



Board of Elections & Registrations

Irwin County Georgia

Waymond Harris, Chairman

Ethan Compton, Election Supervisor

Patricia Thurman, Democratic Party Representative / Vice-Chair

Wyatt Thompson, Republican Party Representative

Board Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, January 6th, 2026 @ 4pm

Call to Order: *Invocation and Pledge led by Chairman Harris, Vice-Chair Thurman not present.*

Approval of Agenda: *At this time, a request was made for public copies of the agenda to be made and provided, which were done. Representative Thompson motions to approve the agenda, Chairman Harris seconds, approved 2-0.*

Approval of Minutes: *Representative Thompson motions to approve the minutes from the December meeting as presented, Chairman Harris seconds, approved 2-0.*

Old Business:

1. Update on Candidate Disqualification and March Election Cancellation
 - a. Mr. Lake did not appeal our vote to disqualify him to Superior Court within the required 10-day timeframe, and as such, the decision to disqualify him is final according to O.C.G.A. § 21-2-6.
 - b. With the decision being finalized and Vince Thompson being the sole remaining candidate, a Notice of Election Cancellation has been published in The Ocilla Star, posted at our office and the courthouse as well as on the county website, and sent to the Secretary of State for his victory to be recognized and that he may be sworn in, in accordance with O.C.G.A. § 21-2-291.
 - c. The final remaining step for our office to fulfill O.C.G.A. § 21-2-291 is to certify the results of the canceled election, whereas by law Vince Thompson is having been counted as voting for himself, and due to being unopposed, wins by default as such.
 - i. The Secretary of State's Office has reviewed the circumstances of this vacancy and has instructed us that a wait until after the originally scheduled March 17th, 2026 election date is unnecessary and to proceed with certification, which is the process for any cancelled election.

New Business:

1. Findings of Latest Audit of Voter Rolls / Vote to Challenge Flagged Voters

- a. Various new enhanced datasets have been recently given access to by Georgia Elections Officials, such as the Department of Homeland Security's SAVE database and far more data from USPS.
 - i. New search tools have been developed to help with cross-referencing this data against our voter rolls to better flag voters who:
 1. Are potential non-citizens
 2. Have residential addresses at locations that are flagged as business addresses by USPS
 3. Have residential addresses that are flagged as vacant by USPS
 - ii. Potential non-citizens are almost always caught and flagged during entry and/or review of applications and remain in a Pending status until such time as they present proof of citizenship as is required by Georgia law. We have 2 such individuals at this time pending who were caught at the application stage by the state voter registration system and were notified by the Secretary of State's Office ~~earlier this year~~ *in February 2025* that they will become active voters once they present proof of citizenship, with none needing review tonight.
 - iii. Individuals living in business addresses have usually been caught and flagged during entry and/or review of applications, with address locks preventing registration having been put into place in 2023 for all addresses within Irwin County zoned as industrial with no residency permitted, and a warning flag to more closely inspect attempts to register at addresses zoned as industrial with limited residency permitted.
 1. That said, apparently if a DDS submitted application has enough completed data and the applicant's identity ~~is~~ *and citizenship are* fully verified by DDS, on occasion the Voter Registration System will automatically approve those new applications despite them listing banned addresses with no residency allowed as their residential addresses. We have 4 such cases for review as of the latest regular audit of voter records.
 2. It is Supervisor Compton's opinion that these registrations were not malicious in nature, but simply the desire of entrepreneurs to list their business address on their licenses but moving too quickly on their applications and neglecting to check the box to opt out of forwarding their information to use to update their voter registrations.
 - a. It is not a crime to have a business address on your license, but it is one to list it as your residential address on your voter registration, because individuals can do that to, for example, allow people who live outside of city limits be able to vote in a municipal election. It can potentially give persons access to contests on the ballot they are not legally permitted to vote on and conversely, deprives them of being able to vote on the contests for those who represent them.
 - iv. Individuals who move away tend to be flagged during voter roll maintenance performed

on odd numbered years on a statewide level, but this enhanced access to USPS data has allowed counties the ability to use that data on more regular audits as well. It is worth noting that a far greater level of scrutiny has been given during the review of these cases to confirm if they were deserving of being flagged for review by this board, and only cases of properties that are uninhabitable and appear clearly abandoned or properties where there is no longer a structure present to reside in are being considered under this category tonight, of which there are 4 individuals across 2 addresses being reviewed.

