



UNION COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS

REORGANIZATION MEETING MINUTES TUESDAY, MARCH 14, 2023

The meeting of the Union County Board of Elections was called to order by Administrator Nicole DiRado at 10:34am. The following were in attendance: Commissioner James Foerst, Esq.; Commissioner Richard Fortunato, Esq.; Commissioner Clara Harelik, Esq.; Commissioner Dennis Kobitz; Commissioner Raymond Szpond; Commissioner Debra Varnerin; and Administrator Nicole DiRado.

The Statement of Compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act was read by Administrator DiRado.

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

REORGANIZATION OF THE UNION COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS.

Union County Clerk Joanne Rajoppi administered the Oath of Office to Commissioner Richard Fortunato.

Union County Clerk Joanne Rajoppi administered the Oath of Office to Commissioner James Foerst.

Union County Clerk Joanne Rajoppi administered the Oath of Office to Commissioner Dennis Kobitz.

Union County Clerk Joanne Rajoppi administered the Oath of Office to Commissioner Raymond J. Szpond.

ELECTION OF CHAIR OF THE UNION COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS.

A motion was made by Commissioner Kobitz to nominate Commissioner Harelik as Chair of the Union County Board of Elections. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Szpond. All commissioners present voted in the affirmative.

ELECTION OF SECRETARY / COMMISSIONER OF REGISTRATION FOR THE UNION COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS.

A motion was made by Commissioner Varnerin to nominate Commissioner Foerst as Secretary / Commissioner of Registration for the Union County Board of Elections. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Fortunato. All commissioners present voted in the affirmative.

COUNTING BALLOTS FOR THE SPRINGFIELD SPECIAL SCHOOL ELECTION

The Board counted vote by mail ballots returned in the Springfield Special School Election held March 14, 2023.



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APPROVAL OF MINUTES

1. February 14, 2023 - Regular Meeting Minutes: A motion was made by Commissioner Varnerin to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Foerst. Commissioners Harelík, Foerst, Szpond and Varnerin voted in the affirmative with Commissioners Fortunato and Kobitz abstaining.
2. February 28, 2023 - Regular Meeting Minutes: A motion was made by Commissioner Varnerin to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Foerst. Commissioners Harelík, Foerst, Kobitz, Szpond and Varnerin voted in the affirmative with Commissioner Fortunato abstaining.
3. February 28, 2023 – Executive Session Minutes: A motion was made by Commissioner Varnerin to approve the minutes. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Foerst. Commissioners Harelík, Foerst, Kobitz, Szpond and Varnerin voted in the affirmative with Commissioner Fortunato abstaining.

RESOLUTIONS

- Appointing District Board Workers for the 2023 Elections

Ms. DiRado provided the list of District Board Workers assigned for the year 2023. She explained the list will likely be amended. There are currently 1,309 poll worker assigned, of which 171 are bilingual. Thus far, the Board needs over 300 poll workers to meet the statutory requirement and despite best efforts, the Board is significantly lacking bilingual poll workers.

Ms. DiRado outlined the various steps being taken to increase participation of poll workers, particularly bilingual poll workers. She has worked with the Secretary of State's office to increase paid media content on bilingual stations; with the assistance of the Office of Public Information, press releases and social media announcements have been disseminated; the municipal clerks are posting messages on their websites, social media pages and local access channels; and three paid ads have run in La Voz.

A motion was made by Commissioner Szpond to appoint the District Board Workers for 2023. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Varnerin. All commissioners present voted in the affirmative.

- Approval of the 2023 Polling Locations

Ms. DiRado outlined the polling location changes for 2023:

- Garwood Districts 1 & 2 will move to the Knights of Columbus, 37 South Avenue.
- Mountainside Districts 3, 4 & 5 will move the Community Presbyterian Church starting with the 2023 General Election.
- New Providence District 1 will vote at the Municipal Center. New Providence Districts 9 & 12 will be assigned to vote at the DeCorso Center.
- Roselle Park 1-1 and 1-2 will be voting in the Municipal Building.
- Springfield District 15 has been assigned to vote at the Sandmeier School.



