

CITY OF CRANSTON  
BOARD OF CANVASSERS  
Regular Meeting of June 27, 2023 – OFFICIAL MINUTES

The Cranston Board of Canvassers met on June 27, 2023, in a meeting advertised in accordance with the Rhode Island Open Meetings Act on June 20, 2023. The meeting was called to order by the Chairperson, James Donahue, at 5:33 p.m. It was held in Council Chambers, Third Floor, at Cranston City Hall.

MEMBERS PRESENT: James Donahue, Kirk McDonough (For Ms. Moronta for a portion of the meeting), Quilcia Moronta

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

NON-MEMBERS PRESENT: Nicholas Lima (Registrar / Director of Elections), Jeffrey Barone (Board Alternate), Theresa Bucci (Canvassing Aide), Dan Wall (Ward 6 candidate), Anthony Melillo (Ward 6 candidate), Marc Bochner (Ward 6 candidate), Thomas Trudell (Republican City Committee Chair), Maria Bucci (Democratic City Committee Chair), Morris Bochner, Bob Murray, and additional Members of the Public

The Chair declared a quorum present.

AGENDA

- I. CALL TO ORDER (NO VOTES TAKEN)
- II. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)
- III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF PRIOR MEETINGS – 5-26-2023 (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)
- IV. PUBLIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS – CHAIRPERSON (NO VOTES TAKEN)
- V. PUBLIC COMMENT (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)
- VI. OLD BUSINESS
  - A. STATUS OF BOARD OF CANVASSERS-SUPPORTED LEGISLATION IN THE RHODE ISLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)
- VII. NEW BUSINESS
  - A. PUBLIC HEARING ON WARD 6 SPECIAL ELECTION POLLING PLACE COMBINATIONS (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)
  - B. THE BOARD MAY DISCUSS AND APPROVE COMBINED POLLING PLACES FOR THE CRANSTON CITY COUNCIL WARD 6 SPECIAL PRIMARY AND SPECIAL ELECTION, FOR SUBMISSION TO THE RHODE ISLAND BOARD OF ELECTIONS FOR FINAL APPROVAL (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)
  - C. THE BOARD MAY DISCUSS AND AUTHORIZE THE STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS TO TABULATE MAIL BALLOTS (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)
- VIII. UPDATES FROM THE REGISTRAR (ALL ITEMS FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY; NO VOTES TAKEN)
  - A. UNITED STATES ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION LOCAL LEADERSHIP COUNCIL ANNUAL MEETING
  - B. MS/EI-ISAC ANNUAL MEETING
  - C. CYBERSECURITY AND PHYSICAL SECURITY GRANT FUNDING

- D. REVIEW OF IMPORTANT DATES FOR BOARD MEMBERS TO BE AVAILABLE FOR THE CONDUCT OF THE SPECIAL ELECTION
- IX. ADJOURNMENT (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

Mr. Donahue asked for a motion to approve the agenda.

MOTION: By Mr. McDonough and seconded by Mr. Barone to approve the agenda as posted.

PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 2-0 – Mr. McDonough and Mr. Donahue voting aye.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF PRIOR MEETINGS – 5-26-2023 (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

Mr. Donahue asked if there were any corrections to the draft minutes that were previously distributed and posted, and there were none.

MOTION: By Mr. McDonough and seconded by Mr. Donahue to approve the minutes of the May 26, 2023 meeting.

PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 2-0 – Mr. McDonough and Mr. Donahue voting aye.

PUBLIC ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS – CHAIRPERSON (NO VOTES TAKEN)

Mr. Donahue acknowledged the candidates, party chairpersons, and members of the public present for the meeting.

Ms. Moronta arrived at 5:36 p.m. and assumed the voting role of Mr. McDonough.

Mr. Lima recognized the recent passing of Don Mellor, who died at 102. Mr. Lima said Mr. Mellor, a World War II veteran and long-time employee of the city well into his 90s, was prominently featured in news articles after being photographed and interviewed when voting at Cranston’s early voting site at the Pastore Youth Center in 2022. The Board members recognized his long career of service to the community and the country.