- v. Example letters and evidence collected in each case are presented and we can vote on them individually or as a batch to send those voters these letters and place challenges on them to afford them due process prior to removal from the voter rolls, as is our sworn duty to perform regular list maintenance to the best of our ability.
 1. It is worth re-stating that in every instance that this board has challenged a voter since 2020, which has only been 3 cases, the challenge letter has prompted the voters to finally contact our office where they had not in prior instances of us trying to contact them, and our staff has been able to explain the situation to them and assist them in re-registering to vote in the correct location either prior to the board's vote or just after our vote to remove them, with the longest a voter has been off the voter rolls being just under 24 hours after we remove them. This is not about kicking people off the lists or depriving them of their rights, but using every tool at our disposal to keep those rights properly maintained and to prevent outdated or inaccurate data from disenfranchising any of our voters.

At this time, Chairman Harris noted that as he is retired, he regularly spends time in our office overseeing our duties and has been intricately informed of all minute details surrounding these presented cases already, whereas the other board members do have jobs that occupy most of their time and understandably require additional time during meetings to be filled in on matters before deciding on them.

Supervisor Compton noted to ignore the headers of the example challenge letters presented to the board, which reflect outdated board membership- they will be corrected before being issued to the voters if challenges are issued. He added that while 8 challenges at once is far more than usual, over 86% of the voters tagged by the new tools available for voter roll review were dismissed upon manual review due to the stringent level of proof needed to warrant even consideration of a challenge being brought by this board. Common false flags included individuals born on February 29th being wrongfully flagged as being younger than their date of registration, and individuals and their families who are pastors living in parsonages on site of their churches or groundkeepers of business addresses and their families who also live on site, in addition to individuals flagged for living in business addresses which are zoned to allow limited residence. All such flags were researched on an individual basis and dismissed with options to never flag that individual for that match reason at that address again selected.

Representative Thompson, after careful review of presented photographs of

properties listed as potential challenged voter residential addresses as well as voter registration data, motioned to approve all 8 voter challenges as a batch. Chairman Harris seconded the challenges, approved 2-0.

2. Summary of January Trainings, Meetings and Presentations by Staff

- a. On January 7th, Supervisor Compton will be traveling to Waycross to present and provide questions and answers for the newly adopted statewide election equipment recap forms designed by our office in cooperation with Verified Voting, the Secretary of State's Office, Gordon County, Whitfield County and Jackson County and piloted in Athens-Clarke and Cherokee Counties throughout their December and early January special elections.
 - i. *Due to Assistant Supervisor Romans currently recovering from heart surgery, assistant poll manager Lisa Harper will open and close our office to assist in the legally required minimum duties of our office of helping people register to vote as well as taking notes if needed for office staff to immediately respond to on return.*
- b. On January 14th, Supervisor Compton will be traveling to Jackson to assist in planning the annual GAVREO training conference as a member of its executive committee and to begin preparing the course he has been asked to give, instructing all 159 counties on proper use and completion of precinct paperwork to maintain ballot chain of custody and equipment security.
 - i. The conference will be in late March in Athens, and more details will be decided on at the January 14th meeting.

