



# *Board of Elections & Registrations*



## *Irwin County Georgia*

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*Waymond Harris, Chairman*

*Ethan Compton, Election Supervisor*

*Patricia Thurman, Democratic Party Representative / Vice-Chair*

*Wyatt Thompson, Republican Party Representative*

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### **Board Meeting Outline**

Tuesday, March 11<sup>th</sup>, 2025 @ 4pm

Call to Order: *Invocation and Pledge led by Chairman Harris*

Approval of Minutes: *Motion to approve minutes as presented by Vice-Chair Thurman, seconded by Rep. Thompson, February minutes approved 3-0.*

Old Business: *N/A*

New Business:

1. Charter Change Proposal

a. Rep. Thompson requested that this board consider changes to the Irwin County Board of Elections and Registrations enabling legislation, otherwise known as its charter.

b. The process required to make any changes is as follows:

i. Changes need to be discussed and approved by a majority of this board.

1. Members of the Irwin County Commission have communicated to us that they will not support any changes to this board's enabling legislation unless approved of by a majority of this board as improvements that need to be enacted in the next few years.

ii. Those changes would then need to be discussed by the board Chair to the county commission to communicate the reasoning behind the proposed changes.

iii. The Irwin County Commission would need to approve a resolution approving the proposed changes.

iv. The changes would need to be conveyed to the Irwin County local delegation to the General Assembly, which are currently Rep. Angie O'Steen and Sen. Carden Summers.

v. The changes would be drafted into state legislation and introduced to the General Assembly next year.

vi. After passage by both chambers of the General Assembly and being signed into law by Gov. Brian Kemp, the bill with the changes would become law either July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026 or January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2027, as decided during the discussion phase of this process.

c. The currently proposed changes are as follows:

i. Proposed by Rep. Thompson is an edit to add two more members to this board, with both members being appointed by the Irwin County Commission in the same manner as the Chair currently is appointed.

1. That change is reflected in the addition of Section 3, Subsection C, changing the existing Subsection C to D, and changing the existing Subsection D to E.

2. In salaries alone, the addition of two board members would cost us an additional \$1,524 annually, in addition to any additional costs related to onboarding the new members.

3. Conversely, adding two members to this board would make needing to postpone meetings due to lacking quorum far more unlikely, as it would require three of the five members to be present to conduct meetings, instead of two of the three as of present.

a. In known history of this board since 2015, failure to establish quorum has only happened in January 2023 due to illness, having been an exceedingly rare occurrence.

b. For tasks such as Absentee Ballot Processing, Ballot Adjudication, Ballot Duplication and Audit Review Panels, only three board members would need to be present: the representatives from each county party as well as one of the two Commission appointed members or the Commission appointed Chair. That balance would maintain the legally required composition of those boards of one member each serving as a representative of their respective parties and one member serving in an independent capacity.

4. This change would more closely standardize us with the majority of counties within Georgia, who have 5 board members on average with the majority of their boards being appointed by either the county commission or by a grand jury.

5. Members of the Irwin County Commission have communicated to us that if these changes were to be implemented, the commission would prioritize appointing members recommended by the entire board and deprioritize the suggested nominees of individual people or groups aside from this board.

*Rep. Thompson requested to know which specific County Commission members have expressed this. Supervisor Compton responded that Chairman Hutchinson directly communicated this to both himself and Chairman Harris, Commissioner Tyson directly communicated this to Chairman Harris, and that Chairman Hutchinson had communicated that Commissioners Paulk and McIntyre are aware of the proposed changes and were in accord with Chairman Hutchinson's opinions. Supervisor Compton emphasized that there was no information available to know whether or not Commissioner Hickey knows of these proposed changes or his opinions on the issue.*

- ii. Supervisor Compton suggested that it would be proper practice to remove the original text outlining the original terms of the establishing board members within Section 3 Subsection D (proposed to become the new Subsection E), since that text was only in effect from January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014 until January 2015.
- iii. Proposed by Supervisor Compton is a change to the language of Section 3, Subsection D (proposed to become the new Subsection E) to change the word "biennium" to "term" when describing the lengths of the terms of board members being tied to the terms of General Assembly members, since the current two year terms for members of the General Assembly, while established in the Georgia Constitution, have frequently been proposed to be changed by ballot referendum.

- 1. If any of these efforts were ever to pass, our founding legislation would become self-conflicting since this one sentence simultaneously says both that board member terms would match those of the General Assembly but also be set to a biennium basis.

- a. The earliest this change would go into effect would be in 2028, so this change is not urgent to make, and one that could be considered at such time as the referendum passed but before it went into effect.

- 2. By changing one word, if General Assembly member terms were ever changed, the term lengths of our board members would change alongside those changes, keeping our charter intact.

- 3. An alternative change would be replacing the original text "Terms shall coincide with each regular biennium of the General Assembly" with the alternative "Terms shall be from January 1<sup>st</sup> of each odd-numbered year until December 31<sup>st</sup> of each even-numbered year."

- a. This change would preserve the current two-year terms while decoupling this board term lengths from those of the General Assembly in case their terms were ever to change.

*Rep. Thompson communicated his preference for the alternative change to be implemented to keep board member terms at 2 years and merely decouple them from those of the General Assembly.*

- iv. Also proposed by Supervisor Compton is the elimination of Section 14 and the renumbering of Section 15 to Section 14.