PUBLIC COMMENT (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

Mr. Donahue asked if there was any public comment from those present. No written public comment was received, and no member of the public appeared to speak.

MOTION: By Ms. Moronta and seconded by Mr. Donahue to close public comment.

PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 2-0 – Ms. Moronta and Mr. Donahue voting aye.

OLD BUSINESS**A. STATUS OF BOARD OF CANVASSERS-SUPPORTED LEGISLATION IN THE RHODE ISLAND GENERAL ASSEMBLY (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)**

Mr. Donahue asked Mr. Lima to present his report. Mr. Lima said the special election polling place combination bill was just signed into law by the Governor, and that other bills related to the conduct of special elections, including the bill to allow them to be expedited, as Cranston's is, passed and have been enacted into law. Mr. Lima said a number of other technical bills that had broad support from local boards of canvassers, the RI Town and City Clerks' Association, Secretary of State, Board of Elections, Common Cause, and other interest groups died at the end of the session, despite similar versions of many of the bills passing unanimously in both chambers.

Mr. Lima said efforts will be made early in the next legislative session to reintroduce those bills and hopefully have them enacted before the Presidential Preference Primary, or at least in time for the fall 2024 elections. They include the drop box bill, mail ballot application transmission bill, legislation to close a loophole for voters with disabilities signing with an X without a witness, and the disaffiliation bill. Mr. Lima said all four bills had broad support in both chambers, but minor, last-minute hiccups prevented their ultimate passage, which is not unusual in the legislative process when so many competing priorities are under consideration in the final days of the session. Mr. Lima said the Board's bill to reduce costs for antiquated advertising deadlines passed both chambers, but in slightly different versions. The precinct cap bill, a top priority, passed the House unanimously but the Senate again chose to not consider it this year.

Mr. Lima said he spent a significant amount of time advocating for elections improvement legislation supported by the Board this session, and noted that bill sponsors Rep. Baginski and Sen. Lombardi were once again extremely helpful. Mr. Lima also noted that Senate Judiciary Chairwoman Dawn Euer and House State Government and Elections Committee Chairman Evan Shanley were also helpful and instrumental in securing passage of the technical bills and special election polling place combination bill. Mr. Lima noted Chairwoman Euer also sponsored the legislation that passed allowing us to use schools for next year's Presidential Preference Primary. Mr. Lima additionally thanked Rep. Noret and Sen. Raptakis, who are Mr. Lima's representatives in Coventry, who agreed to sponsor or co-sponsor several of the local clerks' priority bills and advocate for their passage.

Mr. Lima asked the Board for permission to send a formal note of thanks to the General Assembly members and personnel who worked closely with local election officials throughout this session to advance law changes that will improve our operations, efficiency, and allow us to better allocate our resources.

**MOTION:** By Ms. Moronta and seconded by Mr. Donahue to authorize the Registrar to send letters of gratitude on behalf of the Board to the General Assembly officials who assisted in advancing the Board's supported legislation.  
**PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 2-0 – Ms. Moronta and Mr. Donahue voting aye.**

NEW BUSINESS**A. PUBLIC HEARING ON WARD 6 SPECIAL ELECTION POLLING PLACE COMBINATIONS (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)**

Mr. Donahue asked Mr. Lima to present a summary for the members of the public in attendance. Mr. Lima said this is a new process, in accordance with the laws that just passed and a new Board of Elections rule and regulation on polling place changes that was enacted last year. This is the first time the Board is following this new process, so Mr. Lima said he has carefully reviewed each required step to ensure it is well-adhered to.

Mr. Lima said it is standard practice for the BOE to strongly suggest that local boards open the same polls for both the primary and general election, to mitigate voter confusion. As such, Mr. Lima said the plan he is submitting for the Board's consideration does just that, even if the primary would in theory have a significantly lower turnout.

