

BOARD OF ELECTIONS

Gary Rower, Chairman
Zach Livsey, Vice Chairman
Sharlene Alexander

FAYETTE COUNTY, GEORGIA

Brianna Garrett, Director
Beverly Daniel, Registrar
Margaret Johnson, Elections Supervisor



175 Johnson Ave., Suite B
Fayetteville, GA 30214

APPROVED MINUTES SPECIAL CALLED MEETING September 17, 2024 5:00PM

Welcome to the meeting of your Fayette County Board of Elections. Your participation is appreciated. All regularly scheduled Board meetings are open to the public and are generally held on the 4th Tuesday of each month at 5:00 P.M.

1. CHAIRMAN TO CALL THE MEETING TO ORDER:

2. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA:

Motion made by Vice-Chair Livsey, seconded by Board Member Alexander to amend the agenda for September 17, 2024 Special Called meeting by moving Public Comments before New Business. Vote Unanimous. Motion carried.

3. PUBLIC COMMENTS:

Speakers will be given a five (5) minute maximum time limit to speak before the Board of Elections about various topics, issues, and concerns. Speakers must direct comments to the Board. Responses are reserved at the direction of the Board.

Jamie Harmon: I'm a resident of Fayette County. And I would like to open this with asking the board if you would consider allowing us to have extended voting hours. It can be Monday through Friday, it can be 9:00 AM to 7:00 PM, or 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM. And we also need a Sunday. I've become aware that the people who live in Brooks do not have the same opportunities as those who live closer to town and Peachtree City to vote in an ample amount of time because 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM doesn't work for everyone. So, we really need to extend our hours. Another event of which I've become aware recently is that we will be allowing a public viewing area inside our precincts. I'm not comfortable with that. We have enough issues as it is. We, the various parties, are allowed to have their respective Poll Watchers, but to have credentialed people just hanging around in a precinct, I don't believe that invites safety. So, we need to make considerations about that. And that's all that I have for this morning. Thank you.

Timoria McQueen Saba: I'm a resident of Fayette County. Hi, so, I decided before I came to take a look at, basically, how the census divides the category of employment in Fayette County. My concern is in regards to the time of the voting because in Fayette County, what they do, as far as the census, is they actually divide it into 13 categories in terms of employment. And, so I think what hasn't been considered in terms of deciding the voting times is actually what people do for a living—what people's real jobs are. So, if we actually take that into account, what we would see—just taking 13 categories, but I'll just take the top four for you today—is how many people work in education in Fayette County: 21.4% of the population,

followed by transportation, warehousing, and utilities at 12.3%, followed by waste management, professional, scientific, and admin at 10.9%. And as we all know, with construction going on, that's going to be a pretty large category too, at 7.3%. So, if we round the population up to 119,000, which is the estimated number right now, and then we add up all those percentages, we're at 51.94% of the population, which equals approximately 62,000 people. So, let's look at some of those jobs. There are teachers, construction workers, and all of us in different various sectors of society really understand that it can be really, really hard to just get up in the morning and do our normal activities, let alone have to get our families ready and things like that. So what we're essentially saying to 62,000 people is, 'Good luck to you.' Why would it be so hard to extend the voting time? Even challenge ourselves. I know that some people mentioned nine to seven—why not seven to seven to really be able to accommodate some people who have a hard time? Some people have to be at work at eight or nine o'clock. I know that when we pass so many construction sites, they're already at work between six and seven. Is it realistic that they're going to take their lunch breaks to go vote? No, they're working hard. They need to stay on the campus. They're not really allowed to go off and vote. But everybody should have an equal opportunity. As we see even when we look at the traffic on 54 from the QTS data center—I know you're smiling because we've all seen it, right? So, let's think about that. Every day between four and five, what do we see? The police are, you know, letting them all out. Do you think that they're going to go right there to go be able to vote after they've been working hard all day? No, it'll be nice to go home and stop and take a shower. Bring your family to be a part of the process. So for me, I'm really thinking about, yes, nine to seven would be great. Nine to five is unrealistic. Think about your teachers—nine to five. So if I've been teaching from—I get to my school classroom at seven o'clock, then I'm out of work between three and four. Maybe I have kids to shuffle off to activities. So when realistically, are we looking at the population of Fayette County, what their actual jobs are, and then saying, 'Do these times really allow equal opportunity for every single person to have the opportunity to vote, when it's convenient for them and their family, and not stress them out so much that they don't bother?' We really have to take a look at this and not silence 62,000 people. Thank you."

