



# From THE DESK of

**ROBYN O'DONNELL**  
CITY OF SUWANEE CITY CLERK  
AND ELECTION SUPERINTENDENT

Since the City of Suwanee **does not have a municipal general election in 2022**, now is a good time to take a deeper dive into the minutiae of how the election process usually works!

## ★ ★ ★ ★ ★ HOW TO HAVE A MUNICIPAL ELECTION IN EIGHT EASY STEPS

It all seemed so simple when we were voting for our 8th grade class president: check the name on the ballot, put the ballot in the box, count the ballots. But as you have probably ascertained from the last few years, the reality of elections is a little more complicated.

A few things that are helpful to know: Municipal general elections are held on odd-numbered years (no municipal elections in 2022!). The Suwanee Mayor and City Councilmembers serve four-year terms, and are elected on staggered years - for example, three seats were elected in 2021 and the other three will be elected in 2023. The Mayor and Council serve at-large (serve the city as a whole) and are bipartisan.

The exception to the odd-numbered year elections would be a special election. This would be for electing someone to complete the term of an existing councilmember that needs to resign, or if the city needs to bring a special referendum to the residents earlier than what a general election would allow.

Now that all of that is cleared up, it's time to have an election! Just some paper ballots and a box, right? Well....

### STEP 1 LEARN THE RULES

The election superintendent's role is to understand and adhere to state laws, as well as changes to those laws during the election cycle. During an election cycle, I am responsible for meeting deadlines for advertisements and filings, as well as reporting to the Secretary of State's office.

### STEP 2 START EARLY

While the public starts to notice election happenings beginning with the qualifying period in August, for an election superintendent the process begins in January! In Suwanee, the election superintendent is sworn in during the City Council's January meeting. The election superintendent must be certified by training conducted by the Secretary of State's office, and then must complete recertification every election cycle thereafter.

The council must issue a resolution to conduct the election, set the qualifying fees, and to set the dates for the qualifying period at their January meeting. By law, the election qualifying period and qualifying fees must be advertised no later than February 1 of the General Election year. Speaking of qualifying....

### STEP 3 QUALIFYING

The qualifying period is when candidates "throw their hat in the ring" and have their name appear on the ballot. Would-be candidates must provide a Notice of Candidacy and payment of the qualifying fee. Now that we have candidates, it's time to..

## STEP 4 COORDINATE AND MAINTAIN ELECTION MATERIALS

Section 203 of the Voting Rights Act requires jurisdictions with certain population numbers to provide bilingual voting materials in the language of the minority population. As of 2017, Gwinnett County and its municipalities have been required to provide for voter registrations and elections in both English and Spanish. The election call, website verbiage, election results, advertisements, forms, applications, envelopes, and signage all must be translated in order to ensure that bilingual voters with limited-English proficiency can effectively and actively participate in the election process.

## STEP 5 COORDINATES ADVANCED VOTING

Next, the election superintendent coordinates and holds three weeks of advanced voting, as well as voting on election day, which is the Tuesday after the first Monday in November (so complicated!). We have to hire, train, and schedule poll officials for the entirety of the voting period.

## STEP 6 ELECTION DAY

Hooray, it's here! After trouble-shooting throughout the day, I coordinate and assist poll officials in hand-counting paper ballots once the polls close. This includes advanced in-person ballots, absentee ballots, and ballots cast on election day. These findings are announced as "uncertified results."

## STEP 7 THE NEXT FIVE DAYS

The election superintendent spends the next five days reviewing and completing all summary forms necessary for official submittal, cross referencing the number of ballots printed to the number of ballots cast for accuracy, and preparing documents and reports to be sent to the County Registrar's Office and the Secretary of State's office. After five days, final certification of the election is announced.

## STEP 8 SEVEN WEEKS LATER

At their December meeting, City Council ratifies the election certification, and the new candidates are sworn in at the January Council meeting.

And that's it! Eight simple steps - and 11 months - later, you've successfully elected a council to help cast a broad vision for the city and fashion and adopt policies and ordinances that forward that vision **(but not this year - there are no elections at City Hall in 2022)**. A lot more complicated than electing an 8th grade class president, but arguably much more rewarding as well.

*Robyn O'Donnell has been with the City of Suwanee since October 2013 and was sworn in as City Clerk in January 2021. She obtained her Municipal Election Official Certification in December 2016 and was recertified in 2019 and 2021. Robyn became a Certified Georgia Municipal Clerk in September 2020 and is currently completing the Masters Education Management Development Program at the University of Georgia Carl Vinson Institute of Government.*



**Please note: The City of Suwanee does not have a Municipal General Election in 2022. Suwanee City Hall is not a location for voting in 2022 county, state, or federal elections; you may vote at City Hall in municipal elections only.**

Information and polling locations for 2022 elections can be found at the Gwinnett County Board of Elections and Voter Registration.