Mr. Lima informed the members of the public present that maps are laid out on the tables in the room for their review and input. The maps are also posted on the city website and appeared in the Cranston Herald. Mr. Lima said the main issue is that there are only two polls available to us – Schofield Armory and the Central Library – because of planned construction at CLCF and the fact that schools are in session for the dates of the special primary and special election. Mr. Lima presented a map that showed all of the polling places in and nearby to Ward 6, indicating that nearly all of them are schools and are unavailable for security, parking, and educational reasons. The nearest available locations are the Portuguese Club in Ward 1, and the Pastore Youth Center in Ward 3.

Mr. Lima said his letter to the Board of Elections goes into great detail in analyzing the anticipated turnout and factoring in an extremely high turnout of 50%, and details how many voters the Armory and Central Library would potentially handle. Mr. Lima said even those extraordinary numbers are well within the capacity of both locations to serve and that they will be provided with voting equipment and poll workers that surpass the BOE's minimum recommendations.

Mr. Donahue asked if any members of the public would like to provide public comment to the Board regarding Agenda Item VII. Hearing none, Mr. Donahue asked for a procedural vote to close public comment on this item.

MOTION: By Ms. Moronta and seconded by Mr. Donahue to close public comment on Item VII A.  
PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 2-0 – Ms. Moronta and Mr. Donahue voting aye.

**B. THE BOARD MAY DISCUSS AND APPROVE COMBINED POLLING PLACES FOR THE CRANSTON CITY COUNCIL WARD 6 SPECIAL PRIMARY AND SPECIAL ELECTION, FOR SUBMISSION TO THE RHODE ISLAND BOARD OF ELECTIONS FOR FINAL APPROVAL (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)**

Mr. Lima went over the rationale in his four-page request to the Board of Elections justifying the polling place combinations. He said the request is in part based on low historical turnout rates in neighboring cities and towns when they have held special elections. Mr. Lima also reviewed Ward 6 turnout in the March 2021 Statewide Special Referenda Election and noted it was low despite statewide promotion and mailings to all voters. Mr. Lima said 15% turnout could be a reasonable expectation, although it could be significantly lower or slightly higher. Nevertheless, Mr. Lima said the two combined polls will be staffed and equipped to handle up to 50% turnout, which would be unprecedented in any special election.

Mr. Lima reviewed the details for each polling location. He said the Armory's significantly larger interior space is why there are more registered voters assigned to it. Each location has two precincts assigned, one of which is the default typically assigned to the poll in every election. The Rhode Island National Guard Building – Schofield Armory has Precincts 0718 and 0711 assigned, and the Cranston Central Public Library has Precincts 0714 and 0719 assigned. Ward 6 also has Precinct 0727, however that is a precinct with no assigned polling location because it has no registered voters. Mr. Lima said each location is centrally located in the two precincts it serves, and showed their locations on the map that was provided to the public and Board members.

Mr. Lima said this polling place selection process will be followed again this fall, to switch CLCF back to the Garden City School as the default location for that area, and in Ward 2 to switch Dutemple back to the Eden Park Elementary School for that area. Both locations were the previous defaults, and were only switched in 2022 because the two schools were either partially or fully demolished and under major construction. This experience with the special election polling place change process will inform that process, and has set up the framework for future combinations that may be needed going forward.

Mr. Lima said even if there was a very high turnout of 30% to 35% at the locations, they would be handling fewer voters than they typically handle in a general election, and will have more staff on hand than they do in a general election. With only two locations to monitor, the Board and our techs will be able to directly monitor and support both locations throughout the day.

