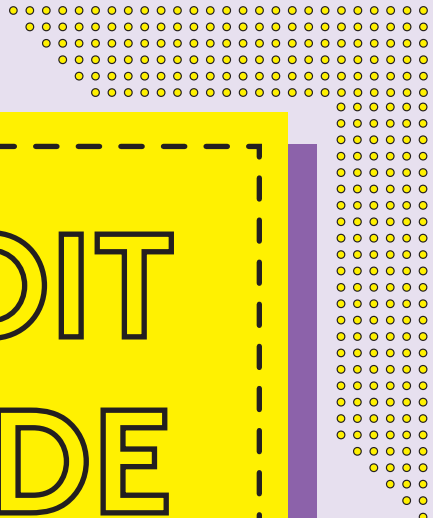
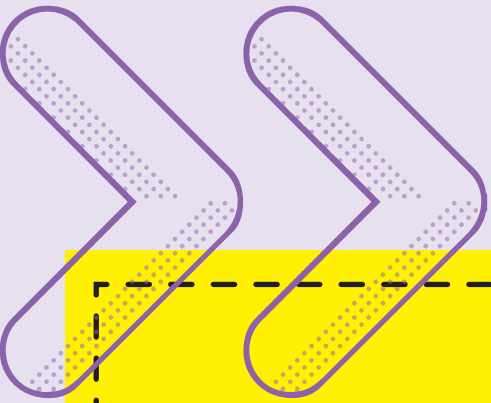
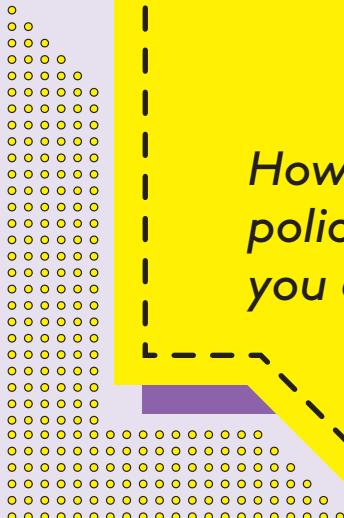
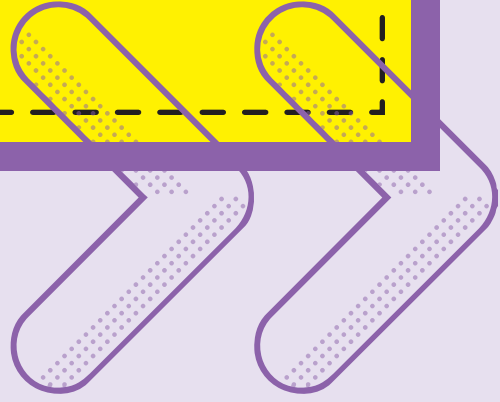




DETROIT ISSUES GUIDE 2026



*How state and local
policy impacts the issues
you care about*



YOUR VOTE MATTERS

By voting in elections, you help choose local, state, and national representatives and influence the decisions that shape your community. When more Detroiters vote, more Detroit voices are represented in the decisions that affect our neighborhoods, schools, public safety, and overall quality of life. Your vote is your opportunity to make your voice heard.

24%

Share of voting age Detroiters who cast their vote in the City's 2025 Mayoral Election – that's fewer than 1 in 4 people.

As we approach Michigan's August Primary Election and November General Election, this is your chance to vote for leaders who will shape the issues that matter most to you.

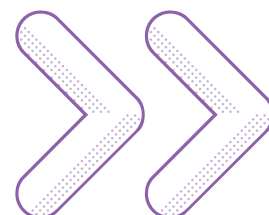
The August Primary Election determines the candidates that will be on the November ballot. Your vote will impact the things you and your community care the most about, from affordable housing and public education to public transit, public safety, and taxes.

