

**MINUTES OF BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
OF GUILFORD COUNTY  
WORK SESSION**

Greensboro, North Carolina  
November 21, 2019

The Board of County Commissioners met in a duly noticed Work Session at 4:30PM in the Blue Room located on the first floor of the Old County Courthouse, 301 W. Market St., Greensboro, NC.

**PRESENT:** Chairman Alan Branson, presiding; Vice Chairman Jeff Phillips (in at 4:57PM); Commissioners Kay Cashion, J. Carlvena Foster, Justin Conrad, Melvin “Skip” Alston, Alan Perdue and Hank Henning (in at 4:52PM).

**ABSENT:** Commissioner Carolyn Q. Coleman

**ALSO PRESENT:** County Manager Marty Lawing; County Attorney Mark Payne; Deputy County Manager Clarence Grier; Clerk to Board Robin Keller; Ariane Webb, Deputy Clerk to Board; Charlie Collicutt, Elections Director; Christopher Duffey, Deputy Elections Director; Michael Halford, Budget Director; members of staff and media.

**I. WELCOME AND CALL TO ORDER**

Chairman Branson welcomed those present and called the meeting to order at 4:48PM.

**II. NEW BUSINESS**

**A. REVIEW CONTRACT WITH ELECTIONS SYSTEMS & SOFTWARE –  
ACQUISITION OF NEW VOTING MACHINES AND EQUIPMENT**

Charlie Collicutt, Elections Director, stated the NC General Assembly has decertified the county’s current voting system and noted options to delay purchase of new voting machines are not feasible with impending primaries scheduled for March 3, 2020.

Collicutt shared the State Board of Elections certifies the voting equipment and the Guilford County Board of Elections makes a recommendation of which equipment should be purchased by the Board of Commissioners. He confirmed the local board chose the DS200 precinct scanner with AutoMARK voter assist terminal for disabled voters with privacy booths.

Collicutt provided a demonstration of the new voting equipment and spoke to the simplicity of the system, which utilizes hand-marked paper ballots that are electronically scanned and tabulated. He shared the scanning unit is equipped with a USB stick that serves as a back-up memory device for the scanner.

Commissioner Conrad questioned the potential to compromise the system via “hacking”.

Collicutt stated the scanning machines are not connected to the internet and this USB stick will never be inserted into a computer with a network connection.

Commissioner Cashion questioned how the voting results would be transmitted to the state.

Collicutt shared a newly un-packaged USB stick would be used to download precinct results that would be transmitted to the state. He discussed post-election audit processes that would be conducted by bipartisan teams.

Commissioner Henning shared his concerns regarding the use of a paper ballot marked with a pencil and questioned the outcome of a voter changing their mind in the booth or accidental markings on the ballot.

Collicutt stated that in the event of ballot error, the voter can choose to redo their ballot or cast the ballot as is, which would result in their vote not counting. He shared that counties using paper ballots are more likely to experience changes in final votes because of these types of ballot errors identified during recounts or post-election audits.

Commissioner Foster questioned the potential to write-in vote options.

Collicutt noted a digital image of the handwritten option would be taken and stored when the ballot was scanned.

Commissioner Alston questioned if the voter received a warning if they failed to complete the ballot.

Collicutt stated the machine and state guidelines do not provide a warning for, nor do they eliminate, incomplete or blank ballots. He offered an example where a voter circled or placed a checkmark on the paper ballot, instead of coloring it in, the machine would count this as a blank ballot and the voter would be unaware that their ballot did not count in the election. Collicutt noted these errors would be identified during post-election audits or recounts.

Commissioner Foster questioned how the new system would impact curbside voting.

Collicutt stated the poll staff would carry the paper ballot to the curb for the voter to complete, then scan the ballot on their behalf.

Commissioner Perdue questioned how accurate the ballot marks must be in order for the vote to count.

Collicutt noted the scanning machine is very sensitive and any dark mark inside the ballot bubble would be counted.

Commissioner Perdue questioned the historical error rate percentage for hand-marked ballots.

Christopher Duffey, Deputy Elections Director, shared his experience with hand-marked ballot voting systems and noted the typical error seen is a mark resulting from resting the pen on the paper. He stated the error rate is typically low and confirmed he has not experienced a situation where final vote results changed due to a post-election audit or recount request.

The Board discussed equipment operation and digital scanning options.

Collicutt shared that while the initial cost for the system is decreased, his annual operating expenses will increase to cover the purchase and storage of paper ballots each year.

Commissioner Alston questioned the total number of machines needed.

Collicutt shared a total of 220 machines are needed to serve the Guilford County precincts. He noted the option to lease machines is comparable to the price of purchasing the system and shared the potential of losing funds after the second year, as leased machines have no trade-in value.

Collicutt discussed the need to purchase a high-speed scanner for recounts during at-large and state elections and spoke to the level of accuracy and efficiency achieved with this tool when recounting large numbers of ballots.

Commissioner Perdue questioned the operating cost differences with the new machines.

Collicutt shared he would not be able to provide this information until an election occurs but anticipated purchasing approximately \$200,000 to \$400,000 worth of paper ballots, dependent upon the type of election.

The Board discussed costs associated with other systems and potential add-on options to the voting system under consideration.

Commissioner Conrad questioned the supply chain for the voting machines and ballots. He spoke to potential security concerns if the company uses a third-party delivery system.

Collicutt discussed the hardware service and ballot providers and noted he was not familiar with the supply chain for product delivery.

Commissioner Perdue spoke to his great concern with additional operating costs such as the transport, storage and support of the cumbersome voting equipment.

Vice Chairman Phillips expressed his concern that the system was a move backwards, with regards to technology.

### **III. ADJOURN**

There being no further business, the Board adjourned the meeting by unanimous consent at 5:30PM.

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J. Alan Branson, Chairman

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Clerk