Per the new regulations, Mr. Lima said he notified the known candidates, local and General Assembly elected officials who represent all or parts of Ward 6, and party chairs. He also sent a media advisory to the Cranston Herald, which ran a news article in advance of today's hearing, and it was posted prominently on the homepage of the city website and city calendar. Pending approval by the Board and the state BOE, the Canvassing Authority will mail a 5x7 postcard to all 4,500 voter households in Ward 6 informing them of their assigned polling places, as well as early voting dates and hours at City Hall. Mr. Lima said if there is a primary, the mailing will be timed to be delivered during the first week of early voting, but if there is no primary, the mailing will be sent out in early September, around the time of the start of early voting for the Oct. 3 Special Election. The mailing will cost the city around \$3,000, and a bid waiver was approved by the Board of Contract and Purchase authorizing Sir Speedy to serve as the vendor.

Mr. Lima said he will also post lawn signs and laminated door signs at all unused polling locations in Ward 6 on and prior to election day, to include Glen Hills School, Garden City School, and the CLCF building, directing voters to the Library or Armory.

Mr. Donahue thanked Mr. Lima for his report. Mr. Donahue said the special election is unprecedented in Cranston, and said that the communication methods Mr. Lima described are traditional methods. He wondered if there could be anything else the city could do to ensure voters are informed.

Mr. Lima said the city does not have a very active social media presence. As a senior election official, Mr. Lima previously had a verified Twitter account and often shares important election information there, which has frequently been retweeted by the state's major media outlets. However, Twitter has become less reliable, and Mr. Lima noted that Elon Musk recently took those verifications away from the state and local election officials who were previously provided them as part of the National Association of Secretary of State's #TrustedInformation campaign. Mr. Lima said he still plans to share information on Twitter in the hopes local news outlets will see and share it to their followers. He said the city also maintains a Facebook page, and while not very active they do post from time to time and could share the information there.

Mr. Lima said that while the post card mailing is traditional, the cost has increased because he is adding colorization to the card to match the colors used on the state's mail ballot envelopes. The hope is voters will not immediately throw the card away thinking it is junk and that the color will grab at least some people's attention to read it first. Adding a uniform color to identify official election mail more easily is a relatively new and national practice the state began in 2020. Mr. Lima said he is open to additional suggestions from the Board. He said several candidates are here, and he knows the candidates will be actively knocking on doors and getting the word out to their voters as well.

Mr. McDonough asked if there is an email database that could be used to inform residents. Mr. Lima said many of the emails on file in the Central Voter Registration System are out-of-date, because they do not typically come over on DMV record updates, and unfortunately most voters have no email on file at all. It could be possible to crosscheck with other city departments, but the data may not line up properly which would be an issue if information is distributed to the wrong people. Mr. Lima said he would look into it further. Mr. Donahue thought it was a great suggestion to explore.

Ms. Bucci suggested reaching out to the Senior Center and Library about including election information and deadlines in their digital and printed newsletters. Mr. Lima said Director Garcia at the library was great in 2022 about hosting mail ballot applications and voter registration forms at a kiosk in the lobby, and he will reach out to him and Director Craddock to see what can be done. He agreed adding information to newsletters would be a great existing resource to utilize.

Mr. Donahue thought those were likewise great ideas. Hearing no further discussion, he asked for a motion to approve the combined polling locations utilizing the Central Public Library and the National Guard Schofield Armory buildings for the special primary and special election.

MOTION: By Mr. Donahue and seconded by Ms. Moronta to approve the Registrar's recommended combined polling places utilizing the RI National Guard Building – Schofield Armory and Cranston Central Public Library for the Ward 6 City Council Special Primary and Special Election, and to transmit those selections to the Rhode Island Board of Elections for final approval. PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 2-0 – Ms. Moronta and Mr. Donahue voting aye.

#### C. THE BOARD MAY DISCUSS AND AUTHORIZE THE STATE BOARD OF ELECTIONS TO TABULATE MAIL BALLOTS (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

Mr. Donahue said this resource is available to us from the state Board of Elections for local special elections in cities and towns throughout Rhode Island. Mr. Lima said in years past, local special elections meant that local boards were responsible for receiving, tabulating, and certifying mail ballots. This would include adjudicating discrepancies and remakes. Mr. Lima said the BOE's practice the last several years now has been to take on this process using their facility and personnel, because they normally do so anyway for all mail ballots in normal state primaries and elections and have the personnel, experience, and sorting and tabulation equipment to do so.

