

CITY OF CRANSTON
BOARD OF CANVASSERS
Special Meeting of October 10, 2023 – OFFICIAL MINUTES

The Cranston Board of Canvassers met on October 10, 2023, in a meeting advertised in accordance with the Rhode Island Open Meetings Act on October 4, 2023. The meeting was called to order by the Chairperson, James Donahue, at 5:31 p.m. It was held in Council Chambers, Third Floor at Cranston City Hall.

MEMBERS PRESENT: James Donahue, Kirk McDonough (For Ms. Moronta)

MEMBERS ABSENT: Quilcia Moronta

NON-MEMBERS PRESENT: Nicholas Lima (Registrar / Director of Elections), Richard Santamaria

The Chair declared a quorum present.

AGENDA

- I. CALL TO ORDER (NO VOTES TO BE TAKEN)
- II. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)
- III. APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS – 9-12-2023, 10-3-2023, 10-4-2023 (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)
- IV. PUBLIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS – CHAIRPERSON (NO VOTES TAKEN)
- V. PUBLIC COMMENT (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)
- VI. OLD BUSINESS – NONE
- VII. NEW BUSINESS
 - A. DISCUSSION AND REVIEW OF THE CONDUCT OF THE OCTOBER 3, 2023 SPECIAL ELECTION (NO VOTES TO BE TAKEN)
 - B. PURSUANT TO R.I. GEN. LAWS § 17-22-5.2, THE BOARD MAY CERTIFY THE LOCAL ELECTION RESULTS FOR THE OCTOBER 3, 2023 CRANSTON CITY COUNCIL WARD 6 SPECIAL ELECTION FOR AN UNEXPIRED TERM (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)
 - C. PUBLIC HEARING ON POLLING PLACE RELOCATION (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)
 - D. RELOCATION OF DEFAULT POLLING PLACES FOR DUTEMPLE SCHOOL (TO EDEN PARK SCHOOL) AND CLCF (TO GARDEN CITY SCHOOL), FOR SUBMISSION TO THE RHODE ISLAND BOARD OF ELECTIONS FOR FINAL APPROVAL (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)
- VIII. UPDATES FROM THE REGISTRAR (ALL ITEMS FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY; NO VOTES TO BE TAKEN)
 - A. 2024 ELECTIONS LEGISLATION UPDATE
 - B. FEDERAL ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION OCTOBER 2023 TABLE-TOP EXERCISE
- IX. ADJOURNMENT (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

Mr. Lima noted for the record that Member Quilcia Moronta and Alternate Jeffrey Barone each had work commitments this evening.

MOTION: By Mr. McDonough and seconded by Mr. Donahue to approve the agenda as posted.
PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 2-0 – Mr. Donahue and Mr. McDonough voting aye.

APPROVAL OF THE MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS – 9-12-2023, 10-3-2023, 10-4-2023 (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

Mr. Donahue asked for a motion to approve the minutes. He asked the Board if they were comfortable taking the minutes as a group or individually, and without objection it was agreed to approve the minutes as a group.

MOTION: By Mr. McDonough and seconded by Mr. Donahue to approve the minutes of 9-12-2023, 10-3-2023, and 10-4-2023 as a group.
PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 2-0 – Mr. Donahue and Mr. McDonough voting aye.

PUBLIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS – CHAIRPERSON (NO VOTES TAKEN)

Mr. Lima thanked the poll workers for conducting a successful election. He said there were virtually no issues, and we had some of the best of the best people working on Oct. 3.

Mr. Donahue agreed and thanked the poll workers. Mr. McDonough added that the office staff also deserved acknowledgement for conducting this irregularly scheduled election, which Mr. Donahue likewise echoed.

Mr. Donahue also acknowledged former Councilman Richard Santamaria was present in the Chambers today as a member of the public.

PUBLIC COMMENT (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

Richard Santamaria spoke about the acoustics of the Schofield Armory, which makes it hard for party checkers to hear the poll workers calling out the names and addresses of voters. He asked if possibly the layout of the room may be adjusted in the future to make it easier to hear. The HVAC system was also noted as being an obstacle as it makes it loud in the room.

Mr. Lima said that both the acoustics and the hot temperature were an issue throughout the day. He said the HVAC fan did not seem to be doing very much to cool the room aside from making a lot of noise, so instead he instructed the moderators to prop open the doors and turn the fan off so it would be easier to hear. He also moved the checkers table closer, to within six feet of the supervisors table, to facilitate hearing.

