



Board of Elections & Registrations *Irwin County Georgia*

Waymond Harris, Chairman

Ethan Compton, Election Supervisor

Charlene Hutchinson, Republican Party Representative / Vice-Chair

Patricia Thurman, Democratic Party Representative

Board Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, June 11th, 2024 @ 4pm

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

Approval of Minutes: *Vice-Chair Hutchinson motions to accept the minutes as written, Rep. Thurman seconds, minutes approved 3-0*

Old Business:

1. May 30th, 2024 Post-Election Audit Results, Ballot Image Review and Post-Mortem
 - a. In an ambitious attempt to provide transparency and build trust in Irwin County's elections, we audited all ballots for 9 selected contests from the May 21, 2024 election. The scale proved to be too much for 16 auditors, and numerous instances of human error occurred as a result.
 - b. Attached are the results of the hand tally by volunteers, a post-audit review of ballot images to tally and account for differences found by elections office staff, and a proposed public statement accounting for both.
 - i. In the volunteer hand-audit, 8 of the 9 audited contests had an error of some kind.
 1. While most were minor errors of one ballot, some audit teams completely forgot to audit some contests on some batches, leading to examples such as the School Board District 4 contest having a percent difference from the actual results of over 13%.
 2. 27 of the 40 audited batches had at least one error, leading to a human error rate of 67.5% of batches being affected.
 - ii. To investigate these errors, Supervisor Compton hand-counted all ballots once more, using the high-definition ballot images hand scanned on regular office equipment, publicly made on May 28th when they were divided into the very same batches as given to the auditors.
 - iii. Supervisor Compton's results took a week to count and were then verified by optical character recognition scan search comparisons of those same images.

1. This count was a true and perfect match of the records as reported by the election system, and proved to be great evidence as to why switching to exclusively hand-counting ballots would provide less secure, less accurate elections.
 2. Extensive hand auditing still should be done after the fact to confirm accurate setup, use and to discover any potential tampering, though.
- c. Too many contests were audited for an election of this complexity and led to inaccuracy which goes against our mission to build public trust in our efforts.
- d. In addition, the decision to audit additional contests might be legally questionable due to changes to O.C.G.A. § 21-2-498 from HB 974 signed into law on May 6th.
- i. In it, the bill allows election superintendents to audit additional ballots and contests “if circumstances warrant”, which would imply that unless some proof or documented evidence might require a contest to be audited or audited to a higher degree than mandated by the state, we may open ourselves to legal liability or potential code violations if we pursue additional audits solely on the grounds of inspiring greater public trust.
 - ii. As such, it would be best for liability reasons to either:
 1. 100% comply with the auditing procedures as established in state law moving forward, keeping audits to only selected batches and for only up to two contests depending on the election.
 - a. This route, while much easier to perform, does not go to the lengths our staff would prefer to guarantee the accuracy of our work and Risk-Limiting Audits as performed by the state leaves room for doubt of the process for people who are not fully involved in the process.
 2. Change our bylaws to provide a standardized set of circumstances which would warrant an additional audit, such as establishing a set margin between candidates or the presence of physical, verified evidence of a potential violation of the sanctity of results.
 - a. This route, if chosen, would remove any perception of bias in the decision of what contests have been selected for audit and ensure that we can address any results of elections that have been called into question with evidence or particularly close contests.
 - b. A proposed edition of the bylaws is available to be reviewed, amendments suggested and considered for the July meeting if this is the route wanting to be pursued.

Guest Wyatt Thompson inquired if additional qualifying circumstances could be added to the proposed bylaw article to allow for county parties to be able to add contests to the audit upon agreement of both county parties.

Supervisor Compton questioned if that would survive scrutiny as a ‘qualifying circumstance’ as objective, not subjective qualifiers would be preferable for what is used to set standards for additionally audited contests.

Vice-Chair Hutchinson suggested, given how disproportionate election results tend to be historically within the jurisdiction of Irwin County, to adjust the recommended margin of error number warranting an audit from 4% to 10%.

New Business:

1. Proposed first draft of FY 25 Department Budget

- a. We are approaching the time where the County Commission will approve department budgets for the next fiscal year which begins September 1st, and as is required by state law, Supervisor Compton has prepared the first draft of our budget for review by this board and then submission to the County Commission.
- b. Attached are a basic budget outline and detailed summaries of both personnel and material budgets.

Supervisor Compton said that while county finance personnel have applauded elections for being the best consistently under budget department, we have faced significant amounts of unexpected additional expenses this fiscal year, such as roughly \$5k in sunken inventory costs for ballot stock due to changes in the legal definition of what can be used as ballot stock and the added requirement of a visible watermark on ballots.

Public Comment:

Becky Cook expressed her thanks for what we do and for allowing her to participate in the process.

Board Comment:

N/A

Executive Session: *Entered executive session @ 5:00pm due to request by Vice-Chair Hutchinson to discuss:*

Employee compensation for fiscal year 2025.

Exited executive session @ 5:11pm

Meeting Adjourned:

1. Next Meeting: Tuesday, July 16th, 2024 @ 4:00pm

Chairman Harris motions to change the regular scheduled meeting for July from July 9th to July 16th due to schedule conflicts, Vice-Chair Hutchinson seconds, meeting date changed 3-0.

Vice-Chair Hutchinson motions to adjourn, Rep. Thurman seconds, meeting adjourned at 5:11pm.