3. Discussion of Potential Board of Elections Charter Changes / Vote to Begin Feedback Period Prior to Adoption in February

- a. Numerous questions about the structure of our board and the state of our charter have been raised by a County Commissioner and the former County Attorney over the last three weeks, and they have a desire to change our charter in tandem with those of other boards and authorities within the county at the same time as the county charter is modernized.
 - i. The structure communicated to me as currently being considered by those parties is to expand the board to five members, solely appointed by the county commission, as the involvement of county political parties in the nomination process could introduce partisan biases in the functions of our office which are strictly intended to be nonpartisan.
 - ii. Past discussions on the matter throughout 2025 by this board have concluded that a majority of this board desires for a size of 3 members to be maintained to reduce complexity and the risk of discourse amongst our board members devolving into discord.
 1. As such, I have prepared a potential amended charter keeping the membership size of 3 members and the sole appointing body being changed to that of the county commission as a negotiated change to propose to them, as any changes passed by our board serve a greater chance of being introduced to and passed by the general assembly than a change proposed solely by the commissioners against our board's will- as our local delegation to the general assembly greatly prefer to avoid interfering in local matters if those matters are disputed locally.

Representative Thompson motions to begin formal consideration of presented

charter changes, Chairman Harris seconds, approved 2-0.

4. Certification of Canceled March Election.

- a. In compliance with O.C.G.A. § 21-2-291 and 21-2-493, we still must certify a canceled election before its results can be certified by the Secretary of State's Office or challenged in court, and Senior Election Project Coordinator Sam Smallwood with the Secretary of State's Office *by phone at 12:30pm on January 5th*, notified our office that our board does not need to delay certification of this canceled election until after the scheduled March 17th election date and may do so at any time between the publishing of the Notice of Election Cancellation and the March 23rd, 2026 statutory deadline for certification for any March 17th, 2026 special elections.
- b. As a reminder, election certification while being a vote is a ministerial task, and that a vote not to certify only serves to delay the enactment of its results and also delays the ability for a challenge to be filed, and such a vote to certify this election cannot be delayed past March 23rd, 2026.
- c. Given the dismissal of the existing county attorney at the county commission meeting last night and that new legal counsel will be in a transitional period where they might not be fully informed nor prepared to handle an election challenge at this time, it is up to the judgement of this board as to whether or not to vote to not certify the election at this time and instead delay the vote to a future meeting of this board, when it feels that legal counsel is fully informed and prepared for this board's certification.
 - i. Given that this is a ministerial duty of this board, and failing to certify before the statutory deadline will expose him to potential criminal penalties, also with the full knowledge that either decision could potentially permit or delay his father's swearing into office or expose his father to a nullification of his victory in a challenge, Member Thompson will be allowed to cast his vote despite the conflict-of-interest present with his father being declared the winning candidate if we do certify.
 - ii. Currently, a decision to certify at this time is completely up to the discretion of the board as to when it feels ready to end this phase of the legal process surrounding this election and move forward to the phase of state-level certification and/or elections challenges and be one step closer to putting this entire matter behind us so that we can properly prepare for the rest of the 2026 election cycle.
 - iii. The results must be read aloud prior to the decision and are as follows:
 1. Vince Thompson- 1 vote.
 - a. According to O.C.G.A. § 21-2-291, the unopposed candidate in a canceled election is counted as having voted for themselves.

Representative Thompson motions to certify, Chairman Harris seconds, certified 2-0. Winner's Certificate and Certifying Forms signed and sealed.

Public Comment:

Gary Paulk asks if the whole board acts as a singular entity as superintendent, which Supervisor Compton states is correct, and that he is not a member of the board and not the election superintendent, merely their employee acting under their authority in day-to-day matters. He asks of the timeframe of events moving forward, where as explained by Supervisor Compton, this certification will be sent to the Secretary of State's office for final certification, and only after the Secretary of State's office certifies the election, the Probate Court Judge will be

