

Minutes of the GREB WorkGroup
March 14, 2018

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

The GREB WorkGroup met at 10 am on March 16, 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, Charlie Judd, Walt Latham, Robin Lind, Dr. Clara Belle Wheeler and Michele White.

From the public, Wanda Judd.

While Ms. Gunter arranged for Tracy Howard to join the WorkGroup by teleconference, Mr. Lind introduced Deputy Commissioner Jessica Bowman who joined the Department of Elections six weeks earlier.

Ms. Bowman expressed the regrets of Commissioner Chris Piper who was attending a VRAV Regional Conference in Loudoun County. She said the Department's first priority is to improve communications, both internally and externally.

The second priority is to "slow the train down," she said, particularly with expectations about implementation of changes and improvements to the VERIS system. She said the Commissioner's analogy is that of a ten-story house erected on an old one-story foundation whose basement floods when it rains.

Ms. Bowman expressed an eagerness to work with the GREB WorkGroup on specific issues where there is currently no hard data, where real measurements and metrics can be gathered for analysis.

At 10:20 am Lisa Jeffers joined the meeting, having been delayed by traffic.

Co-Chair Hanley expressed appreciation for the Deputy Commissioner's interest. She explained that VEBA already has separate committees devoted to large and smaller jurisdictions to address different concerns: chief among which for large jurisdictions, she said, was eliminating requirements to report by Congressional District in non-Federal elections.

Mr. Judd gave a background on the formation of the GREB WorkGroup and its work since 2014 to gather data and support uniformity.

Discussion ensued on the increased role of the Liaisons in the Department of Elections. Deputy Commissioner Bowman said the Liaisons share information with each other in their weekly meetings so that messages don't get lost. She also asked for patience and emphasized that improvements would not happen overnight.

Co-Chair Hager described the WorkGroup as a “bi-partisan, big picture group with great support from VEBA and VRAV” working to improve elections for the people of Virginia.

Discussion continued on the ways the WorkGroup and Department of Elections could work together.

Ms. Hanley gave as an example the request of the Prince William County Electoral Board to the Department of Elections and SBE for permission to conduct a Pilot Voting Equipment Audit following the May Town Elections.

Ms. White discussed implementation and Deputy Commissioner Bowman said it had been a classic example of lack of communication in the previous administration. The request will be considered by the State Board at its meeting on March 23.

The Deputy Commissioner departed at 11:04 am.

The minutes of the January 16, 2018 meeting were adopted unanimously as corrected.

Mr. Lind gave a brief report on the distribution of the 2017 GREB Report to the Governor, Lt. Governor and leaders of the General Assembly.

Dr. Wheeler said the State Board has not had the opportunity to discuss the Report because it had not been formally presented and the SBE had not met since last year.

Discussion ensued on possible changes in future reporting timetables to ensure more timely response.

On a motion by Mr. Lind, seconded by Ms. White, the WorkGroup voted unanimously to formally present the Report to the State Board at its next meeting and ask for a response at its subsequent meeting.

Discussion ensued on Legislative Initiatives and Mr. Judd shared his observations on the failure of the WorkGroup’s primary goal to seek reform of the State Board of Elections, bills that failed to be reconciled in conference committee and subsequently died without action. In addition to the early opposition from the Governor’s staff, the effort was off-message, he said, and “divided on strategy, process and SBE Structure.”

Mr. Latham said he believed, as a matter of principle, that the Commissioner of elections should not serve at the whim of the Governor. Mr. Bell said the focus should be on looking for a professional with a five-member board that can get work done. Co-Chair Hanley said the WorkGroup needs to figure out where the stumbling block is in the Governor’s office.

Discussion turned to New Business on a motion by Mr. Lind, seconded by Mr. Bell, the WorkGroup voted unanimously to accept as Charge One, a study of compensation for Directors of Election, to be conducted by GR members.

On a motion by Mr. Lind, seconded by Ms. White, the WorkGroup voted unanimously to accept as Charge Two, a study of the funding of elections and reimbursement to localities by the state; to be conducted by EB members with the addition of Ms. White.

On a motion by Mr. Lind, seconded by Ms. Jeffers, the WorkGroup voted unanimously to accept as Charge Three, a study of the GIS capabilities of local jurisdictions relating to voter assignment and establishing precinct lines, with a recommendation to the Department of Elections and/or the General Assembly for legislative remedy; to be chaired by Mr. Howard.

Discussion was led by Mr. Ablowich on the necessity for local Voting Equipment Security Plans to have the addition of cybersecurity measures. On a motion by Mr. Hager, seconded by Ms. Andrews, the WorkGroup voted unanimously to accept as Charge Four, a study of Cyber Security measures, risk assessment and mitigation efforts in local jurisdictions.

Following discussion of these new charges, the WorkGroup agreed to re-order the charges to update the charges from the 2017 Report as the new Charge One.

There being no further business, the WorkGroup adjourned at 12:58 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,

Robin Lind
Temporary Permanent Recording Secretary