

A meeting of the Board of Elections Commissioners of St. Louis County was held by video conference, Tuesday, August 18, 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic and subsequent executive order. Members of the public took the opportunity to attend the meeting by calling into a conference line.

Present at the meeting were:

Sharon Buchanan-McClure	Chair
Trudi McCollum Foushee	Secretary
Matthew Potter	Commissioner
Peggy Barnhart	Commissioner
Steve Garrett	Attorney
Rick Stream	Director
Eric Fey	Director
Christian Tolbert	Deputy Director
Julie Leicht	Deputy Director

Chair Buchanan-McClure called the meeting to order and a roll call was taken. A quorum was present.

Chair Buchanan-McClure began the meeting by briefing what went well in the August Primary election. Given the pandemic, being short-staffed at the polls, the reduction of polling places, and the long hours that were put in by the staff, it was overall a successful election. Commissioners visited 25 polling places on Election Day to observe poll workers and voters on the ground. Voters waited patiently in line while poll workers worked hard to make sure everyone could vote safely. By 7:45 p.m. election night, 82,000 absentee ballots were tabulated. Chair Buchanan-McClure said we are always seeking ways to improve and keep our commitment to the voters of St. Louis County. Secretary Foushee added that we take the utmost care of the awesome responsibility for the voters, and that all things considered, the election was conducted in a way that voters and staff can be proud of. We always seek perfection, but it is elusive. We will always work towards this goal and we will make sure we provide voters with the safest opportunities to vote. Commissioner Potter said he was impressed with how hard everyone worked at headquarters. While we had some glitches and other obstacles to overcome, they were at no fault of staff. Commissioner Barnhart agreed with everyone and said she was amazed and impressed, and is grateful for the job everyone has done.

There was one person who signed up to speak at the Public Forum, but was not available when called upon.

Chair Buchanan-McClure asked if everyone had read the minutes from the July 21 meeting. Secretary Foushee made a motion to approve the minutes as amended and Commissioner Barnhart seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the minutes were approved. Chair Buchanan-McClure then asked if everyone had read the closed minutes from the July 21

meeting. Secretary Foushee made a motion to approve the minutes and Commissioner Potter seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the minutes were approved.

Chair Buchanan-McClure then asked if the commissioners had questions about the directors' reports or if the directors had anything to add. Secretary Foushee asked if we have received any feedback from the 11,000 voters who voted at a polling place other than their assigned location. Director Fey said the anecdotal feedback was all positive. Chair Buchanan-McClure asked if we knew how many voters attempted to vote but weren't registered. Director Fey responded that it's difficult to know the exact number other than provisional ballots. Deputy Director Leicht added that election judge payroll will be complete this week and that the Judges department has already begun staffing for the November election. We include a thank you letter with paychecks that include facts about the election. Chair Buchanan-McClure requested the letter be shared with commissioners.

Under Old Business, the Board discussed August election absentee analysis. We've discovered that approximately six percent (subsequently determined to be sixteen percent) of the absentee ballots were not returned from the voters. Director Fey noted this number is much less than past elections. We had 550 ballots that came in late, and two of our employees were at the St. Ann and downtown post offices at 7:00 p.m. election night to pick up ballots that otherwise would not have made the deadline. The Board requested we survey ten percent of the voters who did not return their ballots. The Board will discuss ideas on how to implement this survey at the September 1 meeting, and the directors will present to the Board a finalized plan at the monthly September 15 meeting.