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A motion was made by Commissioner Foerst to adopt the 2023 Polling Locations for Union County. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Szpond. All commissioners present voted in the affirmative.

- Approving the transition of the Provisional Balloting marking process to do so on the Voting Machine.

Ms. DiRado explained to the Board that legislation is pending which would require reporting the number of Provisional Ballots issued on Election Night. The only way for the Board to be in compliance would be to issue Provisional Ballots on the Electronic Poll Book and have the ballot marked on the Voting Machine, instead of issuing a paper provisional ballot. Every time a voter is issued a Provisional Ballot in the Electronic Poll Book it would be captured in Connect, the online website for tracking turnout, which would generate the report required at the close of the polls. The Election Day Provisional Ballot process is the same process used in Early Voting. Since the Speaker of the Assembly is sponsoring the legislation, it is likely going to pass in some form and the Board needs to be ready.

A motion was made by Commissioner Szpond to transition the Provisional Ballot marking process to the Electronic Poll Book and ExpressVote XL. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Kobitz. All commissioners present voted in the affirmative.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

- New Jersey Association of Election Officials – Upcoming Conference: April 11-13, 2023

The Board discussed the upcoming annual conference for the New Jersey Association of Election Officials. They will advise if they will be attending.

- Redistricting in Union County

Commissioner Foerst asked this item be added to the agenda. He indicated he reviewed the statutory provisions relative to redistricting and would like to volunteer to assist with the review and possible reduction of election districts. He believes there should be an objective standard and the Board should set as a goal for possible reduction. He mentioned that while the Board added two election districts, every district which is reduced, also reduces machines, poll workers and and bilingual requirements for Election Day. He did thank Commissioner Kobitz for his work on the district reviews and redistricting which has been done thus far.

Chair Harelik commented that reducing districts is not always in the best interest of the voters and that adding a district in Springfield was the right thing to do. She stated “if it’s not broke, don’t fix it.” She is concerned with confusing the voters, location of polling places and space to accommodate districts. Chair Harelik also thanked Commissioner Kobitz for his work on redistricting which was complete for the Primary Election.

Commissioner Kobitz indicated that he reviewed towns which he was asked to review. At this point, it is too late to redistrict for the primary election. The Board can work on something over the summer, ahead of the General Election.



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Ms. DiRado advised the Board that she had received an invoice from Remington and Vernick Engineers. She questioned the invoice because she had not authorized any work with RVE since the redistricting project in Linden in 2022. Either the State or KnowInk has a contract with RVE to assist with geocoding the State Voter Registration System (SVRS). However, the County was charged back for the work RVE did to apply the shape files for New Providence and Springfield to the SVRS. Ms. DiRado explained to the NJ Elections Division that if there was an issue with the files, the Election Board should have been contacted to adjust the files before a charge was incurred. The state indicated they would pay the invoice and would advise if future work would be charged back to the County, which may affect any future redistricting projects.

- International Association of Government Officials Membership
Commissioner Kobitz reminded the Commissioners to renew their IGO membership.
- Reorganization of the Board of Elections

Chair Harelik congratulated Commissioners Foerst, Fortunato, Kobitz and Szpond on their new terms and swearing-in's. She congratulated Commissioner Foerst on his election to Secretary of the Board / Commissioner of Registration and stated she looks forward to serving the Board in her new capacity as chair.

ADJUDICATION OF CERTAIN VOTE BY MAIL BALLOTS

The Board voted to reject vote by mail ballots for the following reasons: Voters voted sample ballots; voters did not return their ballot; voter returned their General Election Ballot; voter did not return the certificate; and a voter is deceased.

The Board voted to issue cure letters to three voters.

ADJOURNMENT

A motion was made by Commissioner Kobitz to adjourn the meeting. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Varnerin. All commissioners present voted in the affirmative with Commissioner Foerst absent. The meeting was adjourned at 8:09pm.