

A meeting of the Board of Elections Commissioners of St. Louis County was held by video conference, Tuesday, September 15, 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 established.

Chair Buchanan-McClure indicated that the written public comment would be entered into the record. The Public Forum was then closed.

The Board decided to finalize the minutes of the September 1 meeting at the September 29 meeting.

Chair Buchanan-McClure asked if everyone had read the directors' reports. There was no discussion.

Old Business

Possible Third Mailing Regarding Absentee/Mail-In Application

Commissioners and staff discussed the pros and cons of another mailing

Staff provided timelines for a self-mailer and a mailing that provided additional information. Staff discussed an intelligent bar code that could be used.

Chair Buchanan-McClure expressed that this is a complicated situation on many fronts.

Secretary Foushee made a motion to send the additional mailing and Commissioner Potter seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the votes were as follows:

Commissioner Barnhart, No;

Staff stated the reason for this mailing is to increase absentee or mail-in voting to at least 50 percent of active voters. Out of the last six elections, the most success we've had with absentee

mail is 85 percent: Only 85 percent of ballots requested were actually voted. If we take this best-case scenario to the goal of 50 percent, more than 97,000 requested ballots won't be cast.

Secretary Foushee, Aye;

The staff has recommended and we consider here today a mailing to all registered voters with details about available options for voting in the upcoming presidential election which includes a "self-mailer" Absentee/Mail-In Ballot application (Ballot Request) which could be completed and returned to the Board of Elections. This mailing would facilitate Absentee/Mail-In Ballot requests as it would not require the voter to have access to either the Internet or print capability; additionally, the Board provided Ballot Request includes an Intelligent Barcode that would allow the Board of Elections to efficiently and effectively process those requests when received back at the Board of Elections and thus cut down on turnaround time for returning November ballots to voters, because of the digital look up capability afford it by the Intelligent barcode. While the Board has indeed done two prior mailings, neither of the previous mailers was designed to reach the entire voting population with the exact information included in this proposed third mailer.

The first mailer was only mailed to the voting population age 60 and above. While it did include color-coded Absentee Ballot applications, it did not include any information about the Mail-in Ballot option, because that option was not a viable legal option at the time the first mailing was sent. It also did not include the Intelligent Bar Code information, as that capability was not yet available.

The second mailer which went to each voting household did not include a return Ballot Request of any kind. It did clarify the Absentee Ballot requirements and it did include information about the newly created Mail-in Ballot option. But no application with Intelligent Bar Code was included.

While research requested of the Board staff shows an increase in absentee requests for June and August elections neither one of those elections has any similarity to the November presidential election and any comparison of those results is inappropriate either in support of or against a third mailing because we would be comparing diamonds to rocks. History and statistics show that there is a marked increase in voter participation in a presidential election and conversely that the population does not vote as universally in off-year or local elections. What is clear and true is that the only way to devise a communications plan that reaches 100% of the registered voters is to speak directly to them. The only way to speak directly to them is thru direct correspondence to their address of record. Along with being assured that the communication will actually reach the intended voter, it would also put a Ballot Request in their hands. They may choose whether or not to utilize the Ballot Request, but they will not be hampered by the need for internet access to download the application or the need for a printer to print the application. Given the clear and acknowledged digital divide in the country this would clearly address that issue. Additionally, many who have access to the internet do not own printers. An already printed Ballot Request would address that issue as well.

Finally, once the Ballot Request is received back at the Board of Elections, the already strained staff will be assisted by the Intelligent Bar Code which will decrease man power needed by allowing for efficient digital look up and also decrease the turnaround time for getting Ballots out to voters.

While cost must always be a consideration the Mail-in Ballot option is a newly enacted legislative option passed specifically to address voting during the COVID-19 Pandemic. There has not been a prior mailing from the Board of Elections that included a Mail-In Ballot application. There is no reasonable likelihood Covid19 reimbursement will not be available for this mailing. All systems have been delayed by the pandemic and the fact that the Boards prior disbursements have not yet been approved is no indication that they will not be approved. We are today bypassing our most efficient and effective way to communicate with the voting constituency, increase Absentee and Mail-in Ballot request efficiency and reduce the stress on an already beleaguered staff.

Commissioner Potter, Aye;

Voters have the option to vote by whichever method they choose. If we do not send this mailing, it could result in many more people going to the polls on Election Day, with many unknowns such as the weather and the continuing spread of Covid-19. Issues with the St. Louis County website, could have serious implications on the access of absentee applications. The best option is to get this application in the hands of every voter. The letter can state that voters always have the option to vote at a polling place. Since the four Directors recommended this course of action, this makes me more agreeable to follow this course of action.

