

A meeting of the Board of Elections Commissioners of St. Louis County was held by video conference, Tuesday, November 17, 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 read the letter written from the Commissioners to election board staff regarding the November 3 election:

“While we know there is always more to be done, we hope you will stop long enough to allow us to thank each of you for the role you played in accomplishing the unimaginable in an impossible situation.

You executed a timely, accurate, efficient, voter-focused election in the middle of the worst global pandemic in 100 years and a contentious presidential contest. You implemented voting methods that did not exist six months ago.

You worked long hours doing your job while doing your best to protect your own and your family’s health.

You answered unending calls, fielded ceaseless questions and adjusted to constant changes with patience and courtesy. Many of you worked outside in the cold and rain.

You didn’t just do your job you performed a democracy- protecting duty to the voters of St. Louis County. We hope you will one day share this letter with your children and grandchildren because your efforts in this unprecedented time is part of your legacy to them.

On behalf of the voters of St. Louis County and as the Board of Election Commissioners, we thank you.”

No one requested to speak during the Public Forum portion of the meeting.

Chair Buchanan-McClure asked if everyone had read the open minutes from the October 20 meeting. Secretary Foushee made a motion that the open minutes be approved as amended and the closed minutes be approved and Commissioner Barnhart seconded the motion. A vote was taken and the minutes were approved.

Chair Buchanan-McClure asked if everyone had read the directors' reports. The directors each briefly explained their main takeaways from the election. Director Stream explained that as this was his first presidential election as director, he had been warned that this is the most difficult election to administer. He now understands this, especially since we had to deal with Covid-19, a mostly older staff, nearly 150 temporary employees to get through various stages of the election, curbside voting, voting almost 1,000 Covid-19 positive voters on Election Day, and 1,500 in and out of our office daily to vote. It took a lot of people working day and night to make sure Election Day ran smoothly and properly. The 12 weeks leading up to November 3 was a daunting challenge for everyone, but we all pulled it together and did our jobs. When staff was asked to help in other areas they did so without complaint. We worked long hours. We wish the people of St. Louis County could see all the work we did. The commissioners agreed. We received a lot of positive feedback from voters.

Deputy Director Tolbert explained that he has worked in this office for over 25 years and we should recognize the number of hours everyone put in. The effort prior to Election Day is often under the radar. Unlike past presidential elections, this one was very smooth which is a testament to our staff and the organization and preparation that took place before Election Day. Voters often mentioned that our processes were very efficient and organized.

Deputy Director Leicht echoed the comments of Director Stream and Deputy Director Tolbert. She was very impressed with the part-time employees and all staff for getting everything done amidst Covid-19. We implemented a 17-man call center plan within 48 hours to handle the influx of voter calls. In addition, we developed a plan to vote Covid-19 positive voters before the election. It was a joint effort to operate and was successful in safely voting individuals with Covid-19.

Director Fey announced that the East-West Gateway Council of Governments has presented us with the Outstanding Local Government Award. The award states: "In recognition of the time, work and personal commitment devoted to the betterment of our region." The Executive Director informed us that this was the first time the award has ever been given to an election authority. Director Fey is very proud of the staff who made this happen.

Chair Buchanan-McClure mentioned that she loved going around to polling places on Election Day and is always struck and humbled by the patience and demeanor of voters. At this particular election, there was a location with a 3.5-hour wait that was wrapped around the building twice. Voters claimed that once you got inside it was a fast process. Many used the application to find other polling places with shorter lines. It was very encouraging to watch.

Old Business

2020 General Election Follow-Up/Certification

Director Stream provided statistics from the November 3 election. Turnout reached 79.25%, which is the highest ever in St. Louis County. Fifty-nine percent of total voters voted on Election Day and 41% voted absentee. Fifteen percent of total voters voted in-person absentee and 28% voted by mail (including those who dropped off their ballots, which was about 4%). About 10% of the applications were for mail-in ballots. Because voters are given the chance to change their reason on the ballot envelope, it is difficult to differentiate between absentee and mail-in. In-person absentee opened at our office 6 weeks before the election. About 40,000 voters voted, averaging about 1,100 each day. The satellite voting centers opened on October 22 for 11 days. The North County recreation complex voted 10,797 voters, the West County Government Center voted 10,941 voters, the South County Government Centers voted 9,500 voters, and the Mid-County Branch Library voted 11,569 voters. Twenty-one thousand nine hundred and ninety-seven voters dropped off their ballots at a satellite voting center, with the West and South County Government Centers collecting the most dropped off ballots (more than what was collected at our office for 6 weeks). Of the 154,102 ballots that were returned, 152,175 were counted (98.75%). Director Stream explained that we make every attempt to contact voters if their ballot is rejected so they can fix the mistake. Of the 164,658 ballots that were mailed out, 152,175 were returned and counted (92.42%). Five thousand five hundred ballots were surrendered at the polls, and 5,015 ballots were not returned. Secretary Foushee mentioned that these statistics reflect an engaged voting population thanks to our information campaign and the excellent work of staff. Chair Buchanan-McClure agreed that this data is very helpful.

