

BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
STAFFORD, VIRGINIA
MINUTES
Redistricting Work Session
February 22, 2022

CALL TO ORDER – A work session of the Stafford County Board of Supervisors was called to order by Crystal Vanuch, Chairman, at 3:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 22, 2022, in Meeting Room ABC, George L. Gordon, Jr. Government Center, 1300 Courthouse Road, Stafford VA.

ROLL CALL – The following members were present: Crystal Vanuch, Chairman; Pamela Yeung, Vice Chairman; Meg Bohmke; Thomas C. Coen; Darrell English; Monica Gary. Absent: Tinesha Allen.

Also in attendance were Frederick J. Presley, County Administrator; Rysheda McClendon, County Attorney; Julia Homes, Assistant Deputy Clerk; various staff members; and other interested parties.

1. DISCUSSION & CONSIDERATION OF PROPOSED POLLING LOCATIONS

Ms. Vanuch stated that the only item on the agenda other than public comment was discussion of proposed polling locations, so she would turn it over to Registrar Anna Hash.

Ms. Anna Hash stated that the Board has seen the proposed locations, and she offered to address any of their questions or concerns. Ms. Hash said they tried to keep all the locations they were currently using other than one, so the only new places are the additional new precincts and polling locations, other than one in Hartwood—which will be using Hartwood Elementary School. She noted that all the current voting locations would continue to be used, with the additional polling locations added to accommodate the new precincts anymore.

Ms. Hash reported that in Hartwood, Westlake 104 is a new precinct, and they would be voting at Richland Baptist Church; Forge will be voting at Colonial Forge; and Rock Hill would now be at A.G. Wright instead of Rock Hill Baptist Church because there was an issue with the use of the church. She stated that 205 would be Mount Ararat, and Mountain View High School in the Rock Hill District would also be used as 202. She said that most changes would occur in Griffis-Widewater, with three new locations: North Aquia would be at Aquia Episcopal Church, adding Shirley High Middle School and North Stafford High School. She noted that these changes were the result of precinct boundaries and acceptable locations within the district.

Ms. Hash stated that Stafford Elementary School would be added in Aquia; the Rowser Building would be added in Falmouth; and the Gary Meltris Complex would be used for a new precinct in George Washington.

Ms. Gary asked if Stafford Elementary School was the courthouse location.

Ms. Hash responded that they would continue to use the Courthouse Community Center and Brooke Point, and the one at Stafford Elementary was named the "Hope Precinct."

Mr. Anthony Toigo noted that Attachment 6 in their background report provides an historical document of the growth of precincts and polling locations since 1990; all new precincts are broken down by where they are, where the old sites are, and where the new polling locations are by district.

Ms. Vanuch asked Ms. Hash to confirm that Rock Hill Baptist would now be A.G. Wright.

Ms. Hash confirmed this and said that according to church bylaws, their council had to vote and wasn't going to be meeting until the end of March, so she couldn't wait for that.

Ms. Vanuch asked if there were a way for them to bump up that meeting, because A.G. Wright is so far away from everything—especially now that the district would potentially be going much farther west.

Ms. Hash agreed but said there is no other building out there. She said she did speak with the church and they said mid-March was the earliest they could have a meeting.

Ms. Vanuch asked about Rock Hill Rescue Squad, which has a side part to the building that could accommodate polling. She said it was still further away but would be better.

Mr. English said there was also a church at Joshua Road and Garrisonville at St. George's Estates.

Ms. Vanuch responded that it was Shiloh, but it was just as close.

Ms. Hash stated that in Garrisonville, there would be adding one precinct: Parkridge Elementary School as the new polling place.

Ms. Yeung said she was glad they reviewed that and asked if they had considered the Rouse Center for use.

Ms. Hash responded that she did not believe that location was needed, and they tried to make as few changes as possible.

Ms. Yeung stated that she was looking for changes to accommodate future growth, such as that coming from Embrey Mill, and she wasn't sure why that site wasn't considered.

Ms. Bohmke noted that the County built the Rouse Center, but the entire building was operated by another company—so they would have to look at that agreement to see if they have the ability in that agreement to use the space for polling.

Mr. Presley stated that they would have to look into that situation, and the chances are that an all-day polling situation would be disruptive to their business operations.

Ms. Vanuch commented that they would have to shut down for the day.

Mr. Presley stated that it was something staff could look into if the Board desired.

