



CITY OF HARRISONBURG  
**VOTER  
REGISTRAR**

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**TO THE MEMBERS OF CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF HARRISONBURG, VIRGINIA**

**SUBJECT:** Consider an ordinance amendment to move the JMU polling location

**EXTRACT FROM MINUTES OF HARRISONBURG ELECTORAL BOARD MEETING HELD ON:**  
February 14, 2022

These minutes pick up after the General Registrar review and email from JMU students was read into the record.

Secretary Burner: May I ask a question?

Mr. Finks: Of course.

Secretary Burner: They keep referring to the distance to walk to the to the X Lab in the public comment letter JMU has little buses that run all over campus all the time for the convenience of the students, Election Day is once or twice a year, couldn't JMU scheduled their buses to run to the X lab? It's just a one day a year thing.

Chair Wiens: I know one of the answers to that is that JMU doesn't run those buses...

Secretary Burner: No, I'm talking about the ones that we rode around the other day. God knows they could have numerous rounds of shuttle runs out there. This is basically once a year why could they not do some scheduling to assist their students for that purpose if they think that the X labs is too close to the outside of campus?

Mr. Finks: Regarding the main buses Chair Wiens is correct that those buses are operated by the city.

Secretary Burner: I'm talking about the smaller shuttles...

Mr. Finks: Right, I can't really speak to what capacity they have for on campus shuttles, that would have to be a question for JMU.

Chair Wiens: It is an interesting thought.

Secretary Burner: The bus we rode in would at least hold 50 students. I know they have more than one of those. So just for convenience to the students because Election Day is so very important to all of us, I don't know why they can't accommodate the students if we were to choose a location that was not more centered to middle of campus

Vice Chair Price-Stroble: They would have to run some kind of the schedule, it wouldn't be on demand. So I don't know whether they would be running into another time issue, they might have to wait there 20 minutes before the bus comes. That's just something to keep in mind.

Chair Wiens: I figure it's a good idea, but you know it's out of our hands. But we could suggest that.

Mr. Finks: I can't speak for JMU, I don't know what capacity they have for run buses. A possible response from JMU in regard to this discussion would be why not consider space that doesn't require that allocation of resources?

Chair Wiens: OK let's move on. I guess I'm kind of leaning toward the Festival center. It seems to have everything we want. I'm not sure why the distance seems that much different than the Atlantic Union Bank Center, it's only accouple steps further. But if you stand at the Festival Center during regular business days there are students running all over that building. So, it seems to be a place that is somewhat in the center of campus activity, at least for that part of the campus. Ideally, we'd have two of polling locations, but that just isn't going to happen and students are recommending the Festival. I think Godwin's location would be nice if we could just pick the X labs or the Festival center up and put it over Godwin. So my recommendation would be the Festival center, but I'm willing to listen to anybody else.

Secretary Burner: My recommendation is the X-Lab.

Vice Chair Price-Stroble: And my concern is X-Lab, because of the congestion. It seems to me that there is a lot of coming and going. Because you have turn in there from a busy stoplight across lanes of busy traffic.

Secretary Burner: At X-Lab? I mean it's a convenient parking lot, you park and go right in the door. And as far as the students getting there, like I said we're not voting every month.

Vice Chair Price-Stroble: I'm just trying to look at convenience for off campus versus on campus and when there's a big difference that's a little concerning for me. The closer together that could be in terms of the convenience level I think the better.

Chair Wiens: The problem for us is they really have two campuses. I guess we need to split the difference.

Vice Chair Price-Stroble: On the Festival center availability we just have to be sure your booking it well in advance? Will they give any priority to us because it's Election Day?

Secretary Burner: So, what she's saying is a valid point. Are they going to say they have some big thing that needs to come in and we get bumped?

