

**Buncombe County Board of Elections**  
**Asheville/Buncombe County Board of Elections**

**Monitor Name:** Elaine and George Elam plus Cheryl Williams in person

**Date & Time:** April 30, 2024 3:30 PM

**Names of Board Members Attending:**

Jake Quinn, Chairman

Mary Ann Braine, Board Member

Steven Aceto, Board Member

Glen Shults, Secretary

Sally Stein: Board Member

**Names of Buncombe Co Staff Attending:** Corrine Duncan, Director; Devin Whitney, Elections Technical Specialist; Justin Tate, Absentee Coordinator; Anna Katherine Moore, Administrative Coordinator and Clerk to the Board; Bria Bailey, Elections Technical Specialist; Neggy Fox, Deputy Director

**Location of Meeting:** 59 Woodfin Place, Asheville NC

**Observers:**

12 observers as follows: 6 Republicans, 2 Democrats, 3 LWVAB, 1 Common Cause. At least 5 online.

**Agenda Items**

**I. Agenda** for this meeting approved by acclamation

**II. Minutes (G.S. § 143-318.10)** – for the April 23 meeting approved by acclamation.

**III. Office Updates – Corrine Duncan, Director**

- Training for Election Day workers continues all this week
- In person Early Voting started on April 25 and 68 ballots have been cast
- Two updates on hiring:
  - An offer has been made for the position of Candidate Coordinator but no reply yet, and
  - The position posting for Registration Specialist has closed and staff will begin reviewing the applications

**IV. Public Input for Early Voting Plan for the 2024 General Election (G.S. § 163-166.35, SL 2023-140) Neggy Fox, Deputy Director**

- A review of the proposed plan as presented last week:
  - The proposed plan for the General Election Early Voting included:
    - 13 proposed sites
    - Weekday hours are 8 AM to 7:30 PM
    - Open Saturdays – 10/19 and 10/26 and Sunday 10/27

- Weekend hours 10:00 am to 3:00 pm
    - Hours for 11/2, the last Saturday before the Election, are 8 am to 3 pm
  - The 13 proposed sites are:
    - Bee Tree Fire Station in Swannanoa; Black Mountain Library; East Asheville Library; Enka-Candler Library; Fairview Library; Friendship Center in Asheville; Leicester Community Center; North Asheville TBD; South Buncombe Library: UNC-Asheville although the specific location within campus to be determined; Weaverville Community Center; Wesley Grant Southside Center (in lieu of BOE); and West Asheville Library
  - All sites, except for North Asheville, are confirmed and have been used before
- Regarding public input, the site has had over 400 views with 194 responses and over 100 comments, which is not bad for such a short window of time. The comment period for the Primary Early Voting Plan was open for a month and had over 900 views.
  - 55 percent approve of the plan as is
  - 28 percent approve the plan with minor modifications
  - 11 percent approve the plan with major modifications
  - 6 percent do not approve of the plan
- Features of the plan that people liked include:
  - Accessible voting locations (10)
  - Support for weekend voting hours (12)
  - Extended Early Voting period (10)
  - Appreciation for Early Voting and late voting times (11)
  - Convenience of multiple voting sites (9)
- Features people did not like include:
  - Concern about the UNCA location (9)
  - Need for more outer area sites (5)
  - Request for more polling locations (4)
  - Concerns about Early Voting costs (4)
  - Need for weekend voting (4)
- Concerns about UNCA are that the campus is difficult to navigate, parking is difficult to find, many students may not be eligible to vote in Buncombe County and will vote in the district where they live, and a few people were concerned about safety if protests occur
- She looked at possible outer northeast area locations in light of the discussion last week and reached out to Big Ivy Community Center and Jupiter Fire Station but has not yet heard back from either one and the Barnardsville Fire Department does not have a large meeting space
- She also looked to outer southwest area locations and received a very positive response from the Upper Hominy Fire Station that will check with their Board but found that the Enka-Candler Fire Station 2 has no large meeting room