Mr. Coen said that he had consternation in looking at the 605 precinct, because people in Celebrate would drive up to US-17 under I-95 almost to the Falmouth intersection to vote. He said they looked at different options, but he was concerned that this district was having to go almost into the Falmouth intersection just to get to a polling place. He stated that if England Run was at 2,300, he wondered how many people were west of I-95 to Celebrate to see if that pushes it up. He said that in looking at the map, no matter where you put Celebrate, there are so many people in that one area, it would push it over the 5,000 mark.

Mr. Toigo asked if he were referring to the total population west of I-95.

Mr. Coen confirmed that it was mostly the southwest, but basically the whole part from I-95 over to the England Run and Celebrate parts going up to the Howell Library.

Ms. Vanuch asked what that would look like and whether they needed to finalize it today.

Mr. Toigo responded that staff would like for the Board to give them directional polling locations, and it could affect the timeline if there were any substantial changes to the map. He said that for Mr. Coen's question, in looking at the area west of I-95, they were working up the population through the census blocks.

Mr. Coen said they may have to go to the State Board of Elections and ask for a waiver, and they may not get one if England run could hold it or the long distance to Melchers could do it. He reiterated that it was an awfully long distance for people to go, and it had to be over two miles.

Mr. Toigo stated that in looking at the data, they would have to split the Melchers precinct in half to create a total population for the Melchers precinct of 2,216; the total population of individuals over the age of 18 eligible to vote would be 1,941.

Mr. Coen said that adding the 1,941 to the 2,310 shown, it would still be under the cap—so west of I-95 would go up to the library.

Ms. Bohmke agreed that it was awkward to send people in Celebrate all the way down to Melcher, but she did have concern with sending everyone from Celebrate into Howe when there is another polling place at Gayle Middle School—so everyone would be coming down Plantation and Lyons Corner, which is a lot of traffic. She said she wondered if they had another church there, such as Cornerstone.

Ms. Hash responded that for the purpose of the Melchers precinct as it currently is, it was not going to be big enough and didn't have adequate parking, which was why they are not considering that. She added that the Berea Church is also out there but also has limited parking, and they just don't have a space big enough. She stated that some of the churches have to go before their councils and have this approved, so there are constraints with those timeframes.

Ms. Bohmke commented that Hartwood Presbyterian was lost for use because their parish had some real issues with the way their elections worked.

Ms. Hash confirmed this and said they ended up going to Hartwood Elementary.

Mr. Coen said they looked at the Melchers as it stands now, but if they bifurcate the district and have the east go to Melchers and the west go somewhere else, he wondered if the church's parking lots would fit.

Ms. Hash responded that Cornerstone may, but she still didn't think Berea would because it was too small. She asked for clarification of the numbers for Cornerstone.

Mr. Toigo stated that if they move the land area southwest of I-95 into England Run, that would make that district's population approximately 4,200, and that would take away from Melchers and make that about 2,400.

Mr. Coen said that the question now is everything for I-95 and US-17 South, such as Celebrate Virginia, with that population going to the one church—so there would be a separate precinct for southwest.

Mr. Toigo confirmed that that would be about 1,940.

Mr. Coen asked if that would fit in the church.

Ms. Hash responded that it may, but they would need to see if there was space within the church and she could contact them to find that out. She said that presently, the parking is not adequate, but perhaps they could look at that if it were to be split.

Mr. Toigo clarified that if the 1,940 or so population were taken out of Melchers, it would essentially create its own split precinct, 606 in the precinct numbers; alternatively, that could be put into England Run and could still remain under the 5,000 maximum allowable by state code.

Mr. Coen said in theory, there were options to consider in terms of putting it in with England Run or looking at the other church to see if it was usable. He noted that they had looked at the college, but it would be two polling places in the one building that would be problematic, and there was reticence about using the other building.

Ms. Hash stated that there was not adequate space for a second polling location within the college.

Mr. English asked if they had looked at the fire department right behind the post office.

Ms. Hash responded that they had, and the fire department had concern with the traffic flow and the ingress/egress, and the Board had also voiced concerns when he saw it on the map.

Ms. Bohmke asked about Hartwood Volunteer Fire Department and whether they had sufficient parking.

Mr. English and Ms. Hash confirmed that it did not.

Ms. Bohmke noted that there was a lot of vacant space in the Giant shopping center and wondered if there were tenants there.

Ms. Hash explained that per Virginia code, it must be a public space.