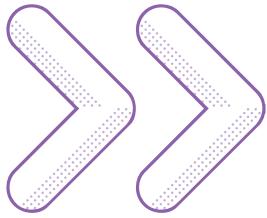


This issues guide, developed by the Citizens Research Council of Michigan and Detroit Future City, provides an educational and non-partisan overview of 5 issues that directly impact Detroit residents. It outlines why each issue is important, what's happening locally and statewide, and how your vote impacts it.

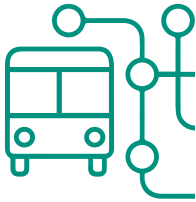
While this guide does not endorse any candidates/parties or tell you who to vote for, we hope this helps you understand the importance of your vote and how it influences the issues you care about.

ELECTIONS MATTER AND DIRECTLY IMPACT
WHAT HAPPENS IN YOUR COMMUNITY!





WHAT THIS GUIDE COVERS



PUBLIC TRANSIT

On the ballot this August: Transit millage for Wayne County.



PUBLIC EDUCATION

On the ballot this August: Replacement of the operating millage for the Detroit school district.



TAX POLICY

State laws and municipal ordinances dictate the local taxes levied on Detroiters.



RENTAL AFFORDABILITY

State and local policies directly shape housing affordability and home repair solutions.

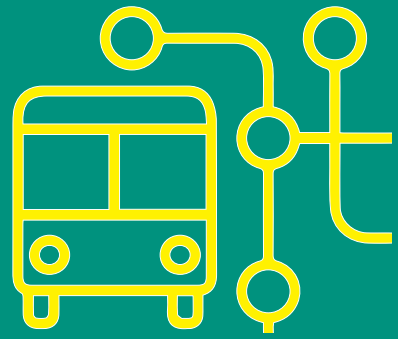


CRIME AND SAFETY

Federal, state, and local funding determines how resources are allocated to address crime.

We recognize that these aren't the only key issues of significance to Detroiters, and we encourage you to research other topics that are important to you as well.

PUBLIC TRANSIT



01 WHAT IS THE ISSUE + WHY IT MATTERS

Reliable public transit helps connect people to education, jobs, healthcare, shopping, and other essential services. It is especially important for youth, older adults, people with disabilities, and anyone who cannot or chooses not to drive. Public transit also reduces transportation costs, supports local businesses, and strengthens the regional economy.

The Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART) provides public transit services in Wayne, Oakland, Macomb, and Monroe counties. For many decades, individual municipalities in Wayne and Oakland County could choose to opt in or opt out of SMART services and the property tax that funds it. Oakland County ended this policy in 2022 when residents approved countywide SMART funding. In Wayne County, however, 26 out of 43 municipalities participate in this bus system while 17 "opt out", leaving many suburbs without SMART access.

10-year Transit Millage

Wayne County

SMART Bus System

Wayne County Transit Authority

Detroit Department of Transportation

02 WHAT'S HAPPENING IN WAYNE COUNTY?

In 2025, Michigan enacted legislation that eliminated the ability of individual municipalities in Wayne County to opt out of the SMART transit millage. As a result, in the August Primary Election, Wayne County voters will decide on a 10-year county-wide public transit millage ballot proposal, similar to the millage approved by Oakland County voters in 2022.

16%

Share of households in Wayne County that are transit-dependent.

\$8 / MONTH

Tax that would be levied for 10 years for a home with a taxable value of \$100,000.

\$57 MILLION

Funds that the Wayne County transit millage is expected to generate in its first year.

\$8 MILLION

Approximate funds from the millage that would go to DDOT per year.

The ballot proposal, if approved, will authorize the Wayne County Transit Authority to levy a countywide millage of up to 0.9831 mills for 10 years, starting with the 2026 tax year. This means, in addition to their property taxes, property owners in the 17 “opt out” cities, villages, and townships, including the City of Detroit, would pay a new tax — about \$8 per month (or \$99 annually), for a home with a taxable value of \$100,000, until 2035. For the 26 communities that are currently serviced by SMART and already pay this tax, this proposal would renew the millage at the same rate.

The tax is expected to generate roughly \$57 million annually and would be distributed to Wayne County, SMART and other community, regional and local transit providers like the Detroit Department of Transportation (DDOT).