- Regarding possible locations in North Asheville, she has reserved the North Asheville Library meeting room, the Woodfin Community Center is not available, and she's waiting to hear back from the North Asheville Community Center and the Stein-Mart Shopping Center.
  - The North Asheville Community Center has limited parking and many people did not like Reynolds Village because it is not convenient for walking
  - Woodfin is leasing out their community Center for the next 2 or 3 years, so Buncombe County will lose it as a polling place as well
- She proposed adding both the North Asheville Library and Upper Hominy Fire Station as Early Voting locations, bringing the total to 14 sites. North Asheville Library will be closed for renovations in the fall but the area used for voting will not be affected. Consequently, voting can take place while the main library room is closed to the public. The Upper Hominy location won't be confirmed until she hears back from their Board.
- With the changes the proposed plan for the General Election Early Voting is:
  - 14 proposed sites
  - Weekday hours are 8 am to 7:30 pm
  - Open Saturdays – 10/19 and 10/26 and Sunday 10/27
  - Weekend hours 10:00 am to 3:00 pm
  - Hours for 11/2, the last Saturday before the Election, are 8 am to 3 pm
- The public input portal closes on Friday, May 3 at 5:00 pm
- Mr. Aceto thanked Ms. Fox for her hard work
- Mr. Shults asked with respect to the north part of the county and knowing that 15 sites might stretch the budget, are there no other options than the Big Ivy Community Center? Ms. Fox said no because other locations are schools or churches. It already is a very popular location.
- Mr. Shults said he supports locations on school campuses but thinks the public may have a point about many students choosing to vote in their home locations. He reviewed the statistics presented for the 2020 election and wondered whether a location near the Land of Sky Regional Council could be found even though it is very close to West Asheville? Ms. Fox said she believes the folks in that area would come in to the library.
- Mr. Shults asked about the Erwin High School and Erwin Hills neighborhood. Ms. Fox said she thinks those folks face a decision of whether to come into town to vote. Although the Enka Candler Library site is available to them.
- The Leicester Community Center is targeted to people who live in Sandy Mush, Alexander, and Leicester which are all further out
- Ms. Duncan asked whether Mr. Shults was proposing to not use UNCA and to add a site more convenient to the Erwin area. He said no, that he raised the issue for discussion
- Ms. Braine asked whether UNCA had provided information on parking. Ms. Fox said not yet but she asked for more details by next Monday. In the last election that included UNCA, the school was very generous in providing

parking close to the polling location with curbside access. The room was large and it was a lovely location. She hopes they will do the same this time.

- Mr. Shults said that a UNCA location takes some of the pressure off other North Asheville locations. Ms. Fox agreed.
- Ms. Duncan wanted to clarify that students may choose to have their residence in Asheville or where they came from
- Mr. Shults noted that UNCA had good turnout and asked whether the staff had data on that issue. Mr. Quinn said that many members of the UNCA community use it, neighbors as well as faculty and staff.
- An observer asked about using AB-Tech. Mr. Quinn said it was not on the table and had four strikes against it: money, staffing, location, and history as discussed in prior meetings. It is not being considered in part because of its proximity to other locations. Staffing is a very big concern and very difficult.
- The observer further asked about the extent to which the Board had considered using more scientific metrics instead of anecdotal evidence to select sites. Mr. Quinn said he hopes that neighborhood groups use the portal to provide input. He further said the current process is not broken and does rely on data, including voter residence and voting location.
- Ms. Duncan commented that staff are always looking for ways to improve and have made progress in developing the Early Voting plan, including seeking public input, getting data out to the public early, and allowing for discussion. With the extensive changes in elections law, each Early Voting Plan stands alone. Also, budgets are developed well in advance of the need for the funds.
- Another observer commented on the need to add another location in the Barnardsville area because the long drive could be a disincentive to voting
- Another observer asked about the number of sites in the past. Mr. Quinn said that in 2020 we had 16 sites.
  - Ms. Duncan reminded folks that 2020 was during covid and staff believed the public would want many Early Voting sites, which proved to be true
  - She also said that in 2020 the office had access to grant funds to open sites that were not in the budget. Grant funding has since been prohibited by statute
  - She said that each county is different. For example, Durham has 12 Early Voting locations although Buncombe County has issues of terrain that other counties do not have
  - Buncombe County has, she said, more Early Voting sites per capita than most other counties
- Mr. Shults asked about other UNCA locations such as Reuters Center but said they have a lot of events going on. Ms. Fox said she did not know but the last UNCA location was in the Blue Ridge Room near Highsmith Student Union which is more centrally located than Reuters.
- With respect to the question about Barnardsville, it seems that it is ignored but it's hard to justify putting a voting location there

