

CORRECTED AND AMENDED
Minutes of the GREB WorkGroup
April 11, 2018

McGuireWoods Conference Room, 800 Canal St., Richmond, VA

The GREB WorkGroup met at 10 am on April 11, 2018 in the Burrus Conference Room at McGuireWoods, 800 Canal St., Richmond, VA.

Present: Co-Chairs John Hager and Kate Hanley, Al Ablowich, Renee Andrews, William Bell, Barbara Gunter, Lisa Jeffers, Walt Latham, Robin Lind, Dr. Clara Belle Wheeler and Michele White.

From the public, Chris Piper, Commissioner of Elections, Jamie Bitz, JLARC Project Leader, Michelle Williams, JLARC Analyst.

Minutes of the March 14 meeting were adopted as submitted.

Co-Chair Hanley gave a brief report on the presentation of the GREB Reports for 2016 and 2017 to the State Board of Elections and the response from the Department.

The members of the WorkGroup then introduced themselves individually to Commissioner Piper. As a group, said Co-Chair Hager, they represented “true dedication, true work ethic, very productive, optimistic public servants working for the Commonwealth moving forward.”

Commissioner Piper expressed his appreciation for the work of the GREB WorkGroup and described current processes being put into place to get staff in the department back on track.

Jamie Bitz, Chief Legislative Analyst and Project Leader explained the mandate of the JLARC study of the Department of Elections currently underway. He said three staff members are currently assigned, focusing on VERIS, security and an independent assessment of the system. He added that they were also looking at disarray in the department reported by the commissioner to see what could be done going beyond his tenure to ensure future stability.

The JLARC study is likely to be completed in the early fall, he said, either in September or October.

In response to a question from Co-Chair Hanley Mr. Bitz asked for assistance in encouraging response to a survey of GRs and EBs that would be sent out shortly.

Ms. Hanley suggested that legislators might also be surveyed to find out what they think is important.

Several members then offered suggestions and observations:

Mr. Lind invited the JLARC team to be observers in the June Primary.

Dr. Wheeler invited their attendance at different canvasses to experience “uniformity.”

Mr. Ablowich invited them to attend Officer of Election training.

Mr. Hager said “There is a huge variability in everything we do; it’s important to recognize the differences.”

Further discussion ensued about polling places, focusing on the security issues of using schools which are normally closed to outside visitors. “In many residential areas,” said Ms. Andrews, “no facility is large enough.”

Mr. Bitz asked where members saw the least uniformity. “Some local differences are minor,” he said, “while others undercut confidence in elections.”

Mr. Latham emphasized the need for continuity at the Department of Elections instead of complete changeover of leadership every four years.

Mr. Bell said that Virginia Electoral Board Association has tried for the past 35 years to get, and put in place, a permanent department head who could focus on the long-term and build the program.

Ms. Gunter pointed that the new Commissioner had the advantage of having experience in the department in the past.

Mr. Hager said the problems described reflected the reason the WorkGroup was formed — “born out of this situation.”

In response to a query from Ms. Jeffers, Mr. Bitz said his team had already interviewed about 15 registrars and expected to get to at least 25. Dr. Wheeler suggested also interviewing recently retired GRs. Mr. Bitz said they also intended to interview former members of the SBE and ELECT staff.

Discussion ensued on the issue of reform of the State Board.

Dr. Wheeler said there is a difference of opinion about what constitutes a bi-partisan board; “We’ve got to get the Board of Elections out of control of whoever wins the election.”

Ms. Hanley said her concern was lack of functionality with a three-member board in which two members cannot talk to each other because of the quorum prohibitions

created by the FOIA. "If we can get a five-member board we can go from there," she said. "I'm willing to do it steps at a time."

Mr. Ablowich said it is important to recognize the problems and limitations of a three-member board. "Is the structure appropriate for administration of elections? Recognize responsibilities and limitations."

Mr. Hager suggested the WorkGroup bring it up again in the next General Assembly and hope for resolution. He directed the previous subcommittee members resume their task.

Prince William County Director of Elections described the upcoming Pilot Audit of the May 1 municipal elections and invited members to attend as observers.

Under New Business Ms. Gunter described ongoing efforts for a compensation study for GRs. Discussion ensued on national experts to be consulted and questions were raised about gender pay inequality issues.

On Charge Two, funding and reimbursements, Ms. White led discussion on tracking expenditures over a five-year period. Mr. Bell suggested asking VACo and VML for their assistance.

On Charge Three, GIS capabilities, Ms. White pointed out that the Commissioner had suggested waiting until forthcoming guidance is issued.

On Charge Four, cyber-security, Mr. Ablowich said the issue does not pertain to the Local Security Plan required by the department and is a relatively complex situation.

The WorkGroup agreed to set its next meeting for Tuesday, May 22 at 10 am at the McGuireWoods conference room.

After further general discussion, there being no further business, the WorkGroup adjourned at 1:41 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Robin Lind
Temporary Permanent Recording Secretary