03 HOW YOUR VOTE IMPACTS PUBLIC TRANSIT

Using the millage revenue, SMART aims to improve and expand operations in Wayne County through multiple new fixed-service routes, extensions, and additional on-demand (flex) zones, connecting Detroit to western and downriver suburbs like Livonia, Canton, Lincoln Park, and others. In Detroit, DDOT seeks to invest the funds in closing service gaps and improving the safety, reliability, and frequency of its existing bus system.

If the proposal does not pass, SMART would not be funded to operate in Wayne County. Existing SMART services in participating communities would be discontinued, while local providers with separate funding sources may continue operating.



Influences
existing and
new services



Impacts access
for non-driving
population



Adds costs
for some
municipalities

04 QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AS YOU VOTE

- ① What would be the estimated total cost to you per year based on your property's assessed value?
- ② In what ways would you and your community benefit – car savings, access to employment centers, added mobility?
- ③ What communities, regions, or activity centers would the expanded service connect?
- ④ What types of public transit options and services would the improved or expanded service offer in your local area?

Sources and additional resources

- [SMART - Wayne County Transit Evaluation \(2026\)](#)
- [Wayne County Transit Authority](#)

PUBLIC EDUCATION



01 WHAT IS THE ISSUE + WHY IT MATTERS

Since the mid-1990s, school funding has been a state responsibility in Michigan. Today, roughly 60% of school funding comes from the state, 30% from local government, and 10% from the federal government. The Michigan legislature annually determines the amount of base per-student funding (called the foundation allowance) for each school district. Since the 2020-21 school year, every district in the state (other than “hold-harmless” districts) receives the same foundation allowance. Under Michigan’s cost-sharing formula, local districts contribute to the foundation allowance through local taxes and the state covers the gap to reach the full allowance through the School Aid Fund. A district’s annual operating budget is largely a function of this per-student foundation allowance and the number of students enrolled in that district.

The base foundation allowance is also used to drive additional state dollars to districts to meet the added learning and health needs of low-income students and English learners. For the 2026-27 school year, additional funding for low-income students ranges from 20% to 26% of the foundation allowance (\$2,000 to \$2,700 per student), depending on the amount of student poverty.

School Funding

Local Non-Homestead School Tax

Foundation Allowance

School Aid Fund

Detroit Public Schools Community District

\$10,500

Foundation allowance per student for DPSCD's upcoming 2026-27 school year.

\$1.1 BILLION

DPSCD's budget for the upcoming 2026-27 school year, supporting 49,000 students.

18 MILLS

School operating tax that would be levied by DPSCD.

\$112 MILLION

Funds that the school tax is expected to generate in 2026.

02 WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MICHIGAN?

When Michigan reformed its school finance system in 1994 and shifted primary funding responsibility to the state, a key goal was to close the wide gaps in funding for basic school operations. Providing every district with the same foundation allowance became the number one priority of the state's annual school budget. Since achieving this objective in 2020-21, the state's funding priorities have shifted to a focus on more equitable funding.

Currently, state lawmakers are passing budgets to ensure that school funding is both equal and equitable across Michigan schools. Recent budgets have poured in additional dollars recognizing that some students come to school with additional learning needs that require added resources to sufficiently serve. While the foundation allowance has seen increases for inflation since 2021-22, the state has tripled its investment in the Opportunity Index to serve low-income students. Additionally, the state K-12 budget has provided substantial funding increases for English learners and students with disabilities to improve the funding equity.

03 HOW YOUR VOTE IMPACTS EDUCATION FUNDING

Detroiters elect state representatives who determine operational funding levels for Michigan's schools through the annual state K-12 budget. Voters also elect members of the Detroit Public Schools Community District's (DPSCD) school board, who are responsible for developing and maintaining an annual balanced budget.

