

House Political Subdivisions Committee

Prepared by the Utah Association of Special Districts

02/27/2026

Bill: HB 548 - Primary Election Amendments

Sponsor: Representative Stoddard

Floor Sponsor: Senator McKell

UASD Position: Track

This Bill modifies the circumstances under which certain primary elections may be held.

Discussion: The sponsor stated that the Bill expands the options available to municipalities by allowing a city to decide whether to hold a primary election rather than requiring one automatically. The sponsor explained that the Bill is permissive and intended to provide greater local control by allowing a municipality to forgo a primary or to hold one before the general election. Under current law, a municipal primary is required when more than two candidates file for an office, and the Bill changes that framework by requiring an affirmative decision by the governing body before a primary election may be held.

With respect to special district board member elections, the sponsor explained that current law allows a primary election to occur based on candidate thresholds. The Bill changes this by providing that a primary election for a special district board position may be held only if the board authorizes the primary and the number of candidates exceeds twice the number of available seats. If either condition is not met, no primary may be held, even if the number of candidates would otherwise trigger a primary under existing law. When a primary is authorized under the Bill, it must be conducted on the same date as the municipal or regular primary election and follow state primary election procedures. The sponsor stated that when no primary is held, candidates proceed directly to the general election or are otherwise treated as nominated, consistent with existing uncontested election and vacancy provisions.

Representative Dunnigan asked about current law for municipalities. The sponsor explained that a city is required to hold a primary when more than two candidates file for a municipal office. Representative Dunnigan also asked about the law for special districts. The sponsor clarified that special districts are not required to hold a primary. When asked what would occur if eight individuals were running for office and a city chose not to hold a primary, the sponsor responded that the decision would rest with the municipality, noting that such circumstances are uncommon. Representative Ward asked how often there is only one additional candidate beyond twice the number of available seats. The sponsor responded that it does occur, though he did not have specific data. The sponsor stated that allowing a municipality to forgo a primary in those situations could save taxpayer dollars and reduce voter fatigue.

Representative Arthur asked whether the Bill provides sufficient guardrails or whether municipalities could make the decision independently. The sponsor responded that current law mandates a primary once candidate thresholds are met, and that the Bill would instead allow municipalities to choose whether to hold a primary in those circumstances.

Representative Dunnigan suggested modifying the Bill to require a primary only when the number of candidates exceeds three times the number of available seats, stating that municipalities and special districts serve different populations and should be subject to different standards. The sponsor expressed openness to including a threshold that would require a primary if candidate numbers exceeded a specified level, while reiterating that the intent of the Bill is to avoid voter exhaustion and allow flexibility where appropriate.

The Committee adopted a voice amendment that revised the municipal primary provisions by deleting “may” and inserting “shall”, striking the word “only”, increasing the candidate threshold from twice to three times the number of available seats, and changing “authorized” to “held”. The sponsor asked whether the same amendment should apply to special service districts. The Committee decided to apply the amendment only to municipalities and leave the special district provisions unchanged. The Utah Association of County Clerks, Utah League of Cities and Towns, and a member of the public spoke in support of the Bill.

Yeas: 6

Nays: 2

N/V: 4

Outcome: HB 548, as amended, passed out of the Committee with a favorable recommendation.

Bill: HB 544 - County Land Use Authority Amendments

Sponsor: Representative Chevrier

Floor Sponsor:

UASD Position: Track

This Bill requires a county to accept and process a plan review application for a single-family dwelling on a qualifying parcel that is not part of a subdivision.

Discussion: The Committee adopted House Amendment 2, which makes modifications to line 98 and deletes line 99 through 106. The sponsor stated that the Bill establishes a narrow, objective baseline for parcels that predate subdivision approval requirements. The Bill is intended to empower more property owners to achieve increased beneficial use of their property for a single-family dwelling while preserving zoning authority, infrastructure requirements, public health standards, and safety protections. The sponsor explained that the legislation also aims to help mitigate the housing shortage and provide clarity, consistency, and fairness by broadly rewriting portions of subdivision law.

Representative Walter asked whether the Bill applies to counties rather than municipalities. The sponsor confirmed that the focus of the legislation is on counties. Representative Kohler asked whether the property owner would be providing a plat map that the county does not already have. The sponsor responded that it would be the owner’s responsibility to provide substantial evidence establishing when the subdivision was created. Representative Miller asked whether other counties have ordinances addressing this issue or whether it is limited to a single county. The sponsor explained that processes exist in various counties, but they are not standardized and

vary widely, noting that he is currently aware of two counties experiencing this problem. Representative Fitisemanu asked whether the policy would supersede counties that already have effective processes in place. The sponsor responded that many counties already have procedures and would be allowed to continue to use those standards because the Bill establishes a minimum requirement and is not intended to override existing effective systems.

Two members of the public spoke in support of the Bill.

Yeas: 7

Nays: 1

N/V: 4

Outcome: HB 544, as amended, passed out of the Committee with a favorable recommendation.