- 1. This change is further legislative cleanup of language from the original charter

setting how elections within Irwin County would be run in the years of 2013 and 2014 while this board was being created, and its language no longer has any practical effect.

v. Supervisor Compton also proposes modernizing the legislation by striking language in the Act's description in the header saying the act relieves the duties and powers of the previous holders of this boards' responsibilities since now this board has those powers and not the board of registrars and the judge of the Probate Court as was the case in this Act's previous incarnation.

1. The same reasoning is behind the striking of wording within Section 1 of the Act, once more being that these changes would no longer be used to relieve the judge of the Probate Court and the board of registrars of their duties since our board already has those powers.

*Chairman Harris recommended that all board members fully read the proposals as typed out and presented to the board and for discussion to begin in earnest at a future meeting after a full review and time for opinions to be formed.*

*Chairman Harris communicated that while he currently feels that no changes need to happen at this time given this board's exceptionalism in performance and its current structure has caused few to no problems to date, he is willing to give full consideration to suggestions for changes.*

*Representative Thompson expressed his desire for expedient discussion and approval of board charter changes.*

*Representative Thompson suggested a longer residency requirement than the existing one year being added as a qualification as a board member, being open to discussion and suggestions by other board members for preferred prior residency lengths.*

*Representative Thompson also suggested a review of the language setting an absolute minimum of annual number of meetings, as lines 92-94 state that the board shall have both regular monthly meetings while also stating that the board shall not meet less than 3 times annually. Supervisor Compton surmised that the language might be in place to set a minimum number of meetings in case of emergencies such as natural disasters like hurricanes or pandemics like that of COVID-19 whose conditions would have hindered the frequency of in-person meetings, but that he did not have a concrete reason for why the phrasing for the original charter would be like that other than some legal formality.*

*Representative Thompson expressed his desire for these changes to be finished and presented to the County Commission at the same time as they vote to approve considered changes to the county charter, and to be subsequently sent to the General Assembly together.*

*Supervisor Compton posited that the ideal timeframe for passage to minimize inconvenience to other governmental bodies would be to approve any changes by this board's November meeting, the County Commission to review and vote on it at their December meeting, so that Representative O'Steen could have the resolution and proposed changes on hand by the start of the 2026 legislative session in January.*

## 2. Statewide Election Forms Update

a. Since 2022, a firm has been working with the Secretary of State's Office in analyzing returned documentation for all elections since 2020 from county elections offices and has recommended

updates to required documentation to reduce redundantly logged information, enhance readability and consistency and increase ease of use for poll workers while ensuring full compliance with state law and State Elections Board rules.

b. The Secretary of State's Office and Georgia Association of Voter Registration and Elections Officials have asked Supervisor Compton to be the leading voice of Georgia's counties in the design process of these revised forms.

i. We will likely be piloting new editions of the elections documentation in the June and November Public Service Commission elections this year to ensure a statewide rollout of the finalized forms for the 2026 election cycle.

ii. We will be piloting additional chain of custody documentation created by the GAVREO Voting System Committee, which Supervisor Compton is chairman of, to evaluate the added benefit of and if they should be recommended to the state to be included as statewide required pieces of documentation.

#### Public Comment:

*Technician Evelyn Romans asked two questions: Firstly, to explain for the public who may not fully understand what this board does, and secondly, in regards to the newer elections forms, will they have electronic versions available and will they be more concise?*

*-Supervisor Compton responded that the Irwin County Board of Elections and Registrations is a body established by state law to act as the election superintendent of all elections in Ocilla and Irwin County, responsible for maintaining accurate voter rolls, conducting elections in accordance with state and federal laws as well as state election board rules, the recruitment and training of poll workers, the qualifying of local candidates running for office and the certification of election results. In regards to the elections documentation, we have communicated to the Secretary of State's Office that the availability of electronically form-fillable documentation is a top-priority and they agreed, and that one of the primary reasons for the redesign of the forms is to make them more precise and concise to minimize errors and improve readability.*

*Helen Moses thanked Evelyn Romans for asking for an explanation of our board's duties then asked two questions: What is the purpose of our office being open in between elections and what truth is there between being a voter meaning that you have to serve jury duty?*

*-Supervisor Compton explained that people move every day, people die every day, people update their drivers licenses every day, and for our just under 6,700 voters and growing, we remain open to process those updates accurately and quickly and available to answer public inquiries and register voters as required by both state and federal law. In regards to jury duty, it is a legal requirement of all citizens to serve when called, regardless of voter registration status. Primary records used for calling for jury duty are property tax records and drivers license data, though voter registration data is cross checked to ensure accuracy of those other records. Court Clerk Ross frequently informs jurors if there is a mismatch between their voter and other data and to check with our office to ensure that all agencies have the most up-to-date information possible.*

#### Board Comment:

*Chairman Harris presented Supervisor Compton and Technician Romans with cards expressing his appreciation for their excellence in service to this board, to elections administration and to the people of Irwin County and Georgia as a whole.*

Executive Session: Entered executive session @ \_\_\_\_\_ due to request by \_\_\_\_\_ to discuss:

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~~Exited executive session @~~

Meeting Adjourned: *Vice-Chair Thurman motions to adjourn, Rep. Thompson seconds, meeting adjourned 3-0 at 4:57pm*

1. Next Meeting: Tuesday, April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2025 @ 4pm