Mr. Finks: So, the difficulty is that we're kind of talking to two different bodies in a way for each one of these spaces. We're talking to coordinators for each location and then there's the administration. From what has been relayed to me the administration wants to make it a priority to make sure that there's an available voting location. Each individual building manager or coordinator may think that their event is more important and may think they need that space. I can't really speak to how that dynamic will work as I haven't worked with JMU beyond the Convocation Center. So, I don't know whether the administration will be able to win out and make sure the space is available. But I do know for a fact that the date for the June primary at the Festival Center is booked for a conference that uses every room in the building.

Secretary Burner: So, we could not use the Festival Center for the June primary?

Mr. Finks: In regards to what the building manager has said. But I believe we shouldn't consider that a concrete thing.

Secretary Burner: I don't think we can go forward until we know that answer. That's an unknown.

Mr. Finks: Right, and I don't know that I will be able to get an answer before we have the primary. If City Council adopted this ordinance that says the 105-polling location is the Festival Center and unless there's an emergency, it would have to be enforced somehow.

Vice Chair Price Strobel: Because it would be law.

Mr. Finks: But I couldn't really speak to where the rubber will hit the road. But I guess if you're trying to weigh whether a conference needs to happen or whether a city ordinance must be enforced, I guess it'll be up to the deciding bodies at JMU on how to move forward with that.

Vice Chair Price-Strobel: At the Festival is there a room that we didn't go in? I've been in there before and maybe it's not big enough.

Mr. Finks: There is another room on the first floor that room doesn't lock but that doesn't mean we couldn't still use that space if we could find a closet to secure our equipment.

Secretary Burner: Seems like we have some things that have not been answered to our satisfaction at this point.

Mr. Finks: I'm not sure if I can get an answer that will satisfy his body, I can attempt it, but we are up against a deadline.

Vice Chair Price Strobel: Can we touch base on the parking at Godwin and what's legally required? Mr. Phillips was saying he could make sure that there was marked off parking right there with the buses, is that the entrance?

Mr. Finks: So, with that entrance it would be for people that are coming to vote curbside and the ADA entrance with an elevator. On the south end of the building is the main entrance. The entrance we left from on the tour.

Vice Chair Price Strobel: So, if we use the other side, where is the parking?

Mr. Finks: There is two or three parking lots around there and Mr. Phillips said that they would be able to rope off a sizable amount of parking to be used on election day. But I think the issue that we always deal with at JMU is that we've got different chiefs on campus, and I can't really speak to the administration's ability to pave the road for us.

Chair Wiens: I think what Ms. Burner said is valid. For this coming election we are not sure what to do on booking, I'm talking about the Festival, they could say OK you can have it after this. My experience with the Festival Center you can line it up year after year in advance.

Mr. Finks: According to the administrator who I talked said she cannot physically book it more than a semester in advance

Chair Wiens: But somebody did..

Mr. Finks: So, she could not book this June primary date until this past December under their current regulations.

Chair Wiens: But somebody booked June?

Mr. Finks: Right, someone had asked for it back at the beginning of year, but she couldn't go into the calendar and book it physically when they asked. So, we can put the ask in but we won't be in the

calendar as booked, she'll put it on in her notes and then she can put us in once she can actually book the calendar. But it's not like you'll be able to look on the website and see we're booked years in advance it won't be until they can go in and book the calendar.

Secretary Burner: The most important thing here is voting. It is my concern with this Festival center we can't look and say OK we always have that room. What you're saying is that's not the case. I have a problem with that, and we should all have a problem with that. I work with many organizations, so I plan things on a regular basis. If I make an arrangement and someone tells me, but you could get bumped this place goes right out the window with my consideration

Mr. Finks: And I would just say that's why I gave this space a one for availability. The event that is on the books in June supposedly happens every year there.

Chair Wiens: But you said that can't happen?

Mr. Finks: Right, you can't book an event in advance, but you can let the facilities manager know that you will have a recurring event every year. But it won't be on the books until the window comes open to do that. So, we could take precedent every year, but there could be a conflict each primary because of this long-standing event.