Deputy Director Leicht explained that we had about 3,000 workers on Election Day including technicians, safety coordinators, and poll workers. We were proud to hire 600 new workers, including doctors, lawyers, and other professionals. The safety coordinators were responsible for cleaning the equipment/polling place and managing the wait-time application. The Election Judges department is finishing up payroll, and checks should be arriving to workers by the end of the week. Gaining early access to the polling places the night before the election was a huge success. The morning of the election was fairly quiet. The wait-time application was piloted with the absentee satellite locations and then rolled out County-wide on Election Day. With 365,887 hits on Election Day, 88,907 people voted at a location other than their assigned location. Almost 1,000 Covid-19 positive voters voted at our tent on Election Day. We originally had 3 bipartisan teams travelling around the County to vote these voters from their homes, but with a spike in positive cases just a couple of days before Election Day, we were incurring a wait-list and quickly realized it would not be possible to reach everyone in time. We had 40 bipartisan teams set-up in the warehouse to open ballots. The Human Resources department did a great job of keeping up with all of the temporary employees coming and going. We have enforced mandatory Covid-19 testing of our staff as we have had a few positive results in the office. We will be doing a deep clean of the entire office over Thanksgiving Break, and continue to clean multiple times a day.

County Website Issues

Director Fey explained that at the end of August, the County's website was compromised and in turn taken offline. They tried to stand up the new website very quickly. The new site was marginally functional throughout the election, and gained more functionality each week. On Election Day, traffic to our portion of the website overwhelmed the entire County site and went down at one point in time of the day. Once the results began to come in, we received about 3.4 million hits which completely overwhelmed the site and it was down for most of the evening. This would not have happened with the previous site as we had worked with the County for years on capacity, and the new site is just not there yet. We had to resort to posting results on our social media pages and a back-up website. This was frustrating and we will be having conversations with the County in the days to come about the issue and how to move forward.

There was nothing to discuss under New Business.

Financial/Budget

2020 Grant Purchases

Director Fey announced that all expenditures, other than salaries and payroll (time employees spent cleaning the office) have been approved to be reimbursed with Covid-19 relief funds. We received \$150,000 from the Secretary of State's CARES grant. We have about \$49,000 left which we intend to use for temporary employee salaries. We also have about \$33,000 left of the regular Secretary of State grant that we intend to use for new desktop scanners. We have about \$1.7 million left of the Center for Tech and Civic Life grant. Once we hit the ceiling of what was budgeted for, we will use the remaining funds to cover the cost of the election. Secretary Foushee marveled at staff for thinking of ways to use this money to better serve the voters and to make the election process run more smoothly and efficiently.

Director Stream then explained the monthly financial reports.

There was nothing to discuss under Personnel.

Legal

Attorney Garrett explained that state statute provides that the second Wednesday before the election we can begin to vote those who have become ill or confined due to illness. As we approached the weekend before the election, there was a spike in Covid-19 that was manageable early in the week, but quickly became overwhelming. On the Monday before the election, we engaged with the Public Health department and determined the plan to set up two large tents in the parking lot of our office to allow Covid-19 positive voters to drive through and vote. We have much gratitude for the Parks and Recreation department for setting up the tents right away. The St. Ann Police department was also a huge help. The Board then discussed the extent of the Public Health department's assistance.

Recap:

- Point of information added to October minutes
- Ballot question
- Amendment to Deputy Director Leicht's report
- Videos to be sent to commissioners
- Media list to be sent to commissioners

Chair Buchanan-McClure announced the Board would adjourn after closed session. Secretary Foushee made a motion 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 Potter seconded the motion. A roll call vote was taken and the votes were as follows: Chair Buchanan-McClure, aye; Secretary Foushee, aye; Commissioner Potter, aye; Commissioner Barnhart, aye.



Sharon Buchanan-McClure, Chair



Trudi McCollum Foushee, Secretary