notified and will arrange to swear in the winning candidate, at such time they take office. Gary Paulk then asked if our board is aware of O.C.G.A. § 21-2-522, which is the code section outlining grounds for contesting elections, which Supervisor Compton states they are aware, and adds that the procedure for filing election challenges to his current memory is § 21-2-524, and that any potential challenger would need to file said challenge within 5 days to the Clerk of Superior Court, which is currently Nancy Ross. Gary Paulk then inquires about the timeframe surrounding the announcement and length of the qualifying period for this special election. Supervisor Compton stated his traditional adherence to the legal maximum prior notice for and length of qualifying periods as the law and logistics allowed, but that with the unique timeframes at play in this situation considering the timing of Carl Hutchinson's resignation, the weeklong delay between his public announcement of resignation and when he finally sent his letter of resignation to the Governor, the delay in Governor Kemp's acceptance of his resignation for multiple weeks, the 29 day delay due to legal counsel ensuring the proper mix of which local and state acts overrode which when conflicting and the holidays. Supervisor Compton continued in stating that, despite receiving the Ocilla Star consistently on Wednesdays for the entirety of his subscription, the paper is technically considered on a Tuesday circulation, which means that 24 hours prior notice was given of the qualifying period, in excess of state law for announcing special election qualifying periods, and that if he had known of that timing when placing the call and announcing the qualifying period, Supervisor Compton would have heavily considered holding an additional day of qualifying in lieu of the 24 hours advanced notice.

Supervisor Compton also stated his legal requirement to post said notices in the county legal organ, and would greatly prefer using that funding to instead invest in a cellular push notification system for all individuals who are interested in receiving county elections notices to be able to do so, but that prior attempts to coordinate with other county departments in investing in such a system has failed in past years due to cost.

Gary Paulk then inquired about the potential for individuals seeking to run as a write in candidate, which Supervisor Compton stated at that moment he did not have the exact timeframe memorized, but that a write in candidate did need to come to the elections office to qualify as well, within either a five or seven day period in order for any votes cast for them to be counted.

Chairman Harris adds that he fully supports the work and legality of the actions performed by our office.

Supervisor Compton states that our office and board have conducted all processes to the best of our ability and understanding of all applicable local, state and federal laws, and that we welcome any differences in interpretation to be settled in court.

William Hudson stated his appreciation for our board's dedication to the truth.

Becky Cook asks Gary Paulk if this election is successfully challenged so as to reopen qualifying, would he be intending to run as a candidate, to which Gary Paulk replied that the answer to that question is his business alone and that while the elections office has been fully honest at all times he has questioned their actions, that he believes that there "ain't a right way to do a wrong thing."

Gary Paulk then asked Supervisor Compton if the 10-page report he filed with the County Commission during their January 5th meeting would be placed in the minutes of this meeting tonight, to which Supervisor Compton replied that he drafted that personal recounting of his actions and observations surrounding all factors of this election and qualifying to best provide transparency to Commissioner Chris Paulk's request at that meeting for minutes of the election board's December meeting, which were only approved tonight, and Supervisor Compton was not going to undermine the election board's authority and independence by supplying unapproved minutes to the commission. Since that record was introduced during the County Commission meeting and copies provided to all commissioners, county legal counsel and the county clerk at that time, it will be in the County Commission meeting minutes. Supervisor Compton adds as it was not introduced at this meeting nor presented to the elections board at this meeting, it will not be in this meeting's minutes.

Chris Mann asked if legal counsel was advised during the actions performed in handling this election, to which Supervisor Compton replied at every step taken. Supervisor Compton stated that Mr. Lake's late-filed qualifying documents were accepted on legal counsel insistence that, even if challenged, Mr. Lake deserves due process rights at all levels allowable by law.

Gary Paulk interjected and alleged that acceptance of Mr. Lake's qualifying documents was tacit authorization and recognition that they were correct, complete and timely filed, which Supervisor Compton disagrees and states that qualifying officers do not have the authority to reject late-filed, incorrect or incomplete documents if a person insists on attempting to submit them. Supervisor Compton continues that legal counsel's research, cited case law and opinion, including that to heavily consider any arguments presented by Mr. Lake if he were to present them, were heavily relied upon in the board's decision to disqualify Mr. Lake.