Chair Buchanan-McClure, No;

A letter was sent to all voters over 60, the most vulnerable to the pandemic, in April that included an absentee mail-in application for November. I strongly supported a letter in July to notify voters of changes in the law that provided additional voting options to voters. There has been no additional changes or options since the July letter justifying another mailing. No other county in the state communicated to voters directly. There were delays in printing and took in some cases 2 weeks for the letters to be received once mailed. That mailing took a month for the final voters to receive their letters. The printing company and postal service will have greater demand in November than they had in August. We have no assurance we wouldn't experience the delays. A mailing is by far the most expensive way to communicate with voters and we have not received any confirmation that the costs will be reimbursed from COVID-19 funding. I strongly support an aggressive, much less costly, communication plan to provide voters with all of their voting options. It should include traditional and digital methods. In addition, the plan should intentionally focus on populations not easily reached by traditional or digital methods. This type of communication plan will be more effective than a mailing. A mailing is static. Information and situations are changing rapidly. We need to communicate with voters using methods that allow for change.

The motion failed.

A Survey to Determine Reasons for the Non-Return Rate of Requested Absentee Ballots  
Commissioner Barnhart made a motion to table the survey discussion until the January Board Meeting and Commissioner Potter seconded until the motion. The vote was unanimous.

Commissioner Potter then left the meeting due to a prior commitment.

#### 2021 Budget

The Board briefly discussed the 2021 budget approach.

#### Strategic Planning for the November Election

The Board asked for a report on strategic planning. Deputy Director Leicht announced that poll worker recruitment is going well. We still have a group of about 1,100 in our database that we are contacting. We are still short on Republicans. Any leftover workers we will use as safety coordinators. We have all managers assigned. Training via Zoom began today and it is working out well. The Mapping department visited Washington University today to map out those locations.

Commissioners asked staff to:

- place additional people and equipment at locations that had long lines during the August election
- request the largest space available at each location, and
- assure there is adequate parking to accommodate greater turnout

Deputy Director Tolbert explained that each location is providing us with the largest rooms they have available. Deputy Director Leicht explained that additional poll workers and equipment will be placed where we expect high volume. Parking and handicap accessibility are the two most important things our Mapping department considers when surveying polling places. Director Stream explained we are working on an application to notify voters of where long lines are, and the safety coordinators will be handing out flyers with the five closest locations to them. This information will also be on the sample ballots that are mailed out closer to the election.

#### Financial/Budget

Director Stream explained the financial reports.

#### Personnel

Director Stream explained the personnel report, and announced that we have a number of employees who are on a special FMLA program for those with children learning at home due to the pandemic.

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

Commissioner Barnhart moved to approve the request for destruction of records and Secretary Foushee seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the votes were as follows: Chair Buchanan-McClure, aye; Secretary Foushee, aye; Commissioner Barnhart, aye.

Recap:

- Table absentee survey to the January meeting agenda
- Take up minutes at the September 29 meeting
- Communication plan from Anne Steffens working with Nicholle Spencer by September 29 meeting
- Approved letter to be sent back to St. Louis County Budget Director

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.



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Sharon Buchanan-McClure, Chair



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Trudi McCollum Foushee, Secretary

Public Comments:

Asim Thakore

First, thanks to you and the BOE staff for all their hard work during a uniquely trying time. I'm always impressed with how smoothly things run in St Louis County, having heard/read stories of chaps elsewhere. The August primary was a good example of this.

I'm writing to urge the board to consider three things:

1) An additional super precinct or two, especially for healthcare workers at area hospitals. Many healthcare workers work 7-7 and cannot step away to vote. Tents in the parking lots would be easy and safe. Similarly, parking lots of malls may be a good place to use as voting sites in general, especially if doing drive through voting (which we should).

2) More social media presence. Shareable graphics sized for Instagram and Snapchat are very important, as are videos less than 1 min long that can be shared to Instagram or Snapchat. Short videos can be posted to an Instagram feed and will autoplay. The same goes for TikTok. The videos don't have to be complex; they can just be text with generic music. These are easily made on PowerPoint combined with a program called Camtasia.

Any video or image posted to one platform should be posted to all.

3) If the weather allows, open exterior doors to polling places. Every little bit of ventilation helps.