

Invalid applications narrow voter options in Bluffton council race

SECTION: [LIVING IN BLUFFTON](#) / OCT 01, 2025

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With the start of early in-person voting beginning on October 7, Bluffton Icon readers have been inquiring about the status of potential candidates for Bluffton Council. The [sample ballot](#) posted on the Allen County Board of Elections website shows four open council seats and just two candidates, incumbent Phillip A. Talavinia and newcomer Liz Gordon-Hancock.

Thomas Downey is listed as a valid write-in candidate. At the end of the business day on September 29, Robert Benjamin Hill was updated from pending to invalid write-in candidate.

Conversations with Allen County Board of Elections Director Morgan Bode and Hancock County Board of Elections Director Jody Beall O'Brien reviewed the status of candidates running for office in the Village of Bluffton, Richland Township, Orange Township and the Bluffton Exempted Village School District.

ALLEN AND HANCOCK COUNTY CANDIDATE APPLICATIONS

Application validity is determined by county boards of elections. Candidates must fill out a declaration of candidacy and file a petition with an adequate number of valid signatures.

Bode explained that Hill filed as a regular council candidate and was rejected because the application was made after the deadline. The Allen County Board did not allow Hill's subsequent application as a write-in candidate. The application of Don C. Burriss as a write-in candidate for Bluffton Council was also rejected by the board.

The application of incumbent Richland Township trustee Gary Lugibihl was rejected by the board. Bode noted that a portion of Lugibihl's application was not filled out.

The Icon tallied a total of 24 invalid Allen County candidate applications for village, township and school board seats in the November 4 General Election as shown on the [Allen County Board of Elections list of candidates filed](#).

Bode told the Icon that applicants can appeal board decisions and that a few invalid candidate decisions were overturned for November 4 ballot.



Local election news

Regarding Hancock County review of candidate applications, Board of Elections Director Jody Beall O'Brien told the Icon that 10 candidate applications for the November 4 election were deemed invalid. She did not provide a report with specific information. In Hardin and Putnam counties online reports showed zero invalid candidates.

O'Brien noted that failure to sign the back of the application form is a fatal error on applications in Hancock County.

BLUFFTON COUNCIL

There are four open Bluffton Council seats, effective January 1, 2026. Council members Jerry Cupples, Mitch Kingsley and Dave Steiner are not running for reelection. Each has served multiple terms in office. At the end of 2025, Cupples will have served a total of 24 years, Kingsley will have served 22.5 years and Steiner will have served 13.5 years. Steiner previously served in the elected role of Clerk Treasurer beginning in 2004.

Incumbent council member Phill Talavinia is running for reelection. First-time candidate Liz Gordon-Hancock is also on the November 4 ballot.

There will be one blank space for a write-in candidate. To use this option, the voter must fill in the circle and write the full name of the write-in candidate. Thomas Downey is the only applicant to successfully apply for write-in status.

Write-in votes for other individuals will not be counted, as is stated in the Ohio Revised Code <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3513.041>.

The fourth council seat will be filled by action of the council or mayor as designated by the Ohio Revised Code <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-731.43>

RICHLAND TOWNSHIP

There are two open Richland Township Trustee seats, effective January 1, 2026 and there are two candidates on the ballot, Seth C. Bixel and Alan D. Myers.

The terms of incumbents Rodney Wayne Goldsberry and Michael David Zimmerly expire on December 31, 2025 and they are not running for reelection. The candidate application of incumbent Gary Lee Lugibihl was invalid.

ORANGE TOWNSHIP

There are two open Orange Township Trustee seats, effective January 1, 2026 and there are three candidates on the ballot: Jeff Scoles, Thomas D. Wagner and David Warren.

Incumbent trustees Thomas E. Green and Bart A. Moser are not running for reelection.

BLUFFTON EXEMPTED VILLAGE SCHOOLS

There are three open Bluffton Exempted Village School District board member seats effective January 1, 2026. Three incumbent candidates are on the ballot: Bradley J. Dailey, Roni L. Kaufman and Wesley Klinger.

FORM USED BY OHIO CANDIDATES

The Form of declaration of candidacy and petition can be found at <https://codes.ohio.gov/ohio-revised-code/section-3513.07>

MORE INFORMATION

[Allen County Board of Elections](#)

[Hancock County Board of Elections](#)