Ms. Bohmke mentioned that there had been a death at one of the County's polling places several years earlier, as the entrance was changed by the school at the last minute, and a woman slipped, fell, and died. She emphasized that she wanted to make sure the polling places, many of which are new, have handrails and safety measures.

Mr. Coen said that the 606 often voted by absentee or voted early.

Ms. Hash confirmed this and said for what is now the Rocky Run Precinct, it was about 50/50.

Mr. Coen stated that in theory, if there was a certain number of people in the 606 district, they all wouldn't be going to the library on election day—only half or so would be—so if there were 2,000 voters, only 1,000 would be going there during the course of the day. He said that his suggestion would be to split the Melchers and put them either in England Run or the church, and then have east of I-95 be in the Melchers; if that weren't possible now, they could go with the plan before them.

Mr. Toigo pointed out on the map provided that the new proposed precinct as P-45, which would have an eligible population of 1,941. He said if Mr. Coen wanted to bring that to the Board for a vote, they would need a motion to add the new precinct and determine the polling location.

Ms. Vanuch asked how that impacted the polling books pre-purchased, because they had added an extra one in either Aquia or Griffis-Widewater.

Mr. Hash responded that the number they have now is what they've budgeted for, and she confirmed that this would be creating another one and that it would add approximately \$10,000 to the budget.

Ms. Bohmke asked Mr. Coen to confirm his intent that all of those east of I-95 would now go to Melchers because of the concern about everyone from Celebrate going to Melchers. She said if they had 2,000 voters in celebrate and half voted absentee or early voting, then there would be 1,000 still going to Howe. She stated that she had concerns about that because Howe Library parking was not easy to get in and out of—it was horrible. She said that for the Republican primary held there, the place was a mess, nobody voted, and people were mad. She emphasized that she did not think she could support this because she feels it is setting up a fiasco, and she asked what other options there were for Mr. Coen for that area for those 1,000 voters.

Ms. Hash replied that there was Cornerstone, and they have not been approached yet because the space wasn't going to be a workable solution before the changes now proposed; she said that it would probably be doable for 1,000 if they had a space inside the church—and it was the parking that wasn't adequate, because as it stands, Melchers was 4,300 over the age of 18.

Ms. Bohmke commented that there was an electoral board member present and asked if it was acceptable to ask her a question since she had been through it many times.

Ms. Gloria Chittum stated that she and Ms. Hash had gone down to the school, and it would be a good place to vote. She said that Mr. Coen was worried about people traveling, but she lived in that district and would have to travel there too. She said there was plenty of parking, and the way

the school is set up, it isn't a long way to walk—people can go right in, vote, and come right back out and get in their cars. She stated that the people in Celebrate certainly go to the Dunkin' Donuts, which is right in front of the school on US-17, and she was pretty sure they used Route 3 for that trip. She added that it was a pretty good place to be, and the library has limited parking and is open on Election Day and full of cars. She said they could also look at Cornerstone, but she really did not know of another place.

Ms. Yeung asked what the difference was with that library and Porter in terms of parking.

Mr. English and Ms. Vanuch responded that they have more parking.

Ms. Yeung commented that she did not really notice a difference between them.

Mr. Coen said that his preference would be to do the church that is closer, and if that weren't doable, they could go with Melchers. He stated that what's shown on the map now for Melchers is split in two, with part of it going down and voting in Chatham; the other half, which would be all of Rappahannock Landing, would vote at England Run. He said those people were already going a distance, and this eases them from having to go under I-95. He said he would go with whatever the Board wanted to do, but if they made the 606 go over to the church, it would be a lot easier on the residents. Mr. Coen added that no matter where they put Celebrate, they would be in the same dilemma, and if Celebrate and England Run were together in any capacity, they would still have the problem of traffic and too many people.

Ms. Vanuch stated that Ruby, which had been the smallest polling location, was now 3,131 people impacted because they expanded the west end of the Rock Hill District; those individuals would have to go to A.G. Wright. She said that right next door is the elementary school, which would be the largest at 4,500—so they are literally taking almost 8,000 people and putting them on Choptank Road no matter how you look at it, cutting through a subdivision to go vote at A.G. Wright and Rock Hill Elementary. She noted that it would be incredibly confusing because half of the people would be going to one school and the other half would be going to another, and she was very concerned with that setup.

Ms. Hash asked if she had suggested Rock Hill Rescue.

