

Special District Elections

What is a Special District Election?

In every odd-numbered year, elections in Oregon focus purely on local races. These races come in two types: education-related contests (school boards, education service districts, and community college boards) and special district contests. Unless an important position has been vacated, there are no statewide or national races in Oregon's odd-numbered-year elections.

What Are Special Districts?

Local and county governments in Oregon have certain general functions assigned by statute. Those functions don't address all community needs, so the Legislature created a framework for local communities to fill in the gaps via the creation of **special districts**.

Each category of special district operates under a set of rules written into Oregon statutes; the special district types are outlined in ORS 255.012 (https://oregon.public.law/statutes/ors_255.012). They are directly accountable to the people they serve and are overseen by state government departments. Currently, there are more than 1,000 special districts across the state.

Special districts are formed when local communities vote to create them. They have elected boards of directors or commissioners. The most common type of special district is designed to provide the necessary funding and equipment for fire protection but there are many different types of special districts including transportation, health, emergency communications, sanitation, road maintenance, cemetery maintenance, domestic water supply, and more.

Many special districts are empowered to levy taxes or impose rates or fees to support their services. They can hire employees (though many are entirely volunteer-driven) and can contract with third parties to supply the necessary services. A district's powers and responsibilities are written into its charter, which is voted on by the people when the district is created. They must supply financial statements to the Secretary of State's Audits Department.

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Who Are the Candidates for Special District Positions?

The people you see on your ballot are simply your neighbors: civic-minded people who have stepped up to help keep these essential community functions running. They must be registered voters living (or in some cases owning property) in the district they are running to serve. They are not professional politicians. They do not receive a salary, though some may get a token per-diem or be reimbursed for expenses.

Want to Know More?

To learn more about special districts, check out this brochure from the Special Districts Association of Oregon (SDAO):

https://www.sdao.com/files/d5606f8ba/What+is+a+Special+District+Brochure+Final+Web+Update+063023_0401.pdf

If you think you might want to serve on a special district board, visit the SDAO homepage: <https://www.sdao.com>

Attention Voters!

The League of Women Voters voter information website www.Vote411.org lists all the Oregon special district races you will find on your ballot with specific information about each district and the candidates. All the candidates are invited to post on the site answers to the League's questions and information about themselves.

For special district elections, Vote411.org goes live in mid-April.

