

Greater Naples Fire Rescue District Referendum

By Sandy Parker | Sparker's Soapbox | Published 2026-07-25

Voters who live in the Greater Naples Fire Rescue District will vote in August on whether or not to change the way the District's five-member Board of Commissioners is elected, beginning with the November 2028 election. A simple majority vote is required for the amendment to pass.

Research for this post was compiled with assistance from Claude (Anthropic AI), drawing on internet-accessible public sources. All information was reviewed and verified by the author.

The Referendum

Below is the Referendum question as it will appear on the ballot:

GREATER NAPLES FIRE RESCUE DISTRICT'S BOARD CONVERSION TO FIRE COMMISSIONERS ELECTED DISTRICT-WIDE (AT-LARGE)

Beginning with the November 2028 election, shall the Greater Naples Fire Rescue District's Board of Fire Commissioners members be elected district-wide (at large) rather than the current charter requirement that two board members are elected from the Golden Gate Division, two board members are elected from the East Naples Division, and one board member is elected district-wide (at large)?

☐ YES.

☐ NO.

Background

The Greater Naples Fire Rescue District (the District) is the largest independent fire district in Florida, covering 1,517 square miles. Located in Collier County, it provides fire, rescue, emergency medical, and life safety services to Chokoloskee, Everglades City, Golden Gate, East Naples, Isles of Capri, Port of the Islands, and surrounding communities. ([HB 4029 Final Bill Analysis](#))

The District was created by the Florida Legislature in 2014 to provide fire suppression and related activities within the district through a merger of its predecessor, the East Naples Fire Control and Rescue District, and the Golden Gate Fire Control and Rescue District, with the approval of voters in both districts. ([HB 4029 Final Bill Analysis](#); [Chapter 2014-240, Laws of Florida](#))

The District's board of commissioners initially had eight seats as a result of the merger. Three of those seats were eliminated in November 2018, resulting in a five-member board. Currently, two seats are elected as at-large seats for the East Naples Division, two are elected as at-large seats for the Golden Gate Division, and one seat is a districtwide seat. Commissioners serve four-year staggered terms. ([HB 4029 Final Bill Analysis](#))

In 2025, the District's board of commissioners voted unanimously to propose a change to the current election structure. Because the District's charter can only be amended by the Legislature, and not by the District's board acting on its own, Rep. Lauren Melo sponsored [HB 4029](#) to amend the charter accordingly. The bill passed the Florida House and the Florida Senate unanimously, and was signed by Gov. Ron DeSantis on Jun. 6, 2025.

The bill itself does not change the election structure; it requires this referendum for the change to take effect.

For more on the District, see [Fire and Emergency Medical Services in Collier County: A Sparker's Civics primer](#) and [HB 4029 \(2025\)](#).

What This Would Do

A “Yes” vote by a majority of voters would result in all five commissioner seats being elected at-large by all voters within the District boundaries.

A “No” vote would maintain the current structure, with two seats elected by East Naples residents, two seats elected by Golden Gate residents, and one at-large seat elected by all District voters.

Arguments in Favor

In materials prepared for the local legislative delegation ahead of the bill’s filing ([Districtwide Elections summary](#)), the District cited two reasons for the change.

First, population growth in one division within the District as a result of district expansion since 2013 and new development has been uneven. At the time of the bill’s certification, the East Naples Division had 63,123 registered electors compared with 57,072 in the Golden Gate Division, yet each division elects the same two seats. Moving to district-wide elections would give each voter’s ballot equal weight regardless of which division they live in.

Second, the District pointed to the U.S. Supreme Court’s “one person, one vote” standard from *Reynolds v. Sims*, 377 U.S. 533 (1964), and noted it is unclear whether the District’s current divisional structure would hold up under the narrower standard the Court has applied to special districts in *Ball v. James*, 451 U.S. 355 (1981). The District said the change “will ensure there is no legal question regarding the validity of the District’s election scheme.”

Arguments Against

No organized opposition to this referendum has been identified. The bill drew no “no” votes in either the Florida House or Senate, and the House’s nonpartisan bill analysis and the available legislative record contain no public testimony or comments in opposition ([House Bill Analysis](#)).

Learn More

- [Greater Naples Fire Rescue District](#)
- [Districtwide Elections summary, prepared for the Florida Legislature](#)
- [HB 4029 \(2025\)](#), Florida House of Representatives
- [Greater Naples district to vote on change to at-large fire commissioners](#), Naples Daily News, 6/20/26

Summary

All voters who reside within the Greater Naples Fire Rescue District will decide this referendum. A majority of votes cast is needed for it to pass.