Mr. Donahue asked if acoustics are regularly an issue. Mr. Lima said that any large, open room, like the Armory or large school gyms at Park View, Cranston East, Western Hills, and particularly Hope Highlands are an issue at every election. There's not very much we can do aside from asking the poll workers to shout the names out louder and moving the table closer, which is usually what we end up doing and did again on Oct. 3.

Mr. Lima said a longer-term solution, which he has repeatedly asked the state about, would be to provide a similar live feed of voter check-ins to the public that we can see via the PollPad E-Pulse system in our office. While this is all public information, the state would need to figure out a way to securely provide a real-time data link for campaign checkers to access. But if enacted that would solve the problem, and be far more accurate, than shouting names across the room from multiple check-in tables. Voters likewise often express discomfort with their name and address being shouted across the room, despite it being required by law, and often get into arguments with the poll workers about why they must do that.

MOTION: By Mr. McDonough and seconded by Mr. Donahue to close the public comment period.
PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 2-0 – Mr. Donahue and Mr. McDonough voting aye.

OLD BUSINESS – NONE

Mr. Donahue noted there were no old business items posted for discussion or action at this meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

A. DISCUSSION AND REVIEW OF THE CONDUCT OF THE OCTOBER 3, 2023 SPECIAL ELECTION (NO VOTES TO BE TAKEN)

Mr. Lima said he traditionally puts this item on the agenda at the certification meeting in order to provide the Board an opportunity to publicly discuss the conduct of the previous election, akin to an after-action report that can inform future elections.

Mr. McDonough noted there was an incident outside Schofield Armory where a voter got into a verbal altercation with a candidate, which was mitigated by the quick response of the police detail. He said security will be an increased concern going into the 2024 election cycle due to the national political climate. He asked what could be done about that.

Mr. Lima said altercations like that are rare but do happen, which is why we always have a police detail in addition to the normal patrol officers on duty on election days. Security concerns and threat mitigation is a major concern for elections administration nationally, and on Election Day Mr. Lima said he tries to respond as quickly as possible to any security threats or incidents. In some places in the country, such as Maricopa County in Arizona, they've had to go as far as having police helicopter units and a SWAT team protecting the vote tabulation center because of actual threats made against the facility and its election staff.

Mr. Lima said none of this was a concern or an issue just a few years ago, but the national climate has changed dramatically. We do the best to mitigate concerns here with our police detail, which on Oct. 3 included a dedicated officer assigned to the election from 5:30 a.m. to 9 p.m., and during larger elections includes an officer in every ward and a detail commander throughout the day in addition to an officer at City Hall.

We also utilize a police escort to transport live ballots to the state Board of Elections from City Hall, and transport election supplies and equipment in a marked vehicle. Mr. Lima said we have contacts at the state election offices, with Homeland Security, and with the FBI field office in Boston, which has a dedicated election crime coordinator, and with any serious incident we notify and involve all of our partner security agencies, such as the vandalism incident that occurred at our office in April.

Mr. Lima said that while we are waiting for the police detail to respond, in the event of a verbal altercation we also receive training from CISA on de-escalation strategies to try to calm an incident or prevent it from getting worse, if possible, until uniformed personnel arrive.

He added this will continue to be a hot topic for discussion, and suggested it may be an issue the Board would like to put on a future agenda as we gear up for the 2024 cycle. He suggested that if we get into any sensitive detail about our security operations plans, that we could likewise discuss that in executive session.

Mr. Donahue acknowledged the work of Mr. Lima, Ms. Madonna, Mr. Brito, and Commissioners Moronta and McDonough for stepping up and running an effective election.

B. PURSUANT TO R.I. GEN. LAWS § 17-22-5.2, THE BOARD MAY CERTIFY THE LOCAL ELECTION RESULTS FOR THE OCTOBER 3, 2023 CRANSTON CITY COUNCIL WARD 6 SPECIAL ELECTION FOR AN UNEXPIRED TERM (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

Mr. Lima said we have the unofficial results that were transmitted to us by the state Board of Elections on Oct. 6, and includes all outstanding provisional and remaining mail-in ballots. He said 4 p.m. today was the deadline for any outstanding qualifying military/overseas mail ballots, cures, and recount requests, and the margin is well outside that which would allow for a recount to proceed and none were filed in any event. Mr. Lima said he has two documents for the Board to sign, the first being the ceremonial election certificate that will be presented to Councilman-Elect Wall, and the second set of documents are triplicate original copies of the election certification to be kept as permanent records by our office, the City Clerk, and the Secretary of State, and will be read into the record at the City Council meeting during the swearing-in ceremony on Thursday night.

