

CITY OF CRANSTON  
BOARD OF CANVASSERS  
Special Meeting of April 3, 2024 – OFFICIAL MINUTES

The Cranston Board of Canvassers met on April 3, 2024, in a meeting advertised in accordance with the Rhode Island Open Meetings Act on March 11, 2024. The meeting was called to order by the Chairperson, Kirk McDonough, at 10:15 a.m. It was held in the Canvassing Authority Office, Room 100, at Cranston City Hall.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Steven Piscopiello, Quilcia Moronta, Kirk McDonough

MEMBERS ABSENT: None

NON-MEMBERS PRESENT: Nicholas Lima (Registrar / Director of Elections), Theresa Bucci (Canvassing Aide), Maria Madonna (Data Entry and Maintenance Specialist), Emerson Brito (Bilingual Elections Specialist)

The chair declared a quorum present.

AGENDA

- I. CALL TO ORDER (NO VOTES TO BE TAKEN)
- II. APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)
- III. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF PRIOR MEETINGS – 3-12-2024 (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)
- IV. NEW BUSINESS
  - A. THE BOARD MAY DISCUSS AND TAKE ACTION TO CERTIFY THE FINAL FORM OF REFERENDA TO BE PLACED ON THE JUNE 4, 2024 SPECIAL REFERENDUM ELECTION BALLOT, INCLUDING ONE LOCAL BOND QUESTION, IN ACCORDANCE WITH R.I. GEN. LAWS § 17-19-7 (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN):
    1. LOCAL BOND QUESTIONS
      1. SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL FACILITIES - \$40,000,000 BONDS AND NOTES
  - B. THE BOARD WILL TABULATE WRITE-IN VOTES CAST DURING THE RHODE ISLAND PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE PRIMARY ELECTION OF APRIL 2, 2024, IN ACCORDANCE WITH R.I. GEN. LAWS § 17-19-31 (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)
  - C. THE BOARD WILL CONVENE FOR THE PURPOSE OF DETERMINING THE DISPOSITION OF PROVISIONAL BALLOTS CAST DURING THE RHODE ISLAND PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE PRIMARY ELECTION OF APRIL 2, 2024, IN ACCORDANCE WITH R.I. GEN. LAWS § 17-19-24.3 (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)
- V. ADJOURNMENT (VOTE MAY BE TAKEN)

APPROVAL OF THE AGENDA (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

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

MOTION: By Ms. Moronta and seconded by Mr. Piscopiello to approve the agenda as posted.

PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 3-0 – Ms. Moronta, Mr. Piscopiello, and Mr. McDonough voting aye.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF PRIOR MEETINGS – 3-12-2024 (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

Mr. Lima said he has not had time to prepare these minutes and he will have them for approval at a future meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

A. THE BOARD MAY DISCUSS AND TAKE ACTION TO CERTIFY THE FINAL FORM OF REFERENDA TO BE PLACED ON THE JUNE 4, 2024 SPECIAL REFERENDUM ELECTION BALLOT, INCLUDING ONE LOCAL BOND QUESTION, IN ACCORDANCE WITH R.I. GEN. LAWS § 17-19-7 (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN):

1. LOCAL BOND QUESTIONS

1. SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL FACILITIES - \$40,000,000 BONDS AND NOTES

Mr. Lima said the bond question has been reviewed and approved by bond counsel. The bond act was approved by the House and Senate last night and transmitted to the Governor. The City Council acted two weeks ago to set the date for the June 4 Special Election. Yesterday, Mr. Lima said, the state Board of Elections met and approved the election calendar. Approval of the ballot question today by the Board of Canvassers is the last remaining legal hurdle before the election process begins.

Mr. Lima said he will work with bond counsel at each step to review and design the required legal ad, election warrant, and the city-wide voter information mailer. He said while the act as passed by the General Assembly as the question in all capital letters, it is standard practice for the Secretary of State to lower-case ballot questions in order to be more readable for voters.

Mr. Lima noted that we do not have codified Local Act chapter numbers yet, however the Secretary of State may add those in place of the House and Senate bill numbers if they become known between now and when they need to provide us a final ballot proof for administrative approval. Mr. Lima said he will hand-deliver the certification to the Secretary of State's office tomorrow and provide them an electronic copy of the Word document. The Board is welcome to review the ballot proofs when we receive them, however the only city sign-off that is required is from the solicitor's office.

Mr. Lima said there will be duplicate original copies, one for the Secretary of State and one for our office's file. Mr. Piscopiello asked if residents will have an opportunity to see what the breakdown is of projects that the bond funds will provide for. Mr. Lima said state election law requires our office to publish a legal notice that will include a detailed project list breakdown including financing costs and a projected timetable.

Mr. McDonough asked what we are expecting for turnout. Mr. Lima said that in the previous city-wide school bond special elections in 1994 and 2003, turnout was around 4 to 5%, similar to what was seen in yesterday's PPP. Mr. Lima said it is contingent upon how much public attention there is to this, although at the same time, Cranston voters are not historically acclimated to holding a special election in June.