Daniel Twedt: I'm here to make a recommendation that we do have extended voting hours. And I'm not necessarily in favor of an expansion either way. I understand that there may be some limitations on what kind of manpower is required to run the election. So shifting it one way or the other—preferably towards later in the evening, in my view—would be beneficial. Also, I want to reiterate the previous comments that some people do have a hard time, or they're working in positions or jobs that don't allow them to make it. And even if they're able to make it, if they're working a hard job where they're hot and sweaty, they probably don't want to come in and bring their family to vote. Whereas, if we had a Sunday opportunity, at least one, then they could make that a family outing. They wouldn't feel embarrassed to come in their sweaty work clothes, and they'd be able to come in, make that an outing, and enjoy their voting experience. Thank you.

Michael Cheyne: Even though I'm very supportive of Democratic women, I'm here on my own, speaking as a citizen. I also support the expanded hours for voting and the Sunday voting. I think it's really important that when we look at the population—and the one speaker did a great job of talking about the jobs in Fayette County—we see that you're asking the working, and particularly the working poor, to either take off work to come and vote or, in many cases, they can't take off work to come and vote. And it's really not fair. I think one of your charters is to have a fair election, which includes providing as many people as possible the opportunity to vote. One thing that we all know in this room, and that you know as well, is that if you limit the time for voting, it increases the voting lines, which disproportionately impacts those people who can't wait in that line. It restricts their ability to vote. Sunday voting is extremely important when you consider working hours. It's not just Monday through Friday—people are working Monday through Saturday. We know from research that the majority of people who vote on Sunday are people of color. I'm not saying that they're being targeted to restrict their access to voting, but we know for a fact that this is happening on Sunday, as far as the people who are voting. We haven't heard what the budget impact is. If you increase a day, if you increase a couple of hours, if you shift hours, I'm hoping that you're not making a decision based on economics. If you are—have you asked the county commission for additional funds to deal with that? I'm hoping that we're looking at this voting opportunity as a broader type of support for people rather than just basing it on the economics of a couple of hours or an extra day of voting. An interesting sideline is the timing of this special meeting. Your meetings are typically at 5 PM, but you're scheduling a meeting to talk about restricting people's voting ability in the middle of the day. So the people that you're impacting the most can't be here to talk about the fact that you're impacting them because you don't realize how hard it is for people to take off work and other obligations at home to come here during the day. So I don't know if you're getting a true sense—so far, you are—but you're not allowing those people that are most impacted to be here.

So, in general, I support the additional time and days for voting. I'm hoping that when you consider longer lines at the voting polls when you don't do that, when you consider the impact of not having Sunday voting, when you think about the working and working poor who can't get here, and when you look at these issues collectively, it appears that it's targeting a certain population, and that is not part of a fair opportunity. So I'm hoping that you take an open approach and provide the opportunity to get as many people to vote as possible. Don't try to protect the changing demographics in Fayette County by restricting people from voting. You should be encouraging everybody to vote. Thank you.

Ralph Hodge: I'm coming because I work in downtown Atlanta. Now, I want you to extend the hours because I get off at 4:30, and it's going to be hard to travel with the traffic to get somewhere to vote. I have a job where I can't leave early or come in late. So, I really have to ask if I can get time off, and then I have to use sick leave or vacation time in order to vote. But if you extended the hours, I think that would really help us a lot, especially those who live in Fayetteville but work outside of the county—that traveling time is a challenge. If there's a wreck on the freeway, we're stuck. I don't care if you extend the hours just by an hour or so; anything like that would help. I've been stuck in traffic for hours before. I was there during the black ice incident, and if something like that happens again around that time, we're in trouble. So, I'm just asking that you extend the hours and consider putting an extra day in there—Sunday or Saturday, whichever day you feel is manageable for the city to operate without an expenditure that's above and beyond what we need. Thank you.

Chandra Wright: I am a resident of Peachtree City. I thank you for having this hearing. I'm going to take a little bit of a different angle. I'm not going to be up here long, but I do want to say this. You've had some extraordinary facts and statistics offered to you today, and all of them are true. I agree wholeheartedly with the fact that we have to make sure that folks who don't have traditional working schedules are afforded the opportunity to vote. It is a fundamental pillar of this nation. We want everybody to be able to vote. But I'm going to say one more thing to you that will hopefully resonate with you—and I know each and every one of you will agree with this. We are on the map here in Fayette County. The nation is watching us. And I say that because we know that Peachtree City has been recognized several times as a place where people want to live, grow, come to school, and play. It has been recognized as one of the premium communities in the nation to live. We know that Fayetteville is getting a lot of attention. It's been growing, it's been off the charts. Trilith has grown, and we have people from all over the state coming to live there and coming to enjoy all that it has to offer. We have the national headquarters coming from the soccer center. We are on the map. People are watching us. And why do I say that? It is so important for us to be leaders in this state. It is so important that when people look at Fayette County, they say, 'That is a place not only where I want to live, but I know that this is a place where they are supportive of their citizens and are going to provide them with every opportunity to be engaged and involved in the political process.' It is absolutely critical, Board members, that we provide that type of leadership in Georgia and that we afford each and every citizen in this county the opportunity to cast their vote for the candidate of their choice. That is what makes us a great state, and that is what's going to make us the best county in Georgia. Thank you very much.

