

Candidate's Guide to the Special Election

February 24, 2026

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For more information, please contact your county auditor's office.



Overview

Candidate Qualifications

A candidate must be an eligible elector in the city and city ward (if any) when filing nomination papers and at the time of the election.

[§376.4(1)]

An eligible elector meets all requirements to register to vote but does not have to be registered. An eligible elector must be:

- A citizen of the United States
- A resident of Iowa
- At least 18 years old

An eligible elector may not:

- Be a convicted felon (unless voting rights have been restored by the president or governor, including via Executive Order)
- Be currently judged incompetent to vote by a court
- Claim the right to vote in any other place

[§39.3(6)]

Filing Period

Nomination papers must be filed with the county auditor during the filing period. They cannot be filed before or after the filing period. The filing period is:

First day: Once Auditor is notified of special election

Last day: Friday, January 30, 2026 – 5:00 pm

There are no filing fees in Iowa.

[§376.4(1)(a)]

Nomination Papers

Each candidate must file nomination papers with the county auditor or the city clerk if designated by the controlling auditor. Check with the controlling auditor to determine the proper office to file nomination paperwork. The affidavit of candidacy and nomination petitions or convention certificate must be filed together, or they will be rejected.

[§376.4(1)(a)]

Copies of nomination papers are available at the county auditor's office or on the website:

https://cerrogordo.gov/elections/2026_mason_city_special_election_2026_02_24/.

Preparing Nomination Papers

Affidavit of Candidacy

Each candidate must complete and file an affidavit of candidacy. The affidavit of candidacy form is available on the county auditor's website.

The affidavit should include the following information:

- Candidate's Name

The candidate's name should be printed exactly as the candidate wishes the name to appear on the ballot. No parentheses, quotation marks, or titles (e.g. Dr., Mrs., etc.) may be included. Please provide the phonetic spelling of the candidate's name. This is helpful when producing audio ballots for visually impaired voters. Be as clear as possible. For example, Eisenhower = "EYES-in-how-er."

- Office Sought and Ward (if any)

The name of the office and the city and city ward (if any) the candidate is running for must be included.

- Vacancy Information

Is the candidate running to fill a vacancy due to an officeholder's death, resignation, removal, or temporary appointment?

The "yes" box must be checked if the candidate is running to fill the remainder of an unexpired term. This happens when an incumbent officeholder resigns, dies, or is removed from office before the end of the term, and another officer is appointed (not elected) to fill the remainder of the unexpired term.

Contact the city clerk or county auditor with questions about whether you are running to fill a vacancy.

- Type and Date of Election

The 2026 Mason City Special Election will be held on Tuesday, February 24.

- Candidate's Home Address

Candidates must provide their house number and street name. Mailing address, phone, and email are optional but assist the county auditor, city clerk, and the public in contacting the candidate.

Affidavit of Candidacy, Continued

- **Candidate's Affirmation, Signature and Notarization**

The affidavit must be notarized. A notarial officer must be present when the candidate signs it, and the notarial officer will complete the verification at the bottom of the affidavit. Once an affidavit is notarized, it cannot be altered.

Affidavits missing any of the information listed below must be rejected:

- Candidate's name
- Office sought and ward (if any)
- Candidate's signature
- Signature of notary public

[§376.4]

The candidate's party affiliation should be left blank.

Nomination Petitions

Candidates must collect signatures on nomination petitions and file the petitions at the same time the affidavit of candidacy is filed. The nomination petition form is available on the county auditor's website.

Candidate Information

Before anyone signs the petition, the required information in the candidate header of every petition page must be completed.

Best Practice: Complete the header on one petition page and make copies of that page so all petition page candidate headings are identical.

The information listed below must appear on each petition candidate header. Signatures cannot be counted on petition pages missing the following information:

- **Candidate's Name**

The candidate's name should be printed exactly as the candidate wishes the name to appear on the ballot. No parentheses, quotation marks, or titles (e.g. Dr., Mrs., etc.) may be included.

- **Office Sought**

Nomination Petitions, Continued

- **City Ward (if any)**

The candidate must provide the city ward if there are any. Signatures on petition pages that do not provide the applicable city ward when required cannot be counted.

- **Type and Date of Election**

The 2026 Mason City Special Election will be held on Tuesday, February 24.

- **Signers' and Candidate's Affirmation of Residence**

The following statement must appear on each petition page:

"We, the undersigned eligible electors of the appropriate county, city, school district, school or community college director district, or other district as established by law, hereby make the nomination outlined above. If the candidate named above accepts the nomination, we believe the candidate is or will be a resident of the appropriate county, city, school district, school or community college director district, or other district established by law as required by law."

The following information should also appear on each petition header:

- **Candidate's County and City of Residence**

- **Vacancy Information**

Is the candidate running to fill a vacancy due to an officeholder's death, resignation, removal, or temporary appointment?

The "yes" box must be checked if the candidate is running to fill the remainder of an unexpired term. This happens when an incumbent officeholder resigns, dies, or is removed from office before the end of the term, and another officer is appointed (not elected) to fill the remainder of the unexpired term.