Mr. Lima said the local board in Cranston has never done this operation in the last 40 years and our staff have no expertise or experience in how it works. During the same time period, we will be conducting early voting, setting up and running polls, processing mail ballot and emergency applications, and conducting poll worker training, and we will already be stretched thin. We likewise do not have the sorting equipment or trained temporary personnel to handle potentially hundreds of mail ballots. The Board would need to schedule multiple meetings to review ballots and follow extensive new procedures and regulations, which is also not feasible.

Due to regulations, if the Board did decide to do this process in-house, we would still be required to transport our mail ballots to the BOE to be received, only to then be required to transport them back to City Hall to be certified, opened, and tabulated by hand through a DS-200 scanner, as opposed to the BOE's automatic DS-850 high-speed scanner and mail ballot sorting equipment. This, by itself, would delay election results for several days and would not be practical given the limited size of our office space and staff.

As such, Mr. Lima recommended the Board take up the BOE's offer to handle this end of the process, which is what they typically do anyway. Mr. Lima said he will have a police escort detailed on election night to transport mail ballots in our drop boxes to the BOE to be tabulated there as normal.

Mr. Donahue asked what role the Board of Canvassers would have. Mr. Lima said the front-end of the process is still entirely within the Board's authority, including the processing and certification of mail ballot applications that are handled in our office. The Board will sign the certifications for those applications as normal. The BOE will handle what they normally do, which is receiving, certifying, opening, tabulating, and storing the mail ballots and handling any deficiencies or remakes.

Mr. Lima that will allow those mail ballot totals to be added into the total on Election Night by the BOE. The only ballots we would not be able to tabulate on Election Night are those traditionally not tabulated until the next day, including drop box mail ballots, provisionals, and manual count ballots as well as military/overseas ballots in transmission. He said for the primary there is a three-day transmission period, and for the Oct. 3 election that period is seven days. Mr. Lima said provisional ballots will be adjudicated by the Board the morning following the election, and along with any manual count ballots would likely be transported to the BOE with returns the next following day.

MOTION: By Ms. Moronta and seconded by Mr. Donahue to authorize the Rhode Island Board of Elections to conduct the tabulation and certification of mail ballots for the Ward 6 City Council Special Primary and Special Election.  
PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 2-0 – Ms. Moronta and Mr. Donahue voting aye.

UPDATES FROM THE REGISTRAR (ALL ITEMS FOR INFORMATIONAL PURPOSES ONLY; NO VOTES TO BE TAKEN)

Mr. Donahue asked the Registrar to present his updates.

**A. UNITED STATES ELECTION ASSISTANCE COMMISSION LOCAL LEADERSHIP COUNCIL ANNUAL MEETING**

Mr. Lima said he was appointed by Secretary of State Amore and the RITCCA to the Local Leadership Council, a new advisory committee of the federal Election Assistance Commission. He said there are two representatives from each of the 50 states, the other from Rhode Island being the registrar from Portsmouth. Mr. Lima said the LLC will be meeting in-person for the first time in its history from July 19-22, and he will be traveling to Washington, D.C. to attend the meeting. Mr. Lima said the federal government will cover the travel costs, and he is looking forward to this new group providing a louder and more direct voice from local election officials to the federal government. He said we have been advocating for more funding, resources, and support for many years and this group is poised to amplify and unify the voice of local election offices nationwide.

**B. MS/EI-ISAC ANNUAL MEETING**

Mr. Lima informed the Board he has a role as the RITCCA's designated local election official security clearance holder, and he participates in election security discussions and briefings for both physical and cybersecurity threat mitigation. Mr. Lima said all 39 cities and towns are now required to be part of the Multi-State/Elections Infrastructure Information Sharing and Analysis Center, which is funded by our security partners at the Cybersecurity Infrastructure Security Agency (CISA) via the Department of Homeland Security.