Mr. McDonough asked if early voting for this school bond question could be held at City Hall given the lighter turnout. Mr. Lima said the issue would be there is no parking while school is in session at Cranston East, and if turnout is higher than expected, the hallway outside the office is not large enough to accommodate the necessary voting booths, check-in tables, and vote tabulators. Mr. Lima also noted it could be confusing for voters if we had early voting for the PPP at Pastore, and will be back at Pastore in August and October, but hold early voting at City Hall only for this Special Election in May and June.

MOTION: By Ms. Moronta and seconded by Mr. Piscopiello to approve the certification of the local referendum question for the school bond and to transmit the certification to the Secretary of State.

PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 3-0 – Ms. Moronta, Mr. Piscopiello, and Mr. McDonough voting aye.

C. THE BOARD WILL CONVENE FOR THE PURPOSE OF DETERMINING THE DISPOSITION OF PROVISIONAL BALLOTS CAST DURING THE RHODE ISLAND PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE PRIMARY ELECTION OF APRIL 2, 2024, IN ACCORDANCE WITH R.I. GEN. LAWS § 17-19-24.3 (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

Mr. McDonough noted the office staff had completed reviewing provisional ballots so that matter was ready to be heard at this time.

MOTION: By Mr. Piscopiello and seconded by Ms. Moronta to take Item C. out of order.

PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 3-0 – Ms. Moronta, Mr. Piscopiello, and Mr. McDonough voting aye.

The Board individually reviewed 23 provisional ballots by precinct, in conjunction with the staff. Two ballots were qualified, three ballots were qualified as federal offices only, and the remaining 18 ballots were disqualified by the Board.

MOTION: By Ms. Moronta and seconded by Mr. Piscopiello to qualify all valid provisional ballot applications.

PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 3-0 – Ms. Moronta, Mr. Piscopiello, and Mr. McDonough voting aye.

B. THE BOARD WILL TABULATE WRITE-IN VOTES CAST DURING THE RHODE ISLAND PRESIDENTIAL PREFERENCE PRIMARY ELECTION OF APRIL 2, 2024, IN ACCORDANCE WITH R.I. GEN. LAWS § 17-19-31 (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

Mr. McDonough noted that he does not feel it is appropriate to have to hand tally write-in votes cast for fictional characters such as Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck, because they are not qualified candidates who would be eligible to hold office. Mr. McDonough

said one of the requirements in the state BOE guidance is that we have to ascertain the name of the person whom a write-in vote is cast for, and we cannot reasonably ascertain the name of a person who does not factually exist or is registered to vote. Ms. Moronta agreed with Mr. McDonough.

Mr. Lima said the guidance from the BOE cannot circumvent state law itself, which the state has interpreted as directing the local boards to tabulate all write-in votes, even if they are for fictional characters. Mr. Lima noted that "Blank" is often the leading write-in vote getter reported out, because many voters choose to fill in the write-in oval but do not write in a name, yet we must still report that out.

Mr. Lima said there is legislation proposed in the General Assembly to modify this process. It has previously passed the House three times, but not the Senate. Mr. Lima said if the Board does not agree with this process, the main mechanism we have to change it is to lobby the General Assembly to modify it. Mr. Lima noted that the Board will need to hand-tabulate hundreds, if not thousands, of write-ins this November, which will probably take about three days for the Board to complete, based on past experience.

Mr. Lima said the context and intent of the state's guidance is to reasonably ascertain the intent of a voter when they use a nickname for a candidate. He used the example of having five write-in votes cast for "Vincent Cianci" and five for "Buddy Cianci," in which the Board could reasonably ascertain the intent that those votes are all for the same person and assign all 10 votes to the same write-in candidate. If the write-in vote was cast for "Cookie Monster," Mr. Lima said that, per the state's guidance regarding last names, the Board could include a vote cast for "C. Monster," as being for Cookie Monster, but not for "Cookie M." He clarified that the guidance is to help determine voter intent when tallying for a particular write-in candidate, but does not allow the Board to choose not to count fictional characters simply because they are not real registered voters who are actually able to hold an office.

Mr. Piscopiello agreed with the rest of the Board that it defied common sense to operate this way. Mr. Lima said that the several days spent doing this in November could be much better spent on other important election processes. Ms. Moronta said it is a lot of time spent for nothing, because at the end of the day Cookie Monster cannot be elected to office and the write-in votes cast for him are legally meaningless. The Board agreed that this process is deeply flawed and that all efforts should be made to change it in the legislature.

The Board proceeded to hand tabulate the write-in votes cast in the PPP for each office and district, and prepared and signed the tabulation sheets for transmission to the state Board of Elections in accordance with the state's procedures.

**MOTION:** By Ms. Moronta and seconded by Mr. Piscopiello to certify all tabulated write-in votes cast in the April 2, 2024 Presidential Preference Primary Election.

**PASSED ROLL CALL VOTE – 3-0 – Ms. Moronta, Mr. Piscopiello, and Mr. McDonough voting aye.**

ADJOURNMENT (VOTES MAY BE TAKEN)

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

The meeting was adjourned at 11:47 a.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

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

APPROVED by the Cranston Board of Canvassers: May 14, 2024