

 [Click to Print](#)

Summit elections board grapples with cutting precincts; process moving forward

Boundaries not yet drawn; Summit elections officials direct company to examine any splits in municipalities

By Stephanie Warsmith
Beacon Journal staff writer



Published: April 10, 2012 - 11:19 PM

Summit County might cut its number of voting precincts by more than a third before the Nov. 6 general election.

An initial effort to reduce precincts would pare them from 475 to 294, county Board of Elections officials said Tuesday.

Specific boundaries are still being determined. The board directed a company hired to redraw the lines to continue its work, focusing on 15 areas where municipalities were split into more than one precinct with the first map.

Ohio Secretary of State Jon Husted has given the board until June 1 to redistrict — a process being done to save Summit County money.

The board got into a heated and lengthy discussion during a Tuesday meeting about how many voters should be in each precinct.

Tim Gorbach, the board's Democratic chairman, pointed out that more than 70 percent of the newly drawn districts were outside the parameters set by the elections board of 1,250 to 1,300 voters each. He questioned whether the board risked failing to comply with Ohio Secretary of State Jon Husted's ruling that the board move forward with the redistricting. Husted mentioned the 1,250 to 1,300 range in his decision.

"I'm afraid we will be running afoul of what he said we had to do," Gorbach said, suggesting that the board halt the redistricting until Husted's office could explain his intent.

Republican board members accused the Democrats, who are opposed to redistricting between a presidential primary and general election, of being obstructionists. They suggested calling Betsy Schuster, an attorney in Husted's office, to clarify Husted's intentions when he broke the board's tie vote in favor of redistricting.

Schuster, communicating with the board via speaker phone, told the board members they aren't required to make the redrawn precincts 1,250 to 1,300 voters.

"That's a goal," she said of the range. "We're not asking you to do something that does not make sense."

Her response means the board will move forward with redrawing the precinct lines.

The board has contracted with International Computer Works (ICW) of Temple Terrace, Fla., to redraw the precincts, so far paying the company about \$4,200. The board authorized paying the company an additional amount — expected to be less than \$1,200 — to address the problems with split precincts.

Gorbach said the goal should be to do what's best "for the convenience of voters."

Joe Masich, the board's director, said the board is hoping to avoid split precincts in municipalities and in areas, such as wards, that vote for the same elected official. For example, he said, the first map had Clinton, which has about 850 voters, in a split precinct with New Franklin. He said this might be changed to leave Clinton in its own precinct.

Masich said having some split precincts is unavoidable. He said Summit County currently has 70 precincts that are split because of school district or congressional district boundaries.

The board will vote on the updated map ICW develops.

In other business, the board:

- Voted to contract with Election Systems & Software (ES&S) to provide the board's ballots for elections between August and next May, including the November general election. The company, which provided the board's equipment, was slightly higher in its bid than Dayton Legal Blank, but the board was concerned Dayton Legal Blank's bond might be insufficient. Board staff reported having a better experience with ES&S, based in Omaha, Neb., than Dayton Legal Blank on previous ballot orders.

RBM Consulting, another Nebraska company that provided the board's ballots for the March primary, did not submit a bid. The company agreed to give the board a discount after the board learned its primary ballots were printed out of state, a violation of Ohio law and of bid specifications.

The board has not determined the ballot order for the August special election. The board will pay ES&S 22 to 25 cents per ballot, depending on the size of ballots ordered.

- Tied on whether to continue having a section on poll books in which poll workers mark the type of identification a voter has provided. An evaluation of the poll books in the March primary showed that poll workers aren't filling out this section nearly 10 percent of the time. Board staff also learned, however, that Summit might be the only county doing this tally.

Republican board members favored continuing the practice, while the Democrats didn't. Husted, a Republican, will cast the deciding vote.

- Deadlocked on whether the director and deputy director should look into purchasing a copier or other device to copy the identification voters provide at the polls. The Republicans favor this step, while the Democrats don't. Husted will break the tie.

Stephanie Warsmith can be reached at 330-996-3705 or swarsmith@thebeaconjournal.com.

Find this article at:

<http://www.ohio.com/news/local/summit-elections-board-grapples-with-cutting-precincts-process-moving-forward-1.293901>

 [Click to Print](#)

Copyright © 2014 Ohio.com