



NORTHWEST COUNCIL OF ELECTED OFFICIALS

MEETING MINUTES **MONDAY, APRIL 8, 2024**

The City of Lauderhill hosted the meeting of the Northwest Council of Elected Officials on Monday, April 8, 2024 at the Lauderhill Performing Arts Center, 3800 NW 11th Place, Lauderhill, FL 33311.

Elected Officials/Attendees:

Vice Mayor Sandra Welch
Commissioner John Brodie
Commissioner Jackie Railey
Commissioner Joy Carter
Mayor Veronica Edwards Phillips
Vice Mayor Mark Spence
Commissioner Tycie Causwell
Commissioner Sharon Thomas
Mayor Ken Thurston
Vice Mayor Lawrence “Jabbow” Martin
Commissioner Sarai “Ray” Martin
Mayor Tommy Ruzzano
Vice Mayor Arlene R. Schwartzman
Commissioner Antonio Arserio
Commissioner Anthony N. Caggiano
Commissioner Joanne Simone
Mayor Samson Borgelin
Vice Mayor Dee Lewis-Ricketts
Commissioner Jacqueline Guzman
Commissioner Hazelle Rogers
County Executive Administrator Dwight Hinkson

Municipality:

City of Coconut Creek
City of Coconut Creek
City of Coconut Creek
City of Coral Springs
City of Lauderdale Lakes
City of Lauderdale Lakes
City of Lauderdale Lakes
City of Lauderdale Lakes
City of Lauderhill
City of Lauderhill
City of Lauderhill
City of Margate
City of Margate
City of Margate
City of Margate
City of Margate
City of Margate
City of North Lauderdale
City of North Lauderdale
City of Sunrise
Broward County
Broward County

Guest Speaker:

Broward County Supervisor of Elections Joe Scott

Lauderhill Administration and Staff:

Andrea Anderson, City Clerk
City of Lauderhill Director of Public Relations & Cultural Arts Leslie Johnson

I **CALL TO ORDER** – Mayor Ken Thurston welcomed attendees and called the meeting to order at 12:25 p.m. He announced that at the end of the meeting, the LPAC staff would give a tour of the facility.

II **APPROVAL OF MINUTES** – **March 18, 2024 - City of North Lauderdale - City of Margate**
Commissioner Caggiano moved to approve the Minutes as submitted. Seconded by City of Sunrise Commissioner Guzman. No discussion. **Minutes approved unanimously by voice vote.**

III **PRESENTATIONS** – 2024 Elections Update from Supervisor of Elections Joe Scott

Mayor Thurston welcomed Supervisor of Elections Joe Scott, noting he read Mr. Scott’s bio and learned that he attended West Point, served in Iraq, where he led troops, and was awarded a Bronze Star.

Supervisor of Elections Joe Scott updated the attendees on the upcoming 2024 elections, highlighting the following:

- Some changes were being made to upgrade the existing system
- Internal changes included: system upgrades, such as new devices, Poll Pads, for smoother check in; the feedback received was positive; some kinks were still being ironed out that were inevitable when upgrading technology; planned improvements to the phone system to better manage calls on election day, including communicating via text messages; mass texts could be sent from the office phone number; the main number, 954-357-VOTE, would have enhanced data security put in place to reduce misinformation; callers could text using that number, and someone from his office would return their call
- Early voting sites were being expanded; one of the main drivers of this was numerous voters switched over to voting by mail due to the COVID 19 pandemic; the result was about 550,000 people between elections in 2020 and 2022 signing up to vote by mail
- The State changed the law, so his staff had to wipe that list clean and start from scratch signing voters up for vote by mail again, and they managed to get from 0 to 150,000 over the past year; as they got closer to the November 2024 election, they expected this number to increase significantly, though he doubted it would reach 550,000 again, as more people grew comfortable voting in person
- The hope was many more people would opt to vote early; before the pandemic there was a peak of about 450,000 people voting early
- His office was planning for about a 90 percent voter turnout in the upcoming election; they anticipated about a million people voting in Broward County
- For the 2020 election there were about 22 early voting sites across the County; for the 2024 election, the aim was to have about 30 early voting sites, so they were still looking for more locations
- They would be marketing the early voting sites more than before; during March 2024, they began testing new methods of informing the public, including: using billboards, radio and TV advertisements with information on the three ways to vote, so voters knew they did not have to wait until election day to vote.

