

# Where's The Action?

## At Your Board of Elections



*The laws about voting in North Carolina have changed, but how they are applied is often decided at the local level. We need to understand and influence how the election system operates locally to make sure it works fairly. That means watching the actions of the County Board of Elections year round, attending its meetings (yes, sometimes they are boring), developing relationships with the members, and raising our voices at crucial times.*

## What Is The Board Of Elections?

***The County Board of Elections is the agency that runs elections in your county.*** They implement the rules set by state law and the State Board of Elections. They print ballots, decide on early voting and Election Day polling places, process voter registrations, hire and train poll workers, settle election-related disputes, and more.

Each County BOE consists of the ***board director and staff*** who do the day-to-day work and ***3 unpaid board***

***members*** who make policy decisions (like approving early voting plans). Board members are appointed every two years by the State Board of Elections.

Under current law, two members must be affiliated with the governor's political party and one member must be affiliated with the other major party.

The General Assembly passed a law adding a fourth board member, but it is being challenged in court and is not yet in effect.

## Why Should I Attend Their Meetings?

***Because that's where the important decisions are made about voting in your county! It's the center of action.***

The BOE is a public agency, so its meetings and records are open to the public. By law, no BOE decision can be secret. Even closed sessions must be announced and a summary of what happened must generally be made public. The principle is simple: The people's business must be conducted in the people's view!

This means you have an invitation to attend BOE meetings and receive meeting agendas, minutes and any (non-confidential) supporting documents provided to board members. All you have to do is show up, pay attention, and ask for what you need!

You can also develop relationships with individual board members by talking with them before and after meetings and arranging separate meetings with them with your supporters.

## How Do I Find Out About The Meetings?

**Call your county BOE and ask!** BOEs are required to give 48 hour public notice of their meetings. Items must be on agenda to be decided, but do not necessarily have to be on the agenda to be discussed. Just contact the County BOE Director and ask to be added to the notification list for regular meetings.

**Tip:** It's a good idea to call the County BOE to make sure a scheduled meeting is still on because they are sometimes postponed at the last minute.

## Will I Have A Chance To Speak?

*Maybe. It depends on what your County BOE has decided about allowing public comment.*

Many County BOEs **do** allow members of the public to speak, but they are not technically required to do so. Some BOEs have a public comment period at the beginning or end of the meeting where you can express concerns or ask questions. Sometimes, a friendly board

member can ask for comments from the audience on a crucial topic. Other BOEs don't allow public comment at all, or only allow it when the board chair seeks input on a topic like early voting sites or precinct changes. But, don't feel discouraged: Your regular presence at the meeting alone will speak volumes!

## What Should I Listen & Look For?

**1. Agenda:** When you get to the meeting, ask for the agenda (better: call the BOE staff for an advance copy). What topics seem important to you? Pay close attention to anything that involves one of the key terms (see below).

**2. Other Materials:** Ask for a copy of other documents that are available. They often provide valuable background about an agenda topic.

**3. Community Involvement:** Did any other people, candidates or party officials attend the meeting? Did they ask questions or provide comments? If so, what were they?

**4. The Vibe:** You can learn a lot about the BOE members and staff by paying attention to their interaction and even their small talk. Where are there conflicts or communication challenges?

## What Do I Do After The Meeting?

**Tell us what happened!** Online is the best way -- go to [demnc.co/boereport](http://demnc.co/boereport). Or if you prefer paper, use the hard copy Board Meeting Report form and return to your local Democracy NC organizer. See <http://demnc.co/staff> for staff contact info or call 919-286-6000.

### KEY ELECTIONS ADMINISTRATION TERMS

- **Budget** – the money the BOE gets (or doesn't) affects voting equipment, number of poll workers, number of early voting sites, voter education, etc.
- **List Maintenance** – this involves removing voters from the registration rolls and updating or verifying the status of other voters; it's not always a bad thing, but always important to monitor.
- **Voter Challenges** – a way for a citizen to challenge the validity of a voter's registration. Pay close attention: Is a clear process being followed to protect voters from being wrongly removed?
- **Precinct Changes** – this could involve merging multiple polling places into one voting site or splitting a precinct to create two polling places; this topic can cause confusion and heated debate.
- **Staffing** – either about a BOE staff member (posi-

tions to be filled, etc.) or about poll workers (judges and assistants), including recruitment and training.

► **Voting Equipment or Software** – some key words you might hear are: SEIMS (the state database of voters); DRE (a "direct record electronic" or touch-screen voting machine); M-100 (machine that reads paper ballots fed into it); electronic poll books (voter rolls on a computer instead of on paper); Ballot on Demand (a way to print out a ballot for each voter as they show up).

► **Director's Report** – valuable information about what is on the board director's task list (and who's bothering the BOE about what, and why).

► **ATV** – authorization to vote form, provided at check-in and signed by voter.