



ORANGE COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS

208 S. Cameron Street
Post Office Box 220
Hillsborough, North Carolina 27278

Kathy Knight, Chair
Jamie Cox, Vice Chair
Elvira Mebane, Secretary
Bob Randall, Member
Rachel B. Raper, Director

October 4, 2018

VIA ELECTRONIC MAIL

Orange County Board of County Commissioners
Town of Hillsborough Town Commissioners

RE: HOG DAY

Dear Honorable Members of the Board of County Commissioner and Hillsborough Town Commission

The Orange County Board of Elections (OCBOE) has recently been made aware that the Hog Day festival which was cancelled due to Hurricane Florence has been proposed to be rescheduled for Friday and Saturday, November 2 & 3, 2018 in and around River Park and downtown Hillsborough.

We are delighted that this long-standing celebration of food and community will return to Hillsborough and we personally welcome the opportunity to enjoy local crafts and outstanding BBQ! However, we are deeply concerned that the organizers have chosen to reschedule this festival for a time that conflicts with the last two days of One Stop Early Voting.

As you know, the Board of Elections office on Cameron Street must serve as an Early Voting site, as mandated by state statute. The site has been designated as such in the One Stop Early Voting Plan adopted by the State Board of Elections for Orange County, and the One Stop Early Voting Period begins in a matter of days. We are therefore unable to relocate this voting site to accommodate the festival. Even if relocating the site were within the power of the OCBOE at this time, we would not wish to do so, as this site has been an Early Voting site for every election in recent history and relocating it would cause confusion for voters as well as create administrative difficulties for our staff and poll workers.

We have observed that in the past that the Hog Day festival brings a very large number of people into the downtown area, requires blocking streets and re-routing traffic, generates high volumes of vehicular traffic, and makes parking scarce. Given that voting must take place at the OCBOE office on these days, we believe that the festival will cause confusion for voters, increase the amount of time required for voters to get into and out of the BOE office, and has the potential to dissuade some from casting their ballot. In addition, the congestion around the festival will make it that much more difficult for our election crews from other sites around the county to return ballots and equipment to the BOE office after the One Stop period closes and they shut down their satellite sites Saturday afternoon.

You may also be aware that the last two days of One Stop Early Voting are the very heaviest in terms of turn-out. Often on the last Saturday in particular we observe a huge spike in the number of voters per hour, often four or five times above the average voter turnout for the rest of the period. This has been true for all election cycles, whether presidential, municipal, primary, second primary or midterm, and whether we have all sites open for the full One Stop period or staggered hours over the course of the early voting schedule. Holding a festival that will generate heavy traffic, block streets and cause confusion for voters during our very busiest days merely exacerbates the problem and increases the chances that voters will choose not to wade through the chaos to cast their ballot. Our task is to ensure that all voters of Orange County are able to exercise their franchise to vote, and so this would be an unacceptable result.

We have asked the organizers to consider shifting the event to Saturday afternoon/Sunday to avoid the conflict. We understand there are objections to that proposal, and would suggest that if that is not a possibility, they consider another weekend. Since they are rescheduling the event from when it was previously planned, we believe they have enough flexibility to choose dates that will not interfere with the busiest days of Early Voting. In the alternative, perhaps they could consider holding the event at another facility, such as Blackwood Farm Park, which recently hosted a very successful regional event and would be convenient for citizens of both Northern and Southern Orange.

As much as we want to see the Hog Day festival succeed, our first priority is to the voters of this county, and we must therefore respectfully request that your respective Boards decline to issue permits or grant approvals for this event if the organizers will not agree to shift the time, dates, or location to avoid the conflict with the One Stop Early Voting period.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you further.

Sincerely,

ORANGE COUNTY BOARD OF ELECTIONS

Katherine Knight, Board Chair

Jamie Cox, Board Vice Chair

Elvira Mebane, Board Secretary

Bob Randall, Board Member

cc: Orange County Manager
Hillsborough Town Manager