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Elections board revisiting precinct numbers

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By Kathleen Folkert

DOWNTOWN AKRON – Ward boundary changes in the county's three largest cities and swelling numbers of registered voters have led to the need for the Summit County Board of Elections (BOE) to once again alter the number of precincts.

The BOE voted unanimously during its Jan. 15 meeting to allow Director Joe Masich to move forward on increasing the number of precincts in the county, one year after the number was reduced from 475 to 298 in an effort to cut costs.

Masich said there are three reasons for the need to revisit the issue.

"One is we have to redo half the county regardless because Akron, Barberton and Cuyahoga Falls have redone their ward boundaries, and that's 45 percent of the county," he said. "And with pretty aggressive registration drives, a lot of the precincts have swelled above the allowed limit, so those need to be reduced. Also, some of the precincts with high voter turnout were unmanageable."

The limit on the number of active voters in precincts is 1,400, Masich said. The BOE hopes to see between 368 and 400 precincts that fall into the 950 to 1,050 voters range.

Masich said the county once again will use the services of International Computer Works to redraw the precincts. He said he received a proposal from the company to do the job at a cost of \$3,800.

He added that's less than the last contract because changes to congressional districts and state senate and house districts already have been made.

Akron, Barberton and Cuyahoga Falls' ward changes are in effect as of 2014, so that impacts this year's Primary and General Elections, Masich said. All of the changes are the result of the 2010 U.S. Census.

Masich said work on the change will begin as soon as possible, but it will be up to the board as to when they will take effect. There is just one issue in the Feb. 5 Special Election, for the Coventry Local Schools District, and the next election will be the May Primary Election for some races. Another Primary Election will take place in September.

"It will be implemented by the September Primary, but it could be done before that," Masich said.

A year ago, after the board was provided a budget from the county that was less than requested, the board was split on reducing the number of precincts as way to reduce costs. The tie vote meant Ohio Secretary of State Jon Husted had to weigh in, and he decided the BOE should proceed on reducing the number.

The BOE did manage to finish the year with a surplus of money, and Masich said it returned about \$460,000 to the county.

The office was the only one that did not submit a 2013 budget request to the County Executive, according to county officials, so it was given a budget of about \$4 million.

Masich said the BOE held off on a request because of the need to redraw precincts again.

"It was hard to put an accurate number on what we would need," he said.

Masich said his office is also planning to re-examine some of the county's new polling places, after some did not work out in the Nov. 6 General Election.

"We strive to be better each election," Masich said.

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