MOTION: By Mr. McDonough and seconded by Mr. Donahue to certify the results of the October 3, 2023 Cranston City Council Ward 6 Special Election for an Unexpired Term, and transmit to the City Clerk and Secretary of State.
PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 2-0 – Mr. Donahue and Mr. McDonough voting aye.

Mr. Donahue congratulated the new city councilmember for Ward 6, Daniel Wall.

C. PUBLIC HEARING ON POLLING PLACE RELOCATION (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

Mr. Lima said a notice was posted on the homepage of the city website as well as through normal Open Meetings Act postings for today's hearing, and he likewise notified all local and state elected officials who represent both Ward 2 and Ward 6, as well as party officials. He received no comment or feedback in opposition, and noted no one was present at the hearing this evening to provide testimony. He also alerted local media including the Cranston Herald.

According to Mr. Lima this is a common sense change, because both of these polls are going back to the long-time defaults that have previously served these precincts in a centrally located site. They were only moved to further away locations, Dutemple and CLCF, in 2022 temporarily while Eden Park School and Garden City School were each being demolished and rebuilt, and now that the new facilities are operational, much larger spaces, and are brand-new and fully ADA compliant, it is time to move them back as the defaults to serve each neighborhood.

Mr. Donahue thanked Mr. Lima for his report and noted there was no one from the public who appeared to provide testimony.

MOTION: By Mr. McDonough and seconded by Mr. Donahue to close the public hearing.
PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 2-0 – Mr. Donahue and Mr. McDonough voting aye.

D. RELOCATION OF DEFAULT POLLING PLACES FOR DUTEMPLE SCHOOL (TO EDEN PARK SCHOOL) AND CLCF (TO GARDEN CITY SCHOOL), FOR SUBMISSION TO THE RHODE ISLAND BOARD OF ELECTIONS FOR FINAL APPROVAL (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

Mr. McDonough asked Mr. Lima about the status of future school construction at Eden Park. Mr. Lima said he spoke with Facilities Manager Ed Collins and Assistant Superintendent Norma Cole at the School Department, and was informed that if and when Phase III construction happens at Eden Park, it will be on areas of the building unrelated to and not impacting the newly constructed gym that would be used for voting. The voter entrance to the gym that we intend to use, Mr. Lima said, opens directly to the street from the voting room. Phase III plans, which may not begin until after 2024 pending voter approval of additional bonds, would not impact that use. Mr. Lima added that throughout both prior phases, the building itself remained open and operational, and it was only unavailable to us in 2022 because Phase II required the cafeteria that we use for voting to be demolished and rebuilt, with the new gym being an addition off of that room.

Mr. Donahue asked what the earliest election in 2024 that either location may be used. Mr. Lima said the earliest possible would be the April 2, 2024 Presidential Preference Primary, if we need additional locations beyond just one per ward, or if another location in either Ward 2 or Ward 6 becomes unavailable. We don't know right now whether we

would be opening one, or possibly two, locations per ward for the PPP. Mr. Lima said neither ward has many non-school locations beyond the Schofield Armory and Cranston East that can easily accommodate a lot of voters, so both schools would be on the table as options to use.

Mr. Lima said it's all a factor of projected turnout, and we will start making those decisions around January. He noted that if there will be a special bond referendum in the city in May or June of next year, ideally we would open the same set of combined polls that we open for April 2, in order to be less confusing for voters and make it easier to advertise polls for both spring election dates. Given that such a bond vote would likely have very low turnout, Mr. Lima said he would lean towards opening one poll per ward and overstaffing and overequipping that poll to accommodate a large number of voters.

If that is the case, and we open one poll per ward for both spring elections, we would likely not need either location until September 2024, when we will likely have city-wide mayoral primaries and the statewide primary, and again in November 2024.

In any event, prior to the first election where these polls will be used, whatever date that may be, we will send a post card mailing to all voter households in both precincts notifying them of the change. Mr. Donahue asked if there is any logical reason why these polls would not be approved, and Mr. Lima said he could not think of one given the circumstances. He said he has drafted an email to the state BOE providing a detailed rationale for each change, and will send that and copy Mr. Donahue following the Board's approval.

MOTION: By Mr. McDonough and seconded by Mr. Donahue to move the default polling location for Precinct 0713 William R. Dutemple Elementary School to Eden Park Elementary School, and to move the default polling location for Precinct 0714 CLCF Building – Gym to Garden City Elementary School and submit to the Rhode Island Board of Elections for final approval.
PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 2-0 – Mr. Donahue and Mr. McDonough voting aye.