Vince Thompson stated that was publicly declaring his intent to run for office of County Commission Chair since shortly after Carl Hutchinson's announced resignation. He added that he filed his candidacy at the opening of the qualifying period and thanked the elections board for their professionalism and transparency. He continued that the qualifying period was held for two and a half days and that there was plenty of opportunity to run. He stated his love for this county and how passionate he is about it. Vince Thompson apologized for the fallout and public and professional attacks his candidacy has placed on Supervisor Compton and that if there is any delay in his taking office, so be it. Vince Thompson then stated that while the county is required to budget for and write him a paycheck for commission chair salary if he takes office, that he commits to not cashing any of them.

Hal Roach stated that he had considered running shortly after Carl Hutchinson's resignation and came to the elections office to inquire about how to qualify. He then claimed that Supervisor Compton offered examples of the forms required in order to run, his best guess at the timeframe for the qualifying period at that moment, where to look for official notices to keep up to date and even a breakdown of how the qualifying fee is the amount that it is. Hal Roach then added that he feels that this outcry is an attempt to challenge the individual who did everything right in order to support someone who didn't.

Board Comment:

Chairman Harris stated that to the best of our knowledge, this is the first candidate challenge in our board's history. He then commended Supervisor Compton's performance and stated that the only reason we haven't lost Supervisor Compton to a larger county that could pay him more is his desire to raise his family in this area and community. Chairman Harris then reiterated his time serving on the Ocilla City Council at a time when it was an at large seat, representing the entire city and all the people within it.

Supervisor Compton reiterated that the forms to qualify for office are available at any time and that the qualifying period is only the timeframe where payment and submission of those documents takes place. Any potential candidate, even years in advance, can obtain the proper forms and relevant qualifying information to the best of our office's knowledge and ability at any time.

Representative Thompson stated that during this meeting, he has done his best to remain quiet as much as possible due to the inherent biases at play in this situation and his desire to respect his position and the board as a whole.

Executive Session: N/A

Meeting Adjourned:

Next Meeting: Tuesday, February 10th, 2026 @ 4pm

Representative Thompon motions to adjourn, Chairman Harris seconds, meeting adjourned 2-0 at 5:10pm.

CONSOLIDATED MUNICIPAL/COUNTY CERTIFICATION OF RETURNS FOR:

- SPECIAL ELECTION
- GENERAL ELECTION
- RUNOFF ELECTION

3-17-26

Date

Irwin

Municipality/County

Instructions: Prepare and print (4) copies of the Election Summary (county consolidated vote totals report that is generated by GEMS). Attach copies of this consolidated certification report as follows:

1. White sheet is attached to Election Summary and returned to Secretary of State.
2. Yellow sheet is attached to Election Summary and maintained by Superintendent.
3. Pink sheet is attached to Election Summary and sent to Clerk of Superior Court.
4. Goldenrod Copy is attached to Election Summary and immediately posted at the City Hall (city) or Courthouse (county)

ELECTION SUMMARY MUST BE ATTACHED TO THIS FORM

WRITE-IN VOTES: Record total number of votes received by all qualified write-in candidates. Votes recorded here are the write-in totals from Direct Record Electronic Machines and Optical Scan Absentee/Provisional Ballots.

WRITE-IN CANDIDATES
(Insert Titles of Offices and Names of Candidates)

Insert Vote Totals On Blanks Below:

| | | |
|---|----------|-------|
| <u>Vince Thompson - County Commission</u> | <u>1</u> | Votes |
| <u>Chair</u> | | Votes |
| | | Votes |
| | | Votes |
| | | Votes |
| | | Votes |
| | | Votes |

We, the undersigned Superintendent of Elections and his/her Assistants, do jointly and severally certify that the attached Election Summary is a true and correct count of the votes cast in this City/County, and that the above listed Write-In Votes constitute all votes cast for qualified Write-In Candidates on Direct Record Electronic Machines and Optical Scan Absentee/Provisional Ballots. In TESTIMONY WHEREOF, We have hereunto set our hands and seals this 6th day of January, 2026. SIGNED IN QUADRUPLICATE.

[Signature] Assistant
[Signature] Assistant
[Signature] Assistant
[Signature] Assistant
[Signature] Assistant

[Signature]
 Superintendent Of Elections

