

What to know about the voter ID requirement

Ted Hall / Special to The Gazette

For the first time, voters here are required to show a valid photo ID before casting ballots in the municipal elections under way now, Gaston County Elections Director Adam Ragan told Belmont Rotarians on Oct. 18, 2023.

A driver's license is the most com-

mon form of ID voters may use, but many other IDs also qualify, Ragan said. A few examples include: A U.S. passport, a state ID from the N.C. Department of Motor Vehicles, a college or university student ID, a state or local government employee ID, and a military or veteran ID card.

Registered voters who do not have a

photo ID can obtain one free at their local Board of Elections office.

Early voting in Gaston County's municipal elections began on Oct. 19 and will end on Nov. 4. The Board of Elections at 410 W. Franklin Blvd., in Gastonia, is the only site open for early voting in the municipal elections. It is open on weekdays from 8 a.m. until 6

p.m. and will be open on Saturday, Oct. 28 and Saturday, Nov. 4, from 8 a.m. until 3 p.m.

All municipal precinct polling places will be open on Election Day, which is Nov. 7, from 6:30 a.m. until 7:30 p.m.

Ragan and three other full-time staff

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Gaston County Elections Director Adam Ragan (left) told Belmont Rotarians recently about new voter photo ID requirements in place for the 2023 municipal election, for which early voting has already started, and about the work of the Board of Elections. With him are Elizabeth Atterberry, chief judge at the Belmont 2 precinct polling site, who was a special guest at the meeting, and Belmont Rotary Club President Thomas Hunter. PHOTO PROVIDED BY TED HALL.

Voter

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members are responsible for registering new voters and maintaining accurate records for 155,000 registered voters in Gaston County. And their list of other duties is long. They conduct all elections, administer state elections laws, establish election precincts and voting sites, appoint and train precinct officials, prepare and distribute ballots and voting equipment, canvass and certify ballots cast in elections and investigate any voting irregularities.

Depending on the size of the election, it requires 300 to 500 workers to staff the polling sites at Gaston County's 46 precincts, Ragan said. A five-member bipartisan Board of Elections oversees the work of the elections staff.

Ragan has been elections director in

Gaston County for 12 years, and he has an extensive background in the field. He earned his bachelor's degree and a masters in public administration at Western Carolina University and then worked for eight years for the Federal Elections Commission in Washington, DC. He also worked five years at the N.C. State Board of Elections, and he has worked in the private sector as a specialist in preparing federal campaign finance reports.

"Elections are not federalized," he said. "With no federal law regulating elections, all 100 counties in North Carolina run their own elections."

He also said it's impossible for a hacker to affect the tabulating of ballots because the machines used are not connected to the internet. "I test every machine to make sure they are working properly before they go to a polling site," he said.

Even while conducting the current election, the elections staff is deep into preparations for the 2024 federal elec-

tion and the primary that will take place in the spring.

To learn more about voter ID and the work of the Board of Elections, visit: <https://www.gastongov.com/263/Board-of-Elections>

About Rotary: Rotary is an international service organization with 1.4 million members in more than 200 countries. "Service Above Self" is the Rotary motto. Rotarians work together to promote peace, fight disease, support education, grow local economies and protect the environment.

Belmont Rotary Club, which will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2025, meets for lunch and a program on local topics each Wednesday, 12:30 - 1:30 p.m., at the First Presbyterian Church in Belmont. Guests interested in learning more about local businesses and issues and how Rotary serves the community are welcome. For more information, visit www.belmontrotaryclub.com.