

STOKES COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS

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Robert (Buster) Robertson, Chairman
Durward Bennett, Secretary
Mike Pell, Member

Jason Perry, Director

Board Meeting Minutes – August 22, 2017

The Stokes County Board of Elections met in session at 4:00 PM in Courtroom C in the Stokes County Government Center. Board members in attendance: Robert (Buster) Robertson, Durward Bennett, and Mike Pell. Staff in attendance: Jason Perry. Those who signed up to offer public comments: Phil Holt, Steven Hewett, and Clifton Kilby. Each board member received a packet of information regarding the day's meeting.

Chairman Robertson called the meeting to order. Each board member reviewed the minutes of the meeting held August 15, 2017. Secretary Bennett moved that the minutes be approved as submitted; Member Pell seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

An ongoing matter before the board regarded the use of the American Legion Post 290 building as the polling place for West King precinct. Chairman Robertson opened the floor for those who signed up to speak for the public comments portion of the meeting, stating that each speaker would be allotted four minutes.

Mr. Holt expressed concern, based on comments he's heard in the community, that a change in polling place location away from the American Legion building would result in reduced voter turnout. He also indicated concern that a precedent would be set if the polling place was moved. He questioned the authority of the Executive Director of the State Board of Elections & Ethics Enforcement to disapprove the use of the American Legion as a voting site, which Executive Director Kim Westbrook Strach had done in an August 17th letter sent to the Stokes County Board of Elections.

Mr. Hewett, who has been barred from the American Legion property but wishes to campaign on Election Day as a King City Council candidate, spoke in advocacy of a polling place move. He said that the duty of the Board of Elections is the law, and the board has to make the right decision. He said that Executive Director Strach was within her rights to disallow the use of the American Legion building, and that voting at other West King precinct locations such as the King Public

Library or Recreation Acres would not be any more inconvenient for voters. He said that many are glad that he stood up, and that he would continue to fight for his rights and others.

Mr. Kilby said that, as the Commander of American Legion Post 290, he was representing those who came to the organization and asked that the voting site remain where it's at. He described his view of the incident involving Mr. Hewett that transpired on the previous Election Day (November 8, 2016) at the American Legion voting location. He maintained that there is not a constitutional or legal right to campaign on Election Day. He said that campaigning as outlined by state law is a privilege and said that if other laws are complied with, then campaigning would be permitted. He also questioned the "constitutional concerns" cited in the letter from the State Board, and noted that he was seeking clarification on what those concerns were. He expressed hope that the board would make the right decision.

Chairman Robertson thanked the speakers. Secretary Bennett said that he had previously voted in favor of keeping the West King polling place at the American Legion building. Based on the letter received from the State Board, however, he said he was now compelled to vote in favor of moving the location. He noted that he agreed with some of what both sides had said on the matter.

Secretary Bennett made a motion that the polling place for West King precinct be moved from the American Legion Post 290 building to the King Public Library. Member Pell seconded the motion. Chairman Robertson said he would vote in favor of it, noting that the library is also used for early voting. He stated that, as a result of the directive received from the State Board, the matter had been taken out of the county board's hands.

The Stokes County Board of Elections voted unanimously in favor of the motion. Chairman Robertson thanked those who attended the meeting, and expressed hope that the move to a new voting location would not have a negative impact on voter turnout.

Director Perry reviewed with board members a list of precinct officials to be appointed for the 2017-19 term. Following discussion, Member Pell made a motion to approve the list. Secretary Bennett seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

In other business, Mr. Perry informed the board that the purchase of voting machines had not been approved in the 2017-18 elections budget. Board members indicated a continued desire to buy new machines during the current budget year, and to seek available county funding.

Secretary Bennett moved to adjourn the meeting. Member Pell seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously. The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 PM.

Robert (Buster) Robertson, Chairman

Durward Bennett, Secretary

Mike Pell, Member