

Ballot Propositions

With a Focus on Getting Propositions on
the Ballot via Annual and Special
Township Meetings

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Ballot Proposition Placement Methods

- Ballot Initiative – a proposition is placed on the ballot via a petition circulated by citizens (AKA citizen initiatives)
 - Signature requirement – A minimum 8% of the number of ballots cast in the last general election for that district
 - In 2020, a statewide ballot initiative would have required a minimum of around 364,000 signatures
- Ballot Referendum – a proposition is placed on the ballot by an elected government organization (by majority vote)
 - State Legislature, City Council, Township Board
 - Park, Library, or School Board
 - One exception is via citizens voting at an Annual or Special Township Meeting
 - More on that later

Ballot Proposition Types Allowed in Illinois

- Non-binding advisory public questions
- Binding propositions, like in California and other states, are not allowed, except amendments to [Article IV of the Illinois Constitution](#)
 - Article IV sets out the powers of the Illinois Legislature
 - Requires three-fifths of those voting on the amendment or a majority of those voting in the election to amend the Constitution

Why Place Propositions on the Ballot?

- Educate and mobilize the public
- Non-binding, no threat of lawsuit but requires elected officials and the public to take a position
- Opportunity to build the Green Party

Path of Least Resistance - Maybe

- Ballot referendums via Annual or Special Township Meetings
 - Do not require major petition drives
 - So, can be the easiest way to get a proposition on the ballot
 - Especially if the Township Board supports it
 - Regardless you need to plan for and organize a strong turnout for the meeting
 - More on this later

Illinois Annual Township Meeting

- Believe it or not, Illinois enacted into law at least one meeting per year when citizens have limited direct democracy! ([60 ILCS 1/30](#))
- Held annually on the second Tuesday of April in all approximately 1,000 townships throughout Illinois
- AKA Annual Town Meeting
- At this meeting, registered township voters in attendance have the same voting rights as the elected township officials!
- Can vote at the meeting to put a non-binding referendum question on the ballot
- In order for this vote to take place at the meeting only a minimum of 15 registered township voters need to sign a letter to add a meeting agenda item to propose placing the question on the ballot
 - Must be filed with the Township Clerk no later than March 1st
 - Insist on a dated and time stamped receipt when you file
- If a simple majority of registered township voters at the meeting vote YES
 - The referendum will be on the next election's ballot for all voters in the township

Illinois Special Township Meeting

- The registered township voters can also call a Special Township Meeting at any time
- This section of the Illinois election code is often overlooked ([60 ILCS 1/35](#))
- Registered township voters have the same voting rights at this meeting as at the Annual Township Meeting
- Can also vote at this meeting to put a non-binding referendum question on the ballot
- In order for this vote to take place at the meeting only a minimum of 15 registered township voters need to sign a letter calling for the meeting to be held and to add a meeting agenda item to propose placing the question on the ballot
 - Must be filed with the Township Clerk
 - Insist on a dated and time stamped receipt when you file
 - The Township Board by law must schedule the meeting within 14-45 days of receiving the letter
- If a simple majority of registered township voters at the meeting vote YES
 - The referendum will be on the next election's ballot for all voters in the township

Planning for the Meeting is Key!

- Democracy is messy. It's important to know what's going to happen on meeting day
- Before the meeting starts registered township voters need to check in with township staff to be identified as qualified voters
- Often the attendees are asked to arrive 15 or 30 minutes early to be identified as a qualified voter
- The Annual or Special Township Meeting is conducted using Robert's Rules of Order
- The Township Supervisor or Clerk calls the meeting to order
- Then nominations for a meeting moderator are accepted

Planning for the Meeting is Key!

- The moderator is key because they control the meeting
- It's imperative that you plan for who to nominate as moderator
- The moderator nominee should be well respected by proponents of the ballot question and be familiar with Robert's Rules of Order
- After nominations are closed a vote is taken to choose the moderator using traditional plurality voting (winner take all)
- Organizers should suggest that everyone voting for a particular moderator stand in one part of the room to easily be identified
- Organizers should be sure that the moderator vote is accurately counted
- Hopefully your moderator will then preside over the meeting working their way through the meeting agenda

Planning for the Meeting is Key!

- When the agenda item to decide whether to place the question on the ballot is taken up your moderator should allow typically 3 minutes of public comments for each meeting attendee that wants to speak regarding the pros and cons of putting the question on the ballot
- Depending on how controversial the question is and how divided the attendees are this can get emotional
- Finally the moderator calls for a vote
- Hopefully your moderator will be able to require that everyone voting yes, no, or abstain regarding placing the question on the ballot must stand in one part of the room to easily be identified
- Organizers should again be sure that the vote is accurately counted

Time to Campaign for the Upcoming Meeting

- Meeting planning is complete
- Now it's time to:
 - Wage a campaign to turnout township registered voters that support placing your question on the ballot, to get them to attend the upcoming Annual or Special Township Meeting!
 - Communicate your moderator choice to your meeting attendees

Your Question is on the Ballot or is it?

