

**Tuesday, June 19 Brunswick Board of Elections mtgs.  
Special meeting on Early Voting and Regular Monthly Mtg.**

**Reporting: Gail Bromley**

**Present: Board members- Boyd Williamson (current chair), Stuart Smith, Carolyn Ferguson, and Randy Pelton**

**Staff: Sara Knotts, Director and Melissa Monroe, Deputy Director**

**League members present: Gail Bromley, Barbara Burrell, Karen Spaight, Karen Richardson, Sue Marsh and Barbara Brandes**  
**There were many others present from other organizations or as concerned individuals.**

**This special session was to address One Stop Voting sites, times and locations.**

Sara Knotts did a presentation pointing out what Senate Bill 325 would do to Early Voting if the Governor signs it or doesn't and is overridden. The law would require the dropping of the last traditional Saturday of Early Voting, adding a day at the beginning with the start being a Wednesday instead of a Thursday. All weekday hours would have to be 7:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. at all sites offered. These long 12 hour days have proven not to be very effective for turnout, except on Election Day itself and forcing this schedule on all open sites, clearly would put a lot of pressure on staffing the sites. Dropping the final Saturday would also mean a huge change for folks who like to vote on that day. The Boards of Elections were not notified about this bill in advance nor were they consulted.

Sara and the Board decided to go ahead as SB 325 has passed both houses, gone to the Governor for signature or his veto and that leaves what happens next up in the air. Given the publicity for the meeting, the uncertainty of the bill and the preparations for this meeting, they went ahead with plans using what is relevant now.

Sara talked a little about the New Hanover turnout of Sunday voters this last May. This had likely been a request from the Board. While the turnout was 412 voters, this was a primary election. (Primary elections routinely have a low turnout and a primary is not like a general election for a true test of Sunday voting use.) Randy asked a question during the presentation on how many registered voters they have in New Hanover County and then made reference to how small the turnout was to that number. (That comparison did not make sense to many of us.)

She also discussed the continued search for a site for North Brunswick Early Voting. The Town of Leland was not going to make either the Leland Cultural

Arts Center nor the Town Hall available for Early Voting as they had in the past. Someone suggested the Navassa Town Community Center as a site so Sara checked it out. She reported that the room was large and would accommodate voting well. (Navassa has a high minority community. It is predominately an African American neighborhood.) Parking is more than adequate and the Town welcomes the BOE for voting purposes. She went through other options. All were not as good for sites in some way. For some parking was a problem; for others, safety was an issue. She showed on a map, the location of the sites that were being considered in North Brunswick.

Then the discussion of the two plans began. Plan 2 offered 1 day of Sunday voting 12:00 noon to 4:00 pm. at only the Bolivia office. That was the only difference from plan 1. Both offered 666 hours for the six sites with an extra 4 hours for the Sunday voting option.

Then public comments commenced. Both major political parties were well represented as were some representing the African Community and other activists. Several Republicans spoke first. Mike Forte, the only currently serving public representative as County Commissioner spoke. To paraphrase his comments, he said Sunday is a day where one should not be involved in working or voting but instead basically observing the Sabbath and spending time with family. Others said it wasn't needed, too burdensome for staff, etc. Then one man said that the turnout in New Hanover showed how ineffective it was given the turnout of such a small percentage.

Speakers for Sunday voting included a young mother who said she wanted more voters, not less. Another woman who commutes long distances said she would greatly benefit from Early voting on Sunday. William Flythe, a candidate for School Board and a representative of a faith-based coalition, spoke about the three constitutional amendments that provided suffrage over the years and emphasized our women's struggle for over 100 year struggle to get the vote. Another speaker talked about the sacred character of voting and he told a story of a felon he had helped, even though he knew the felon had voted against all the candidates he had supported. He was just so happy the man in question got to vote. One older woman said it would be great to come after church to vote.

When I spoke as a League observer, I thanked Sara for getting out the plans for consideration in advance and that I enjoyed attending their meetings. Then I addressed Randy's mathematical example and the implication that the 412 votes were low and not significant. I said that since less than 10% of the registered voter population in NH voted in the primary, using the number of total registered voters for comparison to a Sunday turnout made no sense. And, it was a primary election and not a general election, which makes a huge difference in voting. I then gave my remarks. Barbara Burrell added to this discussion too. She helped with the mathematical issue as well.

After the public presentations concluded, the Board discussed what their views were on the plans. The Republicans on the Board were clear that nothing they had heard that day changed their minds and that they preferred no Sunday voting. The opposite was true for the Democrats. It was clear that there would be again, a split vote.

Carolyn, the newest Democratic member of the Board, made a motion to accept Navassa as a site and she suggested the second North Brunswick site be the Leland Cultural Arts Center. She then asked for a change in plan 2 to reflect three sites for Sunday voting instead of one and excluding Bolivia as one of those sites. The three sites would include Navassa and two other sites in the more southern parts of the county. This motion, after discussion, had two votes for and two against and the vote was along party lines. Then Stuart made the motion for Plan 1 with no Sunday. Also included in his motion was for only the Leland Cultural Arts Center for North Brunswick. When asked if he wanted to add Navassa, he said "no". That was also a 2-2 vote along party lines. The two plans now go to the State Board for their decision on what our plan should be, but with SB 325 looming, who knows what will happen. Since the Leland Cultural Arts Center is not being offered by the Town of Leland, this issue is yet to be resolved. I believe it was mentioned that maybe the State Board could be used to force the issue and make it available.

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