Ms. Vanuch clarified that there is Rock Hill Rescue on Garrisonville Road, which is a bit closer in, and she wasn't sure if they would be amenable to it. She said that it wasn't a viable solution to her to put half of the district's voters inside Vista Woods—but none of the people in Vista Woods would vote in those locations.

Ms. Hash said that she would take a look at Rock Hill Rescue.

Ms. Vanuch stated that perhaps the church would be willing to do an emergency board meeting.

Ms. Hash responded that she had, and the church said they could vote on it at their business meeting on March 9, which was still too far out. She said that she could try to contact them again and see if they would consider it.

Ms. Vanuch expressed her support for approaching them again, reiterating that there would just be too many people going into that one spot.

Mr. Coen said Ms. Hash could also check on his church too.

Ms. Vanuch noted that she would bring it back to the Board meeting on Tuesday.

Mr. Toigo stated that staff could bring it back under Unfinished Business, and the Public Hearing advertisement was currently slated for the same day, so they may need to adjust that or consider holding a special Board meeting in the event the redistricting public hearing cannot occur on March 15; there is a conflict with the budget meeting the first meeting in April.

Ms. Vanuch encouraged alternative resolutions that they could vote on to send it to public hearing, so it doesn't impact the timeline.

Mr. Toigo mentioned that staff was asked last week about balancing out the precincts in Garrisonville between the Woodson and Woodlands boundaries, and staff has prepared an alternative to share with the Board. He said that by state code, precincts do not need to have balanced populations; a precinct must have a population of between 100 and 5,000 registered voters, and this was just prepared as alternative.

Mr. Toigo explained that under this proposal, the Woodlands Precinct would have a total 18+ population of about 3,700; Woodson would have 3,900 or just under 4,000. He said that was slightly lower than where they were currently—Woodlands is at 4,300; Woodson is at 3,400.

Ms. Yeung said that she had sent a question about balancing the numbers and asked if that still needed to be done with these changes to locations.

Mr. Toigo responded that it would not change the polling locations being proposed.

Ms. Vanuch stated that staff had brought this back to address previously stated concerns about balance, and asked if she was happy with them moving it to Park Ridge instead of North Stafford.

Ms. Yeung agreed, stating that it was more about moving individuals who had always voted there, especially those who did not have transportation to get to North Stafford.

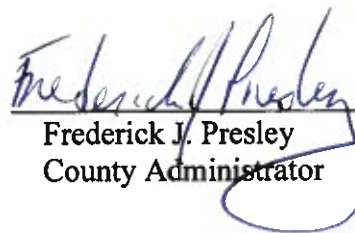
Ms. Bohmke said there were a lot of new voters, and she wondered if there were something that said "Falmouth ES" or "North Stafford HS," and whether that would be spelled out in anything mailed out to people so that people know what those acronyms stand for (elementary school, middle school, high school).

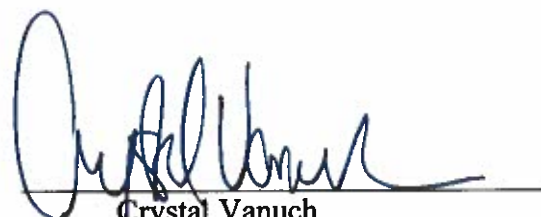
Ms. Hash confirmed that it would spell out full names like "North Stafford High School" and would not use acronyms, and every registered voter in the County would receive a new voter registration card that clearly indicates the full name of the school and its address.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Ms. Alane Callander of 622 Lancaster Street in Falmouth stated that she had some concerns about the precinct locations. She said she cannot imagine going into Aquia Church on Route 1 and making a left turn in or out, particularly during heavy traffic times; she was not aware if there was a drive or cut-through that goes to Aquia Harbor. She also stated that Melchers is too far for Celebrate, and those voters would be really angry to find out they had to go there. Ms. Callander stated that if Berea Fire House needs more parking, they should perhaps just put that in, as that would be a lot closer for Celebrate and the road would be a whole lot safer than Route 1 in Aquia. She added that she had mentioned to Mr. Coen the possibility of having two precincts at the college, but it sounds as though they have contemplated those. She added that she is still not happy with the small peninsula that was created in the redistricting.

Adjournment At 3:42 p.m., Chairman Vanuch adjourned the February 22, 2022 Stafford County Board of Supervisors Redistricting Work Session.


Frederick J. Presley
County Administrator


Crystal Vanuch
Chairman