

**City of Salisbury
Election Board Minutes
Thursday, August 6, 2026
Salisbury Fire Department Station 16**

Members Present: Chair Susan Carey, Secretary Stephen Feliciano, Lou Rimbach (participating by telephone).

Others Present: Dionne Church, Director of the Wicomico County Board of Elections; City Attorney Ashley Bosche; City Clerk Julie English; City Council members Melissa Holland, April Jackson; Sharon Dashiell and one member of the public.

Call Meeting to Order

Ms. Carey called the meeting of the City Election Board to order at 5:33 PM on August 6, 2026. Mr. Feliciano moved to open the meeting, and Mr. Rimbach, seconded. Ms. Carey noted that Mr. Rimbach was present telephonically rather than in person.

Agenda Presentation

Ms. Carey stated that the purpose of the meeting was for Board members to discuss the special election process, and deferred to Dionne Church, Director of the Wicomico County Board of Elections, to provide an update on the Board's prior questions and the County's findings.

Special Election Cost and Feasibility Update

Ms. Church reviewed updated cost and timing information for a special election, comparing current figures to the City's 2023 general-election budget. She first noted a new State Board of Elections policy, in effect from 2023, under which the State Board will not support a municipal special election within 60 days before or after a statewide primary or general election. Because 2026 is a statewide election year, this blackout period effectively removes most of the year as a viable window for a city special election. She also noted that, separate from this restriction, a minimum of four months' advance submission of paperwork is required before the State Board can support any municipal or special election, since equipment and ballot programming must be scheduled well in advance.

Ms. Church reported that the State Board's equipment and programming costs have increased substantially since 2023. E-poll book programming, which was a flat \$1,000 fee in 2023, is now tiered by the number of eligible voters (active and inactive): \$5,000 for fewer than 10,000 eligible voters, \$10,000 for 10,000–20,000, and \$15,000 for 20,000 or more. The City of Salisbury falls into the highest tier, at \$15,000. Voter database programming, also \$1,000 in 2023, is now \$5,000. Combined, these two programming costs alone have risen from \$2,000 to \$20,000 currently. She also noted a flat fee of \$7,200 for mail-in ballot voting support, which applies to any election using the County's mail-in voting system. Combined, the minimum cost to set up an election — before any polling-place salaries, judge pay, facility rental, or additional voting equipment — is approximately \$27,200, compared to a 2023 baseline of \$9,187 for comparable setup costs. Ms. Church noted these are State Board of Elections rates that apply to all Maryland municipalities using the County's support, not rates set by the County itself, and that she was unable to speak to the State's justification for the increase but would refer that question to the State Administrator.

Ms. Church stated that the City's 2023 general election cost approximately \$88,000 in total (including salaries, polling places, voting equipment, printing, and postage), though she noted that year's cost included some redistricting-related expenses following the census. She also noted the County's voting equipment is original to the early 2000s, with new equipment not expected until approximately 2028, and that increased programming costs may reflect the cost and complexity of maintaining and calibrating aging equipment.

Potential Cost Savings — Polling Locations

Ms. Church noted one area that could reduce costs would be consolidating the City's five polling locations into fewer sites, which would reduce the number of judges and equipment needed. She cautioned this may be limited by the City Charter's requirement (if applicable) that voters cast ballots in or adjacent to the precinct in which they reside and offered to confirm with the State whether consolidation would be feasible given the City's five districts. Board members discussed potential trade-offs, including reduced voter turnout or access if polling locations are consolidated, and the political sensitivity of the timing of any such change. The Board agreed this is a topic that could be explored further and brought to the public at a future work session but took no action on it at this meeting.

Conclusion: Special Election Determined Not Feasible

Following the cost and timing review, Board members concluded that conducting a special election is not fiscally responsible or logistically feasible under current circumstances, given the significant cost increases since 2023, the mandatory four-month minimum lead time, and the newly identified 60-day blackout period surrounding statewide elections in an election year. The Board agreed that the appointment process, rather than a special election, will need to be the primary mechanism for filling a Council vacancy going forward, and that this appointment process must be made more robust and transparent to preserve public trust and involvement, since removing the special election option also removes a direct opportunity for voter participation.

Appointment Process — Next Steps

Board members discussed strengthening the appointment process to ensure transparency and public confidence. City Attorney Ashley Bosche indicated she would revise the previously drafted Charter amendment to remove the special election provisions, pending Council's formal decision, and finalize the related appointment policy. The Board discussed developing a standardized set of interview questions, with input from the City's Human Resources Director, to be used for any future Council appointment. It was suggested that these questions be shared publicly and that residents be given an opportunity to comment on them before they are finalized and formally adopted alongside the appointment policy and Charter amendment. Board members also discussed that residents of the specific Council district with the vacancy should have priority input into that district's appointment process, since they are the ones represented by that seat.

Next Steps — Presentation to Council

The Board agreed to present a summary of its findings to City Council at an upcoming work session, explaining that the Board consulted with Ms. Church, received detailed cost information, and concluded that a special election is not a feasible option under current costs and timing constraints. Ms. Church agreed to provide the Board with supporting documentation, including the City's predicted and actual 2023 special-election budget figures, to be forwarded to City Clerk Julie English for use in the Board's presentation. The Board indicated Ms. Church's attendance at the work session would be optional, since the presentation would be handled by the Board using her documentation. A specific date for the work session was not finalized; Ms. Church will advise the Board of her availability, and the Board will coordinate further around Council's work-session schedule.

Public Comment

One member of the public was present. It was noted that members of the public who had previously expressed strong interest in the special election process were not in attendance at this meeting. No additional substantive public comments were recorded.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 6:15 pm by unanimous vote, Mr. Feliciano moved to adjourn the meeting, and Mr. Rimbach seconded.

Stephen Feliciano, Secretary

Approved: 09.28.2026