Vasin Douglas: I'm a resident of Fayette County, and one thing I noticed is that there was a reminder that early voting is considered absentee. But I didn't see anywhere on the Georgia.gov election site that said that. So, I'm trying to understand—if I'm voting in person, just by definition, absentee means I'm not there. But if I'm voting in person, why is it considered absentee? That's my only question. Thank you.

Ted Tolls: I'm a resident of Fayette County. I just want to say that I am in full support of the extended hours, including Sunday voting and so forth. I've been a poll worker in the past, and I would volunteer my time to work during those extended hours for free. Thank you.

4. NEW BUSINESS:

A. Advance Voting Dates and Times

Chairman Rower informed the public that state mandates set the minimum hours currently in place, and the purpose of this meeting was to consider extending those hours. This meeting was called to ensure compliance with the required deadlines and to allow the Board to discuss the matter together. The urgency of the decision is to meet the public notification

requirements. Our staff has already prepared recommendations and analyzed the budget impact, as we have a responsibility to the taxpayers to use funds appropriately if we extend the hours. However, the deciding factor will not be budget constraints but rather our ability to provide the best service and most opportunities for every lawful voter to exercise their right. No one should have to choose between working to feed their family and taking the opportunity to vote. At this time, I will open the floor for discussion among the Board members.

Board Member Alexander inquired on if any data had been provided to the Board to advise their decision.

Director Garrett responded with her recommendation and an update she previously provided to the Board via email. She noted that the last similar election, the general primary for the presidential election, had a 59.7% total turnout. Based on this, and statistics from the 2020 and 2016 elections, she recommended extending the last week of advance voting and including one Sunday voting day. Budget considerations were made to ensure sufficient coverage if the Board decides to extend the hours further. The focus should be on the last week of advance voting to maximize turnout while avoiding unnecessary expenses during periods of low turnout, given that 60-65% of voters typically use advance voting.

Board Member Alexander acknowledged the need for additional hours to accommodate voters and emphasized the importance of Sunday afternoon voting. She noted that turnout during the last week of advance voting is consistently the highest.

Vice-Chair Livsey agreed with extending the hours and considering voters' work and personal schedules. While he appreciated the staff's recommendation, he expressed concern that only extending the last week might confuse voters. He proposed extending voting hours to 7:00 PM for the entire three-week period to ensure inclusiveness and supported Sunday voting.

Chairman Rower inquired about the availability of facilities on Sundays if the Board decided to offer Sunday voting at all locations.

Director Garrett confirmed that all advance voting sites, except the Peachtree City Library, are available on Sundays. She will contact the library for confirmation and report back to the Board.

Chairman Rower expressed concern about passing a motion that might not be feasible if access to certain facilities is not confirmed.

Attorney Stough suggested making the motion conditional on securing access to the necessary facilities on Sundays.

Board Member Alexander confirmed that the main office is available for Sunday voting. She also raised concerns about staffing and asked Vice-Chair Livsey if his proposal included extending hours on Saturdays as well.

Vice-Chair Livsey confirmed that his proposal includes extending hours on Saturdays to maintain consistency. Director Garrett confirmed that staff availability would support this extension.

Motion made by Vice-Chair Livsey, seconded by Board Member Alexander to extend early voting hours to 7:00 P.M. each day and an additional day: Sunday October 20th from 12:00PM to 4:00 P. M. Vote Unanimous. Motion carried.

Chairman Rower requested that Director Garrett provide the Board with an update on Poll Worker Information, including details related to Advance Voting.

Director Garrett informed the Board that Poll Worker Training is scheduled to begin during the week of September 23, with each class accommodating up to 30 participants. She also noted that all Advance-In-Person information would be distributed on September 20, 2024.

5. EXECUTIVE SESSION: (as necessary for litigation and personnel)

6. ADJOURNMENT:

Motion made by Vice-Chair Livsey, seconded by Board Member Alexander to adjourn the meeting. Vote Unanimous. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 11:36 A.M.

Brianna Garrett, Director

Zachary Livsey, Vice-Chairman

The foregoing minutes were duly approved at an official meeting of the Board of Elections of Fayette County Georgia, held on the 24th day of September 2024.

Referenced attachments are available upon request in the Board of Elections' Office.