Chair Buchanan-McClure mentioned the need to minimize the number of ballots that are surrendered at polling places, as this takes longer for poll workers to process and results in delays. Chair Buchanan-McClure asked counsel if we can accept voted absentee ballots at satellite offices on Election Day. Attorney Garrett responded that if we have satellite locations that are considered "off-site" we could accept them there on Election Day. However, polling places are not election board offices and are not considered legal, or sufficient depository places to return absentee ballots. Commissioner Barnhart asked if it was possible for a voter to drop off their absentee ballot at a satellite location and then go vote at a polling place. Director Fey responded that the poll worker would have to notate that the voter had dropped off their ballot in the electronic poll book so they could not vote twice. Secretary Foushee asked counsel if we could open satellite locations on Election Day for the sole purpose of dropping off voted absentee ballots. Attorney Garrett responded that if we made it clear that election board satellite offices would be available on Election Day, and did the same procedures as we do at our office, then it could be possible. Chair Buchanan-McClure clarified that mail-in ballots can only be mailed back through the USPS. Commissioner Potter expressed concerns of confusion between all the different categories of buildings on Election Day, as well as staffing issues.

The Board then discussed the 2021 budget submission. Director Stream said there has been no status report since the letters were sent last week. A meeting with the budget director and staff is scheduled for August 24.

Under New Business, the Board discussed strategic planning for the November election. Chair Buchanan-McClure said the directors would be well-served to come up with planning during this pandemic, and provided internal data from hospital systems which forecast an increase in coronavirus cases. Director Stream said we have been discussing different scenarios in the case of losing poll workers or full time staff. We are also discussing how to handle the continued workload with temporary employees and the reduction of polling locations due to staffing issues. We are working on recruiting two safety coordinators per location. The Judges department is using additional recruiting from our database who have not yet used the new equipment, with a goal of 500. We are constantly thinking of ways to train workers in a safe way. We will train the new workers and poll managers in-person. Other poll workers will be trained online. Chair Buchanan-McClure asked Deputy Directors Tolbert and Leicht to construct a strategic planning timeline for the September 1 meeting.

The Board then discussed November absentee planning. Director Fey announced we gained good absentee experience in August. The absentee process is a lot of work, but we are trying to streamline as much as possible. While we are trying to obtain the largest rooms available at each polling place, it may not be enough. The directors expressed to the Board that sending an application to each voter as one last attempt to encourage voters to vote by mail would help. Chair Buchanan-McClure responded that with the factors between the USPS and previous mailings, the best service we can do for St. Louis County voters is to be creative and figure out ways to communicate without relying on the postal service. We need to focus on the needs of special populations, including the elderly.

Commissioner Potter asked if we can do a return-on-investment analysis to determine if the absentee application received by the BOEC are the result of the recent mailings we've done. Director Stream replied that out of the 220,000 applications that were mailed out in April, 70,000 were mailed back for the June election, a little more than 70,000 for August, and approximately 70,000 have been returned so far for the November election, and we are still 11 weeks out. This equals about a 33 percent return. Director Fey replied he is confident that 70 percent of the mail absentee ballots cast were from that mailing. Chair Buchanan-McClure requested the directors present a one-page analysis of the pros and cons of another mailing.

The Board decided to discuss curbside voting policies in executive session in order to confer with counsel.

Under Financial/Budget, Director Stream explained the reports. Chair Buchanan-McClure asked how to tell which items have been requested for reimbursement with Covid-19 funds. Director Stream responded the "AF" code is noted for those line items. Chair Buchanan-McClure asked if we have made a request for reimbursement for the absentee mailing. Director Stream said it should be on next month's report.

There was nothing to discuss under Personnel in the open meeting.

There was nothing to discuss under Legal in the open meeting.

At the end of each meeting agenda, there will be a “review and wrap-up” of actions requested by the Board:

- 10% canvass of absentee ballots not returned
- Review of payroll thank-you letter
- Timeline for strategic planning
- Pros and cons of another mailing

Chair Buchanan-McClure announced the Board would adjourn after closed session. Secretary Foushee moved that the meeting be closed pursuant to RSMo 610.021(1),(2),(3), (12) and (13) to discuss litigation, real estate, and personnel matters. Commissioner Barnhart seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and the votes were as follows: Chair Buchanan-McClure, aye; Secretary Foushee, aye; Commissioner Barnhart, aye; Commissioner Potter, aye.



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Sharon Buchanan-McClure, Chair



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Trudi McCollum Foushee, Secretary