Margate Commissioner Caggiano remarked on vote by mail registration starting on January 1 of an odd year, and ending on December 31 of the next even year, which meant at the end of 2024, voters would be asked to sign up again for early voting after December 31, 2024. He asked how the need to sign up again would be communicated to voters.

Mr. Scott affirmed communicating this to voters became part of his office’s regular routine, so every odd number year, they had to remind voters to sign up again to vote by mail. Three omnibus voter suppression bills went into effect over the last three years that resulted in significant changes that led to many changes in his office. He said another change was voter list maintenance dramatically changed, where they had 1.3 million people on the rolls, and that dropped to 1.1 million, a ten percent loss, though none of the voters who dropped off the roll voted in

the 2020 election. In some cases, those people were either no longer in Broward County, or they were incredibly apathetic, as 2020 saw one of Broward's highest election turnouts.

Lauderhill Mayor Thurston asked for the deadline for adding a new voting site.

Mr. Scott said once they reached 30 sites they would stop looking, and they were already close to that number; the Lauderhill Mall would be maintained as an early voting site for the entire 2024 election season. He stated his office would be moving into a new building that was almost complete; it was located just south of Commercial Boulevard, and just west of I-95, just near the soccer stadium. In 2025 they hoped to add another location in Lauderhill.

Lauderdale Lakes Commissioner Thomas said many seniors on 41st complained to her, as they used to go over to the recreation, but now they had to cross 441 on the east side to get to the church, which presented a problem; this included Piney Grove and Merrell Churches.

Mr. Scott responded that he would look at the map to see if something could be done to address the matter; they wished to fix as many of such issues as they could.

Lauderdale Lakes Commissioner Causwell commented the Lauderdale Lakes Library had two voting areas, but they had no parking, which was problematic; there used to be parking that disappeared with the building of the Bella Vista development.

Mr. Scott stated his office was open to relocating the site, so they invited suggestions for an alternate site; it was difficult to find sites that met all their requirements. He already had concerns about the Lauderdale Lakes Library location, as voting was on the second floor, and there were challenges with making it ADA accessible if the only option was taking the stairs.

Margate Vice Mayor Schwartz commented in 2020 the Supervisor of Elections office sent out over 300 sample ballots, asking cities which they preferred; she went through all 300 samples and sent back a response that resulted in Margate being on the front page. She asked if they could repeat the exercise.

Mr. Scott noted there was an order to the process, and he did not realize it was something he had the ability to change. There was a change in the law affecting the procedure of how ballots were set up; it was driven by an incident with the U.S. Senate race in 2018. There might have been some flexibility then that no longer existed, but he would look into the matter further.

In response to mention of a city which had monthly visits from representatives from the Supervisor of Elections office, who spoke with members of the public about doing early voter registration, Mr. Scott asked how many cities had his office's trifolds available at their city hall for the public to register to vote; his office would deliver trifolds if needed. Voters could fill in their information on the trifold, seal it and drop it in the mail, as it was already self-addressed with prepaid postage.

On the topic of rumors or misinformation, Mr. Scott noted that most of the negativity he received pertained to ballot drop boxes, adding drop boxes would be present at all County libraries, and at all their branch offices. For the northwest Broward area, the libraries were in Coral Springs and Tamarac; he said all early voting sites had drop boxes during early voting, which ended at 7:00 p.m. the Sunday prior to election day the following Tuesday. He said, by State Law, after Sunday the only drop boxes could be at his office locations, hence the push to establish more branch office locations throughout the County, so voters could drop off ballots within the last 48 hours of an election. Though mail-in ballots had prepaid postage, they had to arrive in his office by 7:00 p.m. on election day; this was the official message being sent out to the voting public; they were working with the U.S. Postal Northwest Council of Elected Officials, April 8, 2024

Service (USPS) to get as many mailed ballots to his office on time, even those posted on election day. However, his office had no wish to overburden the postal system, hence pushing early voting, and increasing the number of sites. Mr. Scott said they tried this strategy in 2022, for which his office received a lot of pushback, because there were less drop boxes available in 2022; there were three attempts in the 2024 legislative session to change the law regarding drop boxes to make them disappear, but as there were some more conservative municipalities that used drop boxes in Broward, any changes that would result in their removal would affect them too, so all the attempts failed. He was cautiously optimistic there would be no hindrance to having the drop boxes as planned.

Margate Vice Mayor Schwartz asked if the mass text from 357-VOTE was only during election day.