Mr. Lima said he has been invited to be the local DHS-funded attendee at this year's MS/EI-ISAC Annual Meeting in Salt Lake City, taking place from Aug. 6 through Aug. 9. The state attendee is Kathy Placencia, Director of Elections for the Secretary of State.



Mr. Lima said the EI-ISAC provides the office and our IT Department with daily cybersecurity updates and notices, along with free services and materials for best practices and threat mitigation strategies. Mr. Lima said he looks forward to representing Rhode Island's local election officials at the conference, which is attended by around 1,000 election officials, IT directors, and security professionals in the elections community.

Mr. Lima said the day after he returns, the Board will have a special meeting scheduled for noon to hear any objections to candidacy or nomination papers that were filed by the previous day's 4 p.m. deadline, and to certify the candidates for the primary. Aug. 9 at 4 p.m. is also the deadline for candidates to withdraw. The deadline to do so is 4 p.m. on Aug. 10, which is why the Board must meet at noon. Mr. Lima said he will then hand-deliver the certification to the Secretary of State's office in Providence.

### C. CYBERSECURITY AND PHYSICAL SECURITY GRANT FUNDING

Mr. Lima said he has reached out to the Secretary of State's office to request additional funding to make security improvements to the office ahead of the 2024 elections. Mr. Lima said the Secretary of State has been generous in recent years in providing federal HAVA grant funding to cities and towns to make cybersecurity upgrades, add training programs, and to install more cameras and physical security upgrades. Mr. Lima said he is working with CISA to assess the office's needs and areas that can be improved if funding is available. He is also reaching out to the city's grant writer to see if other funding sources may be pinpointed.

Mr. Lima said the recent incident where an individual threw a rock through one of the office's windows prompted him to explore additional security funding options to increase security for the office and to better protect the office staff who administer our elections processes. He said he wanted to make sure the Board is aware this is an ongoing effort to continuously upgrade and improve our security posture within the limits of funds and resources available, but he is exploring every possible option to make the office and our staff as safe and secure as possible from the hostile threat actors that are actively seeking to disrupt election operations.

### D. REVIEW OF IMPORTANT DATES FOR BOARD MEMBERS TO BE AVAILABLE FOR THE CONDUCT OF THE SPECIAL ELECTION

Mr. Lima said he sent an email to the Board with various dates they should have set in their calendars for anticipated meetings related to the special election, as well as time periods they will need to come in to sign documents like nomination papers, mail ballot application certifications, and ballot certifications. Mr. Lima also pointed out that the state is holding a cybersecurity national table-top exercise this summer, and a day-long training event this September, both of which the Board is invited and encouraged to attend if members are available.

Mr. Donahue asked if there were any questions from the Board members or alternates on the Registrar's report and there were none. Mr. Donahue asked whether the dates that Mr. Lima shared with the Board are also known or relayed to the parties and candidates. Mr. Lima said most of those dates are for the Board's own operations, but

some overlap with public meetings and functions that may be of interest to the candidates. Accordingly, Mr. Lima said he shared the full election calendar with the party chairs, and posted it on the city website on the “For Candidates” section for download by the public. This page also contains last year’s “How to Run for Office Guide” from the Secretary of State, as well as PDFs of the candidate declaration and endorsement forms for the special election that are mirrored on the SOS’s site. Mr. Lima added that mail ballot application forms are now available on both websites, as well.

ADJOURNMENT (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

MOTION: By Ms. Moronta and seconded by Mr. Donahue to adjourn.  
PASSED UNANIMOUSLY – VOICE VOTE

The meeting was adjourned at 6:15 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Nicholas J. Lima  
Registrar / Director of Elections  
Cranston Board of Canvassers

APPROVED by the Cranston Board of Canvassers: August 10, 2023