

Summit County contracts with Florida company to redraw precinct lines

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Summit County voters may again find themselves voting at a new location this September.

The Summit County Board of Elections voted Tuesday to contract with a Florida company to redraw precinct boundaries — the same firm that did the work for the board last year.

This time, the board agreed to pay International Computer Works of Temple Terrace, Fla., \$3,000, plus travel expenses, which are estimated at \$700. (An employee with the company will travel to Akron to visit the board.) The board previously paid the company about \$4,700.

Director Joe Masich said the company's task is expected to be done in about three days.

"That doesn't mean all the work will be done," Masich said.

Masich is hoping the board can have the precincts redrawn, new polling locations chosen and voters notified of the changes in time for the September primary. He said he didn't think it would be possible to have the work done for the May election.

The board voted at its last meeting to boost the number of precincts to between 368 and 400 from the current 298. The county had 475 precincts before a reduction to save money between the primary and general elections last year.

The new, larger districts would mean 950 to 1,050 voters per precinct. The county currently has an average of 1,200 per precinct.

The board cut precincts last year as one of several money-saving steps when the board was in a battle with the county over how much it needed to make it through the year. The board received numerous complaints in the November election about people being confused about where they needed to vote, wait times as long as 2½ hours and poll workers who were overwhelmed.

Masich said the board was going to need to make changes anyway, because three of the largest communities in the county — Akron, Barberton and Cuyahoga Falls — have redone or are in the process of redoing their ward boundaries in response to the U.S. Census. The board attempts to keep wards and people who vote for particular local elected officials in the same precincts.

The board plans to review all of the polling locations used in the November election to decide which ones should be kept.

"I wasn't happy with some of the physical locations," Masich said.

In other business, the board:

- Held hearings on whether two voters violated voting laws in the November election. The board referred both cases to the Summit County prosecutor, as is required. Both also will be sent to Secretary of State Jon Husted.

In the first hearing, Anthony Clark of Akron told the board his wife filled out his voter registration card in September and signed his name. He said his wife handles all of their paperwork and bills, and he didn't realize it would be an issue.

The board detected the problem when Clark attempted to vote absentee in October, and his signature didn't match what was on file.

"I asked her to fill it out," Clark told the board. "Please put it on me ... I'm the bad boy in this family."

In the second hearing, Danny Malek of Stow voted at a polling place in Cuyahoga Falls, rather than in Stow, where he had moved.

He apparently incorrectly filled out an online form to update his address on Husted's website.

When he called the board on Election Day in November, he said an employee told him to vote at the Falls polling place. A board employee couldn't recall their conversation well, but said she would have told him to vote a provisional ballot at his new polling place in Stow.

The hearing became heated when Ray Weber, a Republican board member, questioned Malek about the addresses he provided in different parts of the online form.

"I don't know what you're getting at," Malek said, his voice raised. "If you call this fraud, it's not fraud. I did my duty!"

"I did not say anything about fraud," Weber responded.

"I'm not a criminal," Malek said.

- Voted to hold hearings on nine other voters who allegedly voted at the wrong polling place or precinct, and one voter who voted both an absentee and a provisional ballot, with both ballots counted. The hearings will be split between Feb. 26 and March 5.

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