Mr. Scott answered no; his office had not yet done a mass texting, but it would likely happen in the next few weeks; the first target demographic would likely be voters who registered to vote by mail. The system had to separate cellphone from landline numbers, so texts would be sent to the former, and robocalls to the latter. The message on the robocall would provide the number for his office.

Margate Vice Mayor Schwartz asked about Mr. Scott's office handled voting material for Broward municipal elections on the front and back of the ballot.

Mr. Scott understood he had no flexibility, but as this was the first time the question was posed to him, he would confirm his belief. He liked the idea that he might have the flexibility to make changes that would make municipal elections more user friendly. He asked if any of the elected officials still held March elections, of which there were a few cities.

When asked about some residents that used to vote at one location and voting now moved to another that was quite a distance away, Mr. Scott acknowledged there was significant frustration when such changes were made; the problem was that in the State of Florida, voting on election day was very rigid, as opposed to early voting when there was a lot more flexibility with regard to sites, so voters could use any site closer to their homes or workplace. He said there was nothing, from a technology standpoint, preventing the same thing being done on election day, yet municipalities were forced by the State to draw geographical areas or precincts, for which one location must be identified as each precinct's polling station. Thus, every precinct border would be further from, or closer to some voters; some voters might live across from a polling station, but they could not vote there, as the polling station was not in their assigned precinct. He had no desire to have voters crossing major thoroughfares to get to their polling station.

Coconut Creek Commissioner Railey thanked Mr. Scott and his staff for having a strong presence in the Wynmoor community, as it made a big difference for residents to have someone actually onsite, handing out the trifolds. It made it easier for voter registration, particularly for new residents.

In reference to the drop boxes, after the last major election, there were discussions about the number of ballots people were allowed to take to the boxes, but in many cases, particularly with senior voters, there were transportation challenges, Mr. Scott clarified the rule was a voter could drop off their ballot, along with the ballots for any voter in their household (the law specified a myriad of family relationships), plus two; the restriction was not only two ballots could be dropped off by each person. The way in which his office communicated this information to Broward voters was ballots could be dropped off for all the voters in their household, plus two.

Lauderhill Vice Mayor Martin mentioned efforts to reestablish voting rights for returning citizens, and making extra efforts to get them ready to vote in the coming elections.

Mr. Scott responded this was something that came out of the August 2020 incident in the County, when they came down and arrested a number of people, and a press conference was held at the courthouse. Some of the persons Northwest Council of Elected Officials, April 8, 2024

arrested mistakenly thought their voting rights were restored, and the whole system was a mess; there was no way to know for sure whether people were eligible to vote or not, as the onus was on an individual to know. He recommended if anyone was unsure of their voting status, they should not fill out a voter registration form, and they should not vote, as the system was not designed to stop them; rather, the system was relying on individuals to establish, prior to voting, if they were eligible. Before the August 2020 incident, there was an effort to remove voters from the system who had past trouble with the law, but they had no wish to see a repeat incident, as people came to his office asking how to find out if they were okay to vote, particularly if they had a prior criminal record. However, the optics of that incident discouraged some eligible voters from registering, which was exactly the plan of those who orchestrated it. Mr. Scott commented, in the interest of reducing the likelihood of this happening again, for the last two years his office looked for persons currently on probation in Broward County, proactively removing them from voter rolls. Once a month his office received an updated list of persons on probation, and did their review. He suggested to elected officials that when residents asked them about their voting rights, they should tell them that their voting rights were automatically restored once they successfully completed all the terms of their sentence. This included all fines and fees were paid, and all probation conditions were completed, after which they did not need permission from the government to vote; they had a Constitutional right to vote. He said, if they were unsure, they needed to clear that matter up first before registering to vote.

County Commissioner Rogers asked about provisional ballots, and how they were used.

Mr. Scott replied if someone showed up to vote without a photo ID, they were allowed to vote using a provisional ballot; their signature had to match or you have to do a cure within 14 days after the election. Persons should not vote by provisional ballot if they went to the wrong polling station, as their ballot would not count, as State Law required voters to vote at their assigned polling station on election day; this applied to situations where election workers allowed someone to vote by provisional ballot, and it affected any person voting at an unassigned polling station on election day. He said another major problem was voters among the homeless population, as voters must have a valid residential address to register to vote. Voters living overseas used the Supervisor of Elections office address as their residential address, with their mailing address being wherever they currently resided out of the country. He stated local homeless persons could go this route, as voters could only vote in their area of residence; sometimes homeless persons had a P.O. box address, but his office required a valid residential address and a mailing address. There were ways to create a residential address for homeless voters; for example, if a homeless person considered home to be a park bench in a specific location in a city. If they could identify to his staff the street, block, etc., something they could work with, his staff could set them up in the voter registration system.

