort to reignite the possibility of satellite locations in Monroe County. He gave me some very good ideas and again, behind the scenes, I vetted some locations for feedback...doing my level best to present possible options that would be as fair and equitable as possible for all of Monroe County voters.

(continued)

Ms. Browne's entire update: (continued)

I tried to divide the county into a quadrangle. I tried to divide the county into thirds going north to south...and then west to east....with options that would not call for voters coming all the way downtown from more remote areas of the county. Unfortunately, I only received feedback conducive to bipartisan support for one location. As I attempted to explain to the Commissioners, this lends to the optics that the Election Board would be favoring one area of Monroe County over another. The only bipartisan support I have at this time is for the Johnson Creamery Building which is located right across the street from the Johnson Hardware Building. This is something for which I would be supportive.

I have also quietly presented a proposal for vote centers on Election Day that does not involve cutting any current Election Day polling sites. In fact, I would be willing to add more polling sites. I've not received any feedback to indicate that moving forward with my proposal would result in a unanimous vote by the Election Board.

Finally, I believe the Board may be aware of a proposal submitted by Guy Loftman to the Board of Commissioners. Guy Loftman is a former Monroe County Election Board member and, thus, uniquely qualified to understand the hurdles we face when it comes to overseeing elections. He had forwarded his correspondence to me for accuracy and he read it into their meeting minutes during public comment. At the work group meeting, I was attempting to move the discussion forward by simply asking if they were amenable to even considering Mr. Loftman's proposal. Somehow that question turned into one of the Commissioners asking if we had met and voted on it ... as though we'd met, considered and voted on a proposal that was submitted to them. Intimations that we're meeting and voting without the benefit of noticing meetings is incendiary and insulting.

At this time, it disheartens me to say that I think the Commissioners' response to my original request has been nothing short of a shell game played at the highest level in an effort to run out the clock before the 2022 elections because the Commissioners don't want to go on record with a hard no in response to that original request. Sadly, the only losers in this are the voters of Monroe County.

I think it's easy to think you would make the perfect decisions regarding the facilitating of elections in Monroe County when you've served as a poll worker one or two times for elections that are nowhere comparable to current elections and to do so from the perch of your home office chair. Here's the truth ... the 2020 elections were difficult but I am proud to say that ... with all of the challenges we faced, we still oversaw the second highest voter turnout for a Presidential election in Monroe County. It was second only to the election in which when Barack Obama was elected President.

With all of that being said, I'll put you in remembrance that I am on record as being amenable to utilizing the old NAPA space for 2022 to store our voting equipment and to conduct poll worker training and the space on the north end of the Showers Building for absentee ballot requests that come by mail. Following the work group meeting, the most recent one, Mr. Crohn came by to inquire as to when we might want him to make arrangements for us to see the NAPA building. I presumed that the most logical time would be following this meeting so that we could recess, rather than adjourn, and discuss the security needs for that space and I look forward to meeting with whomever is available to do so.

Thank you.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

A. Public Comments

HAL TURNER, BOARD OF ELECTIONS

Hal Turner announced that, effective today, he would be resigning from the service on the Monroe County Election Board. He said he has thoroughly enjoyed working on the Election Board and considers this Board and the work on elections to be one of the bright spots of his community service. Hal expects to be involved in other ways by volunteering in future Monroe County elections.

Hal introduced the new Election Board member who will represent the Republican Party, Mr. Donovan Garletts. Mr. Garletts is the president of Indiana Limestone Fabricators. Hal made this announcement today so that this new Board member could have the opportunity to attend the Statewide Election Conference in December, 2021. At this Conference led by the Indiana Election Division, Election Board members and key Election Staff members receive training and hear about important law and procedures to properly manage elections.

Shruti Rana and Nicole Browne expressed that it has been such an honor and privilege to work with Hal on this Board. Hal has been a phenomenal colleague to work with and will be dearly missed. Hal has set an example of bi-partisan cooperation which is so beneficial when defining what is best for our community. With thanks, the Board wishes Hal success in his retirement.

OTHER PUBLIC COMMENTS - NONE

B. Next Election Board Meeting

Date: Thursday, Jan 6, 2022 (will be confirmed with a public announcement)
1:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m. (*Likely meet via Zoom, using ID# 815 4841 8306, password 552782*)

V. ADJOURN

Nicole Browne made a motion to recess the Board meeting to allow a tour of the old NAPA facility today, Dec 2, 2021, at 3:00 p.m. Hal Turner seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously. Meeting recessed at 1:40 p.m.

A recording of this meeting is provided by Community Access Television Service (CATS). At <http://catstv.net>, click VIDEO ARCHIVE then MONROE COUNTY MEETINGS & select ELECTION BOARD December 2, 2021 to view this meeting.