Contact the city clerk and county auditor with questions about whether you are running to fill a vacancy.

[§376.4]

Signature Requirements for Cities with Runoff Provisions

The minimum number of signatures needed is at least 10 or two percent of the number of people who voted for the office at the last regular city election, whichever is greater.

[§376.4(1)(a)]

Ask the city clerk or controlling auditor for the minimum number of signatures needed.

Elected by Ward

In cities where council members are voted on only by the residents of the ward, petition signers must live within the ward.

Elected At-Large

In cities where council members must be residents of a ward but are voted on by the entire city, petition signers may live anywhere in the city.

[§376.4(1)(b)]

Collecting Signatures

Eligible electors of the city and ward (if applicable) may sign nomination petitions. See page 1 for the definition of an eligible elector.

Candidates may sign their own petitions assuming they are eligible electors of the city and ward (if applicable).

Candidates may begin collecting signatures at any time. However, for the signatures to count, the signers must still be eligible electors when the papers are filed.

All signers must include the following information:

- A signature (the signature may be printed)
- The address of their residence

This must include a house number, street name, and city. Providing a post office box only is not sufficient. A signer who is homeless should describe where the signer lives or write “homeless”.

[§376.4(2)]

There is no limit on the number of nomination petitions one elector may sign for different candidates.

Important Note: Petition signers often use “ditto” marks (“) when appropriate (e.g. when the name of a city or the date of signing the petition is the same as the previous signer). The use of ditto marks alone does not invalidate a signature.

Filing Checklist

- ☐ **Review affidavits and nomination petition headers or convention certificates.**

Nothing can be added to a notarized affidavit, a petition header, or a convention certificate if signatures are on the page. Nomination papers can be returned to the filer only if they have been rejected.

- ☐ **Count the signatures.**

Best Practice: File more than the required number of signatures since signatures can be challenged. If there are signatures on a petition that should not be included, draw a line through the name. Those signatures will not be counted.

- ☐ **Make a copy of the nomination papers for your own records.**

- ☐ **Bind your nomination papers together.**

Nomination papers may be rejected without examination if not bound together.

Best Practice: Use staples or a three-ring binder.

- ☐ **File both the affidavit and nomination petitions or convention certificate at the same time.**

- ☐ **File as early as possible.**

Nomination papers will be inspected for completeness before they are accepted for filing. If nomination papers are filed early, candidates may have time to correct any errors in rejected papers and file new nomination papers.

Nomination papers may be filed in person or by mail. When filing by mail, postmark dates are irrelevant. The controlling auditor or the city clerk, if designated by the controlling auditor, must receive the papers by 5:00 pm on the filing deadline. If candidates would like to be contacted when their nomination papers have been received, they should indicate that when they mail their papers and include a daytime phone number at which they can be reached.

Important Note: It is the candidate's responsibility to ensure the nomination papers are received by the controlling auditor or the city clerk, if designated by the controlling auditor, before the deadline. Check with the controlling auditor to determine the proper office to file nomination papers.

After Election Day

Cities with Runoff Provisions

Who Wins?

It depends. If a city has a runoff provision, all candidates must receive a majority of the votes cast to be declared elected at the regular city election.

Majorities in “Vote for No More Than One” Races

In a city with a runoff provision, a simple majority is required to be declared elected at the regular city election. A simple majority is at least one vote more than 50% of the total votes cast.

If no candidate receives a majority in this type of race, a runoff must be held between the two highest vote-getters. For example, a runoff for the mayor's office will have two candidates on the runoff ballot. [§376.8(2), 376.9(1)]

If there is a tie, the board of supervisors must draw lots. [§50.44]

Write-In Votes in Cities with Runoff Provisions

Write-In Candidate Receives Majority at Regular City Election and Declines

1. The winner must file a notice of resignation with the controlling auditor by 5:00 pm on the day following the final canvass.
2. All remaining persons who received write-in votes and want to be on the run-off ballot must file an affidavit of candidacy with the controlling auditor by 5:00 pm on the fourth day following the final canvass. The auditor should notify the write-in candidates of this requirement.
3. The runoff election still must be held even if one of the remaining candidates has a majority of the votes after the write-in votes of candidates who fail to file an affidavit are disregarded.

[§376.11(4)]

Runoff Election Necessary and Write-In Votes were Cast for that Office

1. Everyone who received write-in votes and wants to appear on the runoff election ballot must file an affidavit of candidacy with the controlling auditor by 5:00 pm on the day after the final canvass. The write-in votes received by a person who does not file an affidavit will be disregarded. The auditor should notify the write-in candidates of this requirement.
2. The runoff election still must be held even if one of the remaining candidates has a majority of the votes after the write-in votes of candidates who fail to file an affidavit are disregarded.

[§376.11(5)]

After the Runoff City Election (If Necessary)

Who Wins?

Candidates who receive the most votes, up to the number of seats to be filled, are declared elected. If there is a tie, the board of supervisors must draw lots.

[§50.44, 376.9]

Write-In Votes

No affidavit of candidacy is required. The person is elected as if their name had been printed on the ballot.

[§376.11(1)]