

Election Board Meeting, October 16, 2026, 10am, Council Chambers, 4th floor, St. Joseph County Building

All Election Board members present: Jason Cichowicz-D, John Jurgonski-R, Kim Riskovitch-R, Clerk's Office (taking the Clerk's place due to Clerk being on the ballot).

Minutes from 8/21/26 and 9/3/26 were approved.

Resolution: Kim reported a change in venue for Early Voting the weekend before Election Day: Harris branch library has a conflict but Frances and Center Township branches will host Early Voting that day. Approved 3-0. NOTE: It was not stated how this updated information would be communicated to the public.

Complaint Discussion: This involved a complaint the Penn Township Trustee displaying her political sign at the Osceola Bluegrass Festival, as well as firefighters being present at the booth (with campaign canopy and campaign materials) during the event.

Jim Groves, D- Attorney, began by saying Dems are not seeking sanctions, but asked of the 13 affidavits "did they knowingly violate the law?" He substantiated there were photos, campaign materials, and large billboards at the booth that could make it look like the firefighters were supporting the "R" candidate, which would violate Sec. 17 and 31416 of IN law. He mentioned possibly needing further investigation. Cichowicz commented that IN State Police would be the appropriate entity for investigation 'for fairness'. Groves then commented that he 'has 2 Republicans against him at a time', and requested "at least a reprimand." R-Attorney, Pete Agostino, questioned the authority of ISP regarding the 35-44.1 section of IN law.

Agostino represented trustee Doris Portolese and Kent Hizer and argued that Penn firefighters did no solicitation for votes, nor for money, that the firefighters were taking their breaks from the sun under the canopy, and he submitted 13 affidavits from firefighters to this effect. He mentioned D-Nancy Duncan "had stuff". At one point, Nancy was able to make a comment but I have no written notes of what she said. There was discussion about the booth and canopy being "an attack on firefighters." Agostino asked the Board to consider "If you believe there is 'substantial reason' for any action."

Dr. Don Westerhausen, D-Dem Chair, testified that he was not aware of any monetary solicitation, that he saw "0" affidavits, and the "attack on firefighters" is speculative. He believed no investigation was needed, they could respond as they wished, as there is no substantial reason to move forward. Cichowicz stated he did not read that the canopy was an attack on firefighters, but they do have a duty to ask if there was campaigning involved. Don added there may have been no intent but the actions or inactions could give rise to campaigning. Cichowicz stated they were clearly campaigning by educating for votes, with posters of candidates. He thought these should be considered an election function, and that "just sitting is promoting." Additional discussion included firefighters that said they were not campaigning; this was an educational booth; affidavits carry the weight. Cichowicz stated there was no need for further investigation; he believes a reprimand is in order; if actions were criminal, they could prosecute, but there is no legal definition to do so.

The Board decided no further investigation. They decided to publicly reprimand Doris Portolese for campaign activities, and reminded candidates to do their due diligence, and cautioned candidates to be careful in the future.

(Ed. Note: I believe the reprimand was not strong enough, and that she should have been ordered, at the very least, to make a public statement acknowledging her error, and validating her intent to ensure this does not happen ever again.)

New Business:

Kim Riskovitch, Clerk's Office, discussed processing incoming ballots. They are requesting Board approval to allow Gidget to handle the vault/ballot room where completed ballots are kept, and to keep this door open during the work day. There are cameras inside and out. Another Clerk staff member, Arlene, who does not do election work, will be available to assist. Board approved this request. Kim stated the numbers are up. Cichowicz believed this was reasonable and they did not need to make a policy to cover this particular request, but to be sure to sign in and out.

Election Commissioners will be needed on Election Day. Parties will need to choose Election Commissioners, and were directed to give those names to Kim for Credentialing.

Old Business:

- Status on parking for Election Volunteers. They may look into 'signs' for volunteers to put in their cars.
- 15 letters were sent to voters from New Prairie regarding something I did not note (apologies).
- Vote Center Training dates and information went out yesterday.
- South Bend School Board names left off the ballot; they have no answer for this. Kim stated that 1st District names were left off the ballot for South Bend Schools. This affected 1 precinct in District 1. She stated the map was incorrect as there were no candidates in that District.
- Dan Caruso reported some folks are not getting their ballots and he is very concerned about lag time. He questioned how many people did not get their ballots?
- Cichowicz asked about Bulk Mail Ballots and was informed the Clerk takes these to Bulk Mail at the South Bend Post Office. This was not specified, but I take this to mean that Absentee Ballots are being mailed to voters who requested them.

Respectfully submitted,
Pam Claey's