

**BERRIEN COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS**  
**Special Meeting Minutes**  
**May 19, 2022**

**CHAIRMAN TO CALL THE MEETING TO ORDER:**

Chairperson R. McKinley Elliott called the Special Meeting to order at 8:36 A.M. in the Board of Commissioners' (BOC) room at the Berrien County Administration Center, 701 Main Street, St. Joseph, Michigan.

**ROLL CALL:**

The Chair instructed the Clerk to take a roll call with the following results:

11 PRESENT: Rayonte Bell, Jim Curran, Teri Sue Freehling, Robert Harrison, Jon Hinkelman, Michael Majerek, Ezra Scott, David Vollrath, Julie Wuerfel, Mamie Yarbrough and R. McKinley Elliott.

0 ABSENT.

**DISTRICT #3 COMMISSIONER INTERVIEWS:**

Chairman Elliott went over the process for the interviews. The BOC has thirty days from the date that former Commissioner Meeks resigned to fill the vacancy for District #3 Commissioner. Chairperson Elliott asked each applicant the following questions:

1. Give a personal statement about yourself.
1. Why do you want to serve on the Berrien County Board of Commissioners?
2. What skills or talents could you bring to the position of County Commissioner if you were selected?
3. Would you like to make a final statement?
4. Final/Closing statement, if they wish.

The following candidates were interviewed:

- Jerry Sirk
- Chokwe' Pitchford
- James Martin
- Joseph Taylor

**Discussion and Vote:**

Chairperson Elliott opened the floor for Commissioners' comments. The BOC spoke and discussed the following:

- Thanked the four applicants.
- Four applicants live in the district that will exist in 2023 with the exception of Jerry Sirk.
- Two of the applicants have already filed to be a candidate for District #3: Chokwe' Pitchford and Joseph Taylor.
- James Martin can file as a candidate without political party affiliation by 4:00 P.M. on July 21, 2022. James Martin stated he is looking at filling this seat as an interim position and probably will not file as a candidate without political party affiliation.
- All four candidates are residents of the current District #3, voting registration, background checks, and the treasurer review have all been completed.
- Past history of filling a vacancy on the Board.
- Concerns that it may be an unfair advantage on the two candidates and possibly show favoritism.
- Politics should not be injected on the decision of the candidate to fill the vacancy.
- Discussion on the costs and issues on holding a special election to fill the vacancy.
- District #3 deserves to have a voice on the Board.

Chairperson Elliott stated that ballot forms for Round 1 were distributed with all four candidates. The Commissioners will vote for up to two candidates. The top two candidates will go to Round 2 for voting.

Corporate Counsel Thaddeus Hackworth read the total votes for each candidate:

- James Martin: 7
- Chokwe Pitchford: 3

- Jerry Sirk: 4
- Joseph Taylor: 2

Chairperson Elliott stated that ballot forms for Round 2 were distributed with Commissioners voting for one candidate, either James Martin or Jerry Sirk.

Corporate Counsel Thaddeus Hackworth read the total votes for the two candidates:

- James Martin: 6
- Jerry Sirk: 5

**Motion:**

Commissioner Curran moved and seconded by Commissioner Scott, to appoint James Martin to fill the vacancy of District #3 Commissioner, his term expires on December 31, 2022. Motion carried, no nays.

**District #3 Commissioner Oath:**

County Clerk Sharon Tyler administrated the Oath of Office to James Martin.

Chairperson Elliott appointed Commissioner Martin to the Administration Committee.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:48 A.M.

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R. McKinley Elliott, Chairperson

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Sharon J. Tyler, County Clerk

***Minutes are to be approved at the next Committee of the Whole meeting.***