- If the meeting was a success you can't rest on your laurels
- If the Township Board doesn't support the question or are incompetent they may drag their feet regarding the post meeting logistics
- Regardless attend every subsequent Regular Township Meeting until you ...
- Make sure the Township Clerk works with the County Clerk in a timely manor to certify that the question will be on the ballot for the next election
- You need to be aware of the election deadlines to certify that a question is on the ballot and continually remind the Township Clerk to not miss those deadlines

Time to Campaign!

- You've confirmed that you are the ballot!
- Now the real work starts
- Mount a campaign all the way until Election Day to turn out the vote for your proposition!
- Good luck on Election Day!

Good News!

- All this organizing work can pay off!
- Here's Move to Amend's results using these methods in 2012
- Followed by a recent RCV ballot proposition ballot placement success in Berwyn Township (Cook County)

2012 Illinois Annual Township Meeting Results

- 7 Illinois townships were victorious at their Annual Township Meeting in getting the Move to Amend question placed on their November ballots:
 - **Avon Township – Lake County** (Contacts: Barb Hogman, Grayslake, barbhogman@juno.com, Kim Kearby, Round Lake, kearbs@sbcglobal.net)
 - **Northfield Township – Cook County**
 - **Oak Park Township – Cook County** (unanimous) (Dylan Bellisle, dylanbellisle@gmail.com)
 - **Lisle Township – DuPage County** (Steve Alesch, steve.alesch@dupagegreens.org)
 - **Champaign Township – Champaign County** (Colan Holmes)
 - **Cunningham Township – Champaign County** (unanimous) (Colan Holmes)
 - **Carbondale Township – Jackson County** (Jessica Bradshaw)

2012 Illinois Special Township Meeting Results

- Naperville Township – DuPage County
 - Filed June 29, 2012 to call a Special Township Meeting and put on the agenda a vote to put the Move to Amend question on the ballot in November
 - Meeting was held, the opposition out organized us and we lost
 - But we set a precedent for using this method to put questions on the ballot

2012 Illinois Special Township Meeting Results

- Wayne Township – DuPage County
 - Filed petition to call a Special Township Meeting to put question on the ballot
 - Wayne Township officials broke the law and refused to schedule the meeting
 - DuPage Move to Amend members (Kris Deyne and Frank Esposito) sued Wayne Township (filed a Writ of Mandamus)
 - Judge dismissed the case on mootness
 - A victory for Illinois citizens because no judgment was made regarding our right to call a Special Township Meeting

2012 Illinois Ballot Initiative Efforts

- Question successfully placed on the ballot in all 3 of the following voting districts:
 - Warrenville – citizens initiative
 - DuPage Move to Amend collected 450 signatures (needed 350)
 - Kane County - citizens initiative
 - Move to Amend Kane collected 14,000 signatures (needed 12,000)
 - Chicago – initiative referral (referendum)
 - A coalition including Greater Chicago Move to Amend North, Common Cause, Public Citizen, and other groups lobbied the Chicago City Council

2012 Landslide Victory

- **Landslide Illinois Victory – A Super Majority of Voters say YES to Move to Amend Question!**
- Over 800,000 Illinois voters in the following 10 voting districts have spoken. A super majority (at least 67%) in all 10 districts voted YES (on average 73%):
 - **Lisle Township – DuPage County**
 - **City of Warrenville**
 - **County of Kane**
 - **City of Chicago**
 - **Avon Township – Lake County**
 - **Northfield Township – Cook County**
 - **Oak Park Township – Cook County**
 - **Champaign Township – Champaign County**
 - **Cunningham Township – Champaign County**
 - **Carbondale Township – Jackson County**

2012 Local Resolution Successes

- Chicago
 - A coalition including Greater Chicago Move to Amend North, Common Cause, Public Citizen, and other groups lobbied the Chicago City Council
 - 39 co-sponsors of the resolution out of 50 alderpersons (passed unanimously 47-0)

2021 Successes

- April 13, 2021 Berwyn Township (Cook County) Annual Township Meeting (Rita Maniotis)
 - Successful in passing at the meeting the placement of an RCV ballot proposition on the Berwyn Township March 2022 Primary Election ballot

Resources

- Contact me if you would like a sample:
 - Petition to add a meeting agenda item to place your question on the ballot, at an upcoming Annual Township Meeting (or to call a Special Township Meeting and specify a meeting agenda item to place your question on the ballot, at the Special Township Meeting)
 - Cover letter to accompany the petition to be filed with the Township Clerk
 - Flyer to use to turn out Annual or Special Township Meeting attendees
 - Flyer to get out the vote once you are on the ballot
 - Yard sign design