

CITY OF CRANSTON
BOARD OF CANVASSERS
Special Meeting of October 4, 2023 – OFFICIAL MINUTES

The Cranston Board of Canvassers met on October 4, 2023, in a meeting advertised in accordance with the Rhode Island Open Meetings Act on September 6, 2023. The meeting was called to order by the Chairperson, James Donahue, at 11:09 a.m. It was held in the Canvassing Authority Office, Room 100 at Cranston City Hall.

MEMBERS PRESENT: James Donahue, Quilcia Moronta

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

NON-MEMBERS PRESENT: Nicholas Lima (Registrar / Director of Elections), Kirk McDonough (Board Alternate), Maria Madonna (Data Entry and Maintenance Specialist), Emerson Brito (Bilingual Elections Specialist)

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. NEW BUSINESS
 - A. THE CRANSTON BOARD OF CANVASSERS WILL CONVENE FOR THE PURPOSE OF DETERMINING THE DISPOSITION OF PROVISIONAL BALLOTS CAST DURING THE CRANSTON CITY COUNCIL WARD 6 SPECIAL ELECTION FOR AN UNEXPIRED TERM OF OCTOBER 3, 2023, IN ACCORDANCE WITH R.I. GEN. LAWS § 17-19-24.3 (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)
 - B. THE CRANSTON BOARD OF CANVASSERS WILL TABULATE WRITE-IN VOTES CAST DURING THE CRANSTON CITY COUNCIL WARD 6 SPECIAL ELECTION FOR AN UNEXPIRED TERM OF OCTOBER 3, 2023, IN ACCORDANCE WITH R.I. GEN. LAWS § 17-19-31 (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)
- IV. ADJOURNMENT (VOTE MAY BE TAKEN)

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA

Mr. Donahue asked for a motion to approve the agenda.

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

NEW BUSINESS

A. THE CRANSTON BOARD OF CANVASSERS WILL CONVENE FOR THE PURPOSE OF DETERMINING THE DISPOSITION OF PROVISIONAL BALLOTS CAST DURING THE CRANSTON CITY COUNCIL WARD 6 SPECIAL ELECTION FOR AN UNEXPIRED TERM OF OCTOBER 3, 2023, IN ACCORDANCE WITH R.I. GEN. LAWS § 17-19-24.3 (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

Mr. Lima showed the Board members the various paperwork, tracking sheets, chain of custody reports, and other certification and accounting paperwork related to the election from the polling places, mail ballots, and early voting. He explained what the election certificate, discrepancy report, seals and certificates sheet, and other forms are for, and how we track down and review these forms from each polling place as part of the routine closing out of an election. He also reviewed the receipt tapes from the DS-200 machines, and noted that there were no write-in reports as no write-in votes were cast. Mr. Lima reviewed the certification sheets for mail ballot applications, all of which have been signed by the Board, and explained record retention policies for ballots and these documents. He further explained the chain of custody and returns process at the state Board of Elections, and which documents, ballots, and equipment they will be receiving or picking up from our office and when.

Mr. Lima said he transported all remaining live drop box mail ballots to the BOE this morning with a police escort. The same escort procedure will be followed this afternoon with any qualified provisional ballots for election security and chain of custody purposes. There were no manual count ballots that require transport.

Mr. Donahue asked if there were any variances or discrepancies in this small special election. Mr. Lima said there were not, and if there were, part of the reason we closely review all of the paperwork Mr. Lima described is that it would inevitably provide an explanation for or draw attention to a discrepancy that requires further investigation.

Mr. Lima said that there are normally several hundred provisionals, the vast majority of which are very straightforward in that the voter is either legally qualified to vote or is not, so a vote is taken by the Board to adjudicate by unanimous consent, unless a Board member objects to an individual qualification or disqualification, requiring a roll call vote on that individual ballot.

Discussion ensued among the Board about how best to follow the procedure, and Board members were informed what they should be looking for on each provisional ballot to inform their decisions.

MOTION: By Mr. McDonough and seconded by Ms. Moronta to adjudicate provisionals by unanimous consent unless an objection is noted requiring an individual vote to qualify or disqualify.
PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 2-0 – Ms. Moronta and Mr. Donahue voting aye.

As Mr. Donahue and Mr. McDonough were new to the process, Ms. Madonna provided a detailed explanation to the Board of how provisionals are individually researched by the office staff on the Central Voter Registration System.

The Board reviewed six provisional ballots, three from each precinct. By unanimous consent of the Board, four ballots were qualified and two were disqualified. Mr. Donahue marked each ballot accordingly so Ms. Madonna could enter the dispositions into the Central Voter Registration System and prepare an audit report for the BOE to compare against when we transport our returns.

B. THE CRANSTON BOARD OF CANVASSERS WILL TABULATE WRITE-IN VOTES CAST DURING THE CRANSTON CITY COUNCIL WARD 6 SPECIAL ELECTION FOR AN UNEXPIRED TERM OF OCTOBER 3, 2023, IN ACCORDANCE WITH R.I. GEN. LAWS § 17-19-31 (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

Mr. Lima reiterated that there were no write-in votes cast in the Ward 6 Special Election, so no action was necessary from the Board. He asked the members to sign the blank write-in report indicating zero write-ins for the record. Ms. Moronta and the other Board members were glad there were no write-ins to hand tabulate as the process is often very time-consuming and labor-intensive.

Mr. Lima explained the remaining reconciliation, equipment recovery, returns, and voter registration backlog process remaining this week. He suggested the Board can meet sooner than originally planned to certify the election, because the margin is too wide for recounts, so the Board may legally meet to certify as early as the afternoon of Oct. 10.

Mr. McDonough noted that the elections process is highly complex, with a lot of moving parts. He said that this particular election showed that even with only two polls, there are myriad tasks that must be completed under tight deadlines in sequence, and the workload for the office staff and Board is high. He is concerned that the process may be exceptionally difficult next year with three, and now possibly four, city-wide elections run back-to-back due to the proposed school bond referendum election being talked about for next spring.

Mr. Lima said that is concerning to him as an elections administrator, as it will cause processes like today's provisional meeting and everything else the office has done to support the election to have to be repeated four times over, at a large sacrifice of time and effort from everyone involved in administering the election, including the Board and our poll workers. It is unknown at this time whether that election will be held, as it is contingent on a variety of factors including City Council approval, General Assembly authorization, and approval from RIDE and the School Committee and School Building Committee. However, at this point in time it does appear that a special city-wide bond referendum is more likely than not to happen next year, and we should start preparing for that possibility and blocking off meeting and election dates in our calendars now.

Ms. Moronta also noted that the Board has been operating without a third member, which has put pressure on all of the other Board members and alternates to be present. There have been several instances where the Board has barely met quorum at key deadlines. Mr. Lima said the third Board member seat has now been vacant for over 13

months, and he cannot recall the Board operating for this long without a full complement before in its history.

Ms. Moronta noted that what we just went through with this Special Election was nothing compared to what is coming, and that there is a tremendous amount of work ahead. Mr. Lima said it is critically important that a third Board member be appointed by the Mayor and confirmed by the City Council as soon as possible to mitigate risks and ensure the continuity of Board operations, especially with four possible city-wide elections next year.

ADJOURNMENT (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

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

The meeting was adjourned at 11:52 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

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

APPROVED by the Cranston Board of Canvassers: October 10, 2023