County Commissioner Rogers remarked on U.S. citizens living out of the country for extended periods of time, asking if American embassies in foreign countries helped citizens with voting in U.S. elections.

Mr. Scott acknowledged many people living overseas did not know how to register to vote; in order to vote, a valid residential address in the U.S. was necessary, so voters could be assigned to a county where their vote would be counted. This assignment was done locally, not at the state or federal government levels. He was unsure of the information U.S. embassies around the world provided to Americans living abroad, though there was a federal website with information, but it was a recurring problem his office encountered.

When asked about voter registration drives for high school students that would soon be turning 18, Mr. Scott explained when a young person registered to vote through school before they were 18 years old, on the day they turned 18 they were active to vote; even without a physical voter registration card they could vote early at any polling station, etc. He said their website browardvotes.gov had a tool into which any Broward address could be entered to find the location of the assigned polling station; the link was shown at the top of the webpage.

Lauderhill Mayor Thurston, on behalf of the attendees, thanked Mr. Scott for all the valuable voting information he provided.

IV Old Business

Lauderhill Mayor Thurston stated the City of Lauderhill was the cricket capital of the U.S., mentioning big cricket events were planned for the coming June.

Lauderhill Director of Public Relations & Cultural Arts, Leslie Johnson, gave a brief update on coming cricket events in Broward County and the City of Lauderhill, highlighting the following:

- Lauderhill's being the cricket capital was possible with the support of the County, and the location of the Broward Central Regional Park Stadium in Lauderhill
- The LPAC's façade was being updated, including the installation of public art
- County Commission Rogers was very instrumental in acquiring some four grants to help fund the cricket initiative; City of Lauderhill had been pushing its cricket initiative since 2007 until they finally achieved success
- In 2024, an incredible cricket event would be coming to Lauderhill, the ICC (International Cricket Council) Men's T20 Cricket World Cup; games would be played by teams representing 17 countries, including the U.S.
- The Lauderhill venue would host cricket games in June, specifically: June 11, Nepal vs. Sri Lanka; June 14, USA vs. Ireland; June 15, Canada vs. India; and June 16, Ireland vs. Pakistan; for surrounding Broward cities, this meant an influx of visitors spending time and money in their communities
- The last cricket series event between the West Indies and India brought in \$21 million
- In the next few weeks, vendor opportunities would be presented at vendor meetings at the stadium on the Wednesdays of April 10th, 16th, and 25th; vendors, such as food trucks, and businesses wishing to sell their wares should attend
- Cricket was the second most watched sport worldwide, soccer being the first
- The Cricket World Cup would bring worldwide focus on Lauderhill, and Broward County as a whole
- Lauderhill's Parks Department staff and County staff hoped to host watch parties at venues outside the stadium, for which the ICC was being asked to grant the rights to do so; if granted, the County and Lauderhill would urge other Broward cities to erect tents, and host watch parties with a cultural element.

County Commissioner Rogers stressed the World Cup Cricket event was a County event in which it was hoped all Broward cities would participate in some manner. She knew the City of Miramar planned to host a cricket watch party, and other cities sought to do similar events. Each city should ensure there was adequate parking for the additional vehicular traffic generated by the watch parties to ensure everyone's safety. She mentioned the County's idea of offering opportunities for vendors in the local business community, which she spearheaded to ensure the Broward's small businesses could benefit from such a large event; this applied to whether the vendor participated in getting the stadium ready, or they set up at the stadium on event days. She urged cities to disseminate to their local businesses vendor participation information, so they could reap the economic benefits generated. This was also an opportunity to demystify beliefs about doing business with Broward County.

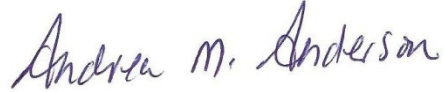
Ms. Johnson stated her office would be sending out more information on the event to other Broward municipalities.

V New Business – None

VI Next Scheduled Meeting – Monday, May 13, 2024 – City of Coconut Creek

VII Adjournment - There being no further discussion, Mayor Thurston adjourned the meeting at 1:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Andrea M. Anderson".

Andrea Anderson, MMC
Lauderhill City Clerk