Vice Chair Price-Strobel: On Godwin, can you go over the reasons it didn't meet state criteria?

Mr. Finks: Because it basically only has one ADA entrance, and the issue with the 150 feet curbside voting spot. So the space meets the language of the law but maybe not the spirit. The fact that curbside parking spot would have to be created and that signage would have to be created to tell people where it is.

Secretary Burner: Because this is where the buses are parking?

Mr. Finks: Yes. It is a bit of a concern, but it does meet the state standards

Vice Chair Price-Strobel: I guess the one thing looking over all of this compared to X-Labs is that it doesn't seem to have the discrepancy on convenience and size. So really the worst thing you're talking about there are those two areas which we could meet them minimally right?

Mr. Finks: Right, we're meeting them minimally which is what we need to do. I wasn't able to gather this information, but this might be something Ms. Price-Strobel could speak to given your tenure on this body, I can't imagine that the JMU precinct over the years has had a high number of curbside voting. So, the fact that it just barely meets the state standards might be OK because there's really not that many curbside voters that we would have compared to precincts like Simms or Keister.

Chair Wiens: My question about Godwin when I was watching these sports on the local television station the other day and guess what building the volleyball was in, Godwin. Are we going to run into the same problem there? Is CA or whatever going to be scheduling stuff there?

Mr. Finks: What I've heard from the facilities manager Mr. Wise, who is our one of our equipment technicians, he said that there are other facilities on campus that should be able to accommodate most of those events and the worst-case scenario typically those events only use one side. So, we could use one side with an event on the other, which is not ideal, but doable given there is a wall rather than a curtain. So, I don't really have a lot of information outside of the information the facilities managers told me other than what information I might have been able to look up online, in regards to the availability of all of these spaces. There could be instances with all of these spaces as far as availability.

Chair Wiens: There could be.

Mr. Finks: The facilities managers may tell us now that the space will be available for us then another pandemic happens and JMU has to change their entire way of running campus. So, I don't think it's impossible to have problems with availability for any of these spaces in the future, even the ones we gave a 5 rating on availability.

Vice Chair Price-Strobel: What's the difference in how many people registered voters are not students versus students.

Mr. Finks: It's roughly around 100 people that live off campus and it can be anywhere from 500 to 3000 on campus depending on what sort of voter drives are going or what sort of election is happening.

Vice Chair Price-Stroble: So, it's a weighted majority of the voters in this precinct are on campus students, compared to the 100 or so off campus. If I was looking at it the other way around, I probably say OK there are a lot more people who are community voters than on campus students and I would lean in that direction of X-labs.

Secretary Burner: So, how we can consider any location that might have a question?

Vice Chair Price-Stroble: But do we really have that much of a question on Godwin? I hear you on Festival for example, but on Godwin I think it can be worked out as there is enough space.

Secretary Burner: On Godwin I think it's ok, I just think there are a few logistics issues.

Chair Wiens: I agree.

Mr. Finks: I'm sorry I just remembered something, going back to Mr. Wiens questions on sports in Godwin. So, there's nothing like that happening in the space in June or November as far as I understand. I believe that most of the sport events happen January through April so if we had a special election between that time there could be an issue.

Chair Wiens: Well, if we had a special election, we are going to have issues at all our locations. I don't like Godwin, but I have to agree with Ms. Burners concern with the Festival Center. So, I have to begrudgingly go with Godwin. The traffic situation down at the X-Labs was something I think an off campus personal might say it's not worth fighting all that traffic. And the students seem to want Godwin, so I guess I'll have to begrudgingly support it.

Secretary Burner: I don't love Godwin either, there are problems with the building. But given its location it seems more equitable for students and off campus voters.

Mr. Finks: I would just like to mention that none of these locations got a 25-point score in my report. So, there isn't there isn't a perfect location in front of us. They've all got some drawbacks so that's just kind of the nature of what we are looking at.