- Mr. Aceto said that living far out isn't an argument for or against locating a site there if lots of people live there but he agreed with the observer about the need for more data to support whatever decisions the Board makes
- An observer asked whether there was ever a voting site in Barnardsville. Mr. Quinn said not Early Voting site but regularly have Election Day voting. Mr. Quinn further said it was helpful to hear about the traffic issues there. The Board looks to patterns of growth in the community to decide where to best place services
- Mr. Quinn stressed the difficulty of finding a suitable location and enough people to staff it. By opening the planning process to the public, the Board has received suggestions of locations that the Board has used. Another big concern for locations is security and the need for 2 and a half weeks of lock down to keep the machines and supplies secure
- Ms. Duncan responded to the question about cost, noting that the biggest cost at each location was staffing which runs about \$30,000 per location for 2 captains and 12 workers. Another cost is rent. For example, Reynolds Village costs about \$4,000 to \$5,000. Training is another cost. Elections Services has 140 Express Vote machines that will be allocated across all sites.
- Mr. Aceto raised a longer-term issue of what do we do to plan for the future. Fire departments have empirical data on response times they can take to the Commissioners and the Zoning Board. What metrics could we use to literally present a map to the Commissioners about where we think Early Voting sites should be. The needs should be on paper with criteria defined so the County knows that voting is part of the County's infrastructure
  - Mr. Quinn said it was a great idea for more cooperation with the Planning Department and use the data that have already been developed
  - Developing a plan could help the other departments "sell" their plans to the Commissioners
- Ms. Braine asked about both Big Ivy and Jupiter. Ms. Fox said she is waiting to hear back from each of them
- An observer said she would like to see a map with sites evenly distributed across the county so that no one must drive more than 10 or 15 minutes
- Another observer said that Jupiter has grown more than Barnardsville. Mr. Quinn said that perhaps the experience of the Board in 2012 using the Jupiter Fire Station needs to be revisited
- Mr. Shults asked whether the budget had enough money for a 15th site. Ms. Duncan said no but the staff could look for ways to move money around or ask the Commissioners for additional funds
- Ms. Duncan said that Early Voting is a super important part of elections because most people vote Early in a General Election. However, Election Day voting with extended hours is available to everyone and is designed to have all 80 precincts available to voters to minimize driving time. Yes, Election Day is

a Tuesday but the polls are open both before and after work hours. Also, voters can vote absentee by mail

- Ms. Duncan loves the idea of using empirical metrics and strategic planning, specifically around connecting community centers and fire stations with voting. It is her job to advocate voting to the County but anyone can bring up the issues to start the discussion. She encourages members of the community to talk to the Commissioners. The County Comprehensive Plan is being put together now. The County has conducted 2 community-wide surveys which could include voting-related questions. She would also like to see risk assessments as part of the planning for site locations. For example, which ones face the risk of flooding, heavy snow, or other hazards
- Mr. Aceto commented that she was defining accessibility
- Elections compete with other services such as emergency services which get a lot of attention. So, staff and community supporters of voting need to keep raising the importance of voting to officials. She does not see the competition as zero sum. The community can have both and have them both be efficient
- Mr. Quinn said the Mountain X readers' poll closes today at 11:59 pm and it contains a question about what north Asheville needs. He answered that it needs a polling place. The public input portal for the Early Voting Plan is open until 5:00 pm, Friday, May 3.
- Ms. Stein asked whether the final vote on the plan would be next week, May 7. Mr. Quinn said yes

#### **V. Absentee Ballot Review (GS §163-230.1(f)) – Justin Tate**

Mr. Tate first presented 4 mailed in civilian ballots with exception forms that staff recommended for approval

- The Board reviewed the ballots and all 4 were approved 5/0
- For the benefit of new observers, Mr. Tate explained the process members use to review the ballot envelopes and exception forms

Mr. Tate then presented 7 mailed in civilian ballots with IDs that staff recommended for approval

- The Board reviewed the ballots and all 7 were approved 5/0
- All 11 ballots were scanned by Bria Bailey and placed in envelopes which Mr. Tate had all members sign. The ballots and envelopes were then sealed in separate envelopes for storage. Similarly, the flash drive was placed in an envelope that was signed and sealed by members.

**VI. Next Meeting:** Tuesday, May 7 at 3:30 pm

**Location:** 59 Woodfin Place