UPDATES FROM THE REGISTRAR (ALL ITEMS FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY; NO VOTES TO BE TAKEN)

A. 2024 ELECTIONS LEGISLATION UPDATE

Mr. Lima said there were a number of bills that the Board supported in 2023 that passed, and others that were unsuccessful for a variety of reasons. He said many were widely supported based on their merits and their ability to improve our operations to support elections, but did not pass due to time constraints and other legislative priorities at the end of the session. He said he has reached out to a number of legislators to discuss each bill for possible reintroduction next session, and whether any should be modified to increase their chances of passing. He noted we have many challenges to overcome in 2024, and some of the outstanding bills would help us tremendously if passed next spring.

Mr. Lima said he was recently invited to attend a joint meeting of the Barrington and Warren Boards of Canvassers to discuss election legislative priorities with their House delegation. He reported the meeting was extremely productive, and the legislators present were pleased with the format and the information we were able to convey in that setting, as opposed to the time limits presented by committee hearings. Mr. Lima said about 20 people were in attendance, and he suggested the Cranston Board of Canvassers and others around the state may want to hold similar public meetings with their own delegations to better inform them about our needs and which bills may help our offices the most.

Mr. Lima said the East Bay boards of canvassers brought with them the “CVS receipt-length” write-in tapes that local boards use to tabulate write-ins, as well as stacks of the paper disaffiliation forms we have to painstakingly process and enter by hand, and the representatives were shocked at the amount of manual labor involved in these processes and agreed they needed to be reformed. They specifically noted that seeing these documents first hand was great information and encouraged us to set up similar meetings with their colleagues in the House and Senate.

Mr. Lima said he has also met with several other representatives in recent weeks in his capacity as chairperson of the Rhode Island Town and City Clerks’ Association Elections Committee. One idea Mr. Lima has been discussing with his colleagues on the committee is whether it may be more productive to combine several ideas into one omnibus bill, which would make it easier to testify for, or to keep each idea as a separate act. He said Rep. Baginski and Sen. Lombardi have each been very helpful the last few years now in advancing legislation that helps improve and modernize our operations by making tweaks to backend elections processes.

Mr. Lima said he spoke with the Secretary of State’s office, and now that he is chairperson of the Elections Committee and is already advocating on behalf of the Cranston Board of Canvassers for local elections legislative improvements at the State House, going forward he will be registering as a lobbyist and filing regular reports. Mr. Lima said he has been provided a badge which he will be wearing at the State House when he is there on business related to the bills that either the Board or the RITCCA have taken a position on.

Mr. Lima said he is not acting as a lobbyist when at the State House to attend meetings of the Special Senate Commission to Study Non-Plurality Voting Methods and Runoff Elections for General Assembly and General Officer Primaries, of which he is an appointed member. He said the Commission will be wrapping up its work to review runoff and ranked-choice voting at a meeting later this month, and he will keep the Board apprised on its work and conclusions.

Mr. Lima said that the study commission also includes representation from the state BOE, Secretary of State’s office, Coventry Board of Canvassers, and three state senators. He noted that Cranston technically has run-off voting already per our Charter, as if more than two candidates qualify for any School Committee seat, the top-two advance from a primary to the General Election.

B. FEDERAL ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION OCTOBER 2023 TABLE-TOP EXERCISE

Mr. Lima said he was invited by the Election Assistance Commission to attend a table-top exercise (TTX) in Arlington, VA. He will be flying down to Washington, D.C. on Monday, Oct. 23 and returning on Wednesday, Oct. 25, and the federal government will cover all travel expenses, so there is no cost to the city.

The exercise is built around continuity of operations planning in the event of a security threat, incident, or natural disaster. About 20 election officials from around the country have been invited to attend along with the four EAC commissioners and other officials. Mr. Lima said the group will likely run through various scenarios at the TTX and see what we can learn, and he will report back to the Board on any findings we can incorporate into our own continuity of operations planning as we prepare for 2024.

ADJOURNMENT (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

MOTION: By Mr. McDonough and seconded by Mr. Donahue to adjourn.
PASSED UNANIMOUSLY – VOICE VOTE

The meeting was adjourned at 6:05 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nicholas J. Lima
Registrar / Director of Elections
Cranston Board of Canvassers

APPROVED by the Cranston Board of Canvassers: December 5, 2023