Chair. Wiens: With a campus as large as JMU you would think we could have better choices than this.

Mr. Finks So, if this body feels like there isn't an acceptable choice we could table this..

Secretary Burner: There is one board member that thinks there's is an acceptable choice.

Mr. Finks: Yes, I'm just giving options. So, if the majority decides that there isn't a viable option, we could table this and come back with an emergency meeting in the coming weeks. I could try to gather more information on our options. We could investigate the requirements to set up an emergency

location just for this election, so we have more time to think about this. We might be able to request it given the amount of time we have and the tight schedule. But from what I understand typically an emergency precinct is used for something unforeseen happening. It might be difficult to do that since this appears to be foreseen. My only issue with exploring that is we do have a hard deadline of the coming primary on June 21<sup>st</sup>. We would likely need to meet at the end of this week to make the March 8<sup>th</sup> City Council meeting.

Vice Chair Price-Stroble: If we went with an emergency precinct request, we would need to send out notices now and then you'd have to also send them out again for the new location? So, you would be adding a second mailing?

Mr. Finks: Correct.

Vice Chair Price-Stroble: Which way would most people come in who were driving into campus to get to Godwin?

Mr. Finks: To avoid the gates they would likely be driving in from Port Republic as it is closer to the off-campus voters, but they could also come in from University Bld. by way of carrier drive. Either way would get them in without a gate, but I would assume most off campus voters would come in by Port Republic as it's closer. They could also take the bus.

Vice Chair Strobel: I could be ready today to make a decision, based on this information, I'm willing to do what the majority wants to do.

Chair Wiens: I'm with you Sandra. I think we need to get this off the table today; there are just too many timelines to deal with.

Vice Chair Price-Stroble: So, if we used the emergency process we would have to come back around and do it again. And, if we choose a location today hopefully thinking that will be where we want to be we could use the emergency procedure to change it in the future.

Mr. Finks: We wouldn't have to use the emergency process in that case, the governing body can change polling locations at any time if they choose.

Vice Chair Price-Stroble: Right. I guess I was comparing it to emergency procedure because if you use emergency route now it still be changing later, but if we find it doesn't work later it's not the end if we find that it's not working 100%.

Mr. Finks: And I also want to mention it's not clear whether we would ever be able to use the Convocation Center as a polling location again with it's new configuration.

Chair Wiens: And the students don't like it, so I think we need to make the location as convenient for students as possible.

Secretary Burner: I wasn't on the board at that time, but how possibilities were there considered when this precinct was created Ms. Price-Strobel? Were there multiple locations, or that this was just a flat location or using the convo?

Vice Chair Price-Stroble: Well of course at that time the decision was whether to have a precinct on campus, so the location of the polling place wasn't discussed as much. There were other locations but I'm not sure what they were. Ultimately, it's what they felt was workable because of parking and coming in and out.

Mr. Finks: I looked back at the meeting minutes, and it just said other locations were considered.

Chair Wiens: Well, we probably aren't going to agree..

Vice Chair Price-Stroble: Are you ready for a motion?

Chair Wiens: I'm ready for two motions.

Vice Chair Price-Stroble: Well, I'll start by saying considering all the information we have what would appear to be most equitable situation would be Godwin Hall. So, I'll make the motion that we recommend Godwin Hall.

Chair Wiens: Do you have a motion Ms. Burner?

Secretary Burner: I make a motion for X-Lab.

Mr. Wiens: So, there's not much point having more discussion on it as we have talked this to death to and the way I'll do this is I will name each one and we will vote on each one and that will be our decision.

Chair Wiens: Everyone in favor of using X-Labs say Aye.

Secretary Burner: Aye

Chair Wiens: Everyone in favor of using Godwin Hall say Aye.

Vice Chair Price-Stroble: Aye

Chair Wiens: Aye

Chair Wiens: So we will recommend Godwin Hall