This year, Detroit voters must vote whether to renew the local school operating property tax levied on non-homestead properties, such as rentals or businesses. Revenue from this tax represents the local share of the district's foundation allowance. Proposal S on the August ballot asks Detroiters to vote on renewing DPSCD's school operating tax (18 mills) to raise \$112 million in 2026, about 10% of the district's total budget. The tax will generate about \$2,300 per student toward the district's \$10,500 foundation allowance in 2026-27, with the School Aid Fund providing the remaining \$8,200 per student.



**Influences operational
funding levels for
schools**



**Decides members of
the district's school
board**

04 QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AS YOU VOTE

- ① What are candidates' priorities for improving public education in Michigan and Detroit?
- ② How do candidates propose to fund K-12 education and support student success?
- ③ How will candidates help prepare students for college, careers, and the workforce?

Sources and additional resources

- [Detroit Ballot Issue: Proposal S – School Operating Millage Replacement](#)

TAX POLICY



01 WHAT IS THE ISSUE + WHY IT MATTERS

Today, Detroit residents and businesses are among the most heavily taxed in the nation. The city's property tax rate is among the highest in Michigan and second highest among big cities in the nation. The city, school district, and library make up a large share of these taxes, but Detroiters also pay property taxes to the county, intermediate school district, several special authorities, and the state. City residents also are burdened by city income tax and city utility users tax.

This high tax rate affects both residents and businesses, contributing to the loss of population and employers while reducing Detroit's competitiveness as a place to live, work, and invest. Without some level of tax incentives, investments in Detroit housing and business properties will be very slow.

Lowering the tax burden will allow families to invest more in their homes and other household needs and help businesses compete with competitors located in other cities. It can also help attract more investment in the city to continue improving city and school services.

Property Taxes

City Income Tax

City Utility Users Tax

Temporary Tax Relief

Tax Abatement

HIGHEST

Detroit levies the highest city income tax rate in Michigan.

25%

Approximate share of property taxes paid to retire city and school debt.

2ND HIGHEST

Property taxes levied on Detroit property owners is the second highest among the biggest cities in each state.

LESS THAN 1/4

The city controls less than 1/4 of the total property tax rate.

02 WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ADDRESS TAXES IN DETROIT?

Leaders engaged in efforts to lower taxes have two options: reduce city services to Detroit residents who are arguably underserved relative to suburban neighbors or identify alternative revenue sources that would support property tax and/or income tax relief. The new administration is seeking new revenue sources to lower the rates for existing taxes. Enacting new taxes, including those that would increase the share of taxes paid by city visitors, requires authorization by the state legislature before the city can act.

In place of tax reform, Michigan law allows cities to use several tools, such as tax abatements, to provide targeted relief as part of the economic development efforts and to retain and attract families and businesses. Tax abatement programs allow the city to either freeze the pre-development property value of a development for tax purposes or to cut the tax rate in half. This form of tax relief generally is limited to 12 years. In exchange for this public investment, Detroit often requires investors to provide community benefits as compensation for the city's participation in project financing.

03 HOW YOUR VOTE IMPACTS TAX POLICY

Because Michigan law governs many local taxes and how cities are funded, state lawmakers play a major role in shaping Detroit's tax system. They can authorize new taxes that Detroit leaders may choose to levy and create programs that support city services. Detroiters also elect city representatives who determine the services provided with city and state resources and the cost/benefit of providing tax incentives.



**Shapes
Detroit's tax
system**



**Influences
new taxes and
programs**



**Impacts
services and tax
incentives**

04 QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AS YOU VOTE

- ① What strategies are candidates proposing to reduce taxes for Detroiters?
- ② Who benefits from these tax reductions?
- ③ Do the businesses investing in downtown and midtown provide job opportunities, amenities, or services you qualify for?

Sources and additional resources

- [An Assessment of Detroit's Economic Condition and a Critique of its Economic Development Efforts](#)
- [Allowing the Detroit DDA's Captured Tax Revenues to Again Fund Government Services](#)
- [Detroit's Use of Tax Abatements and Alternative Strategies to Improve Competitiveness](#)
- [Evaluating Local-Option Admission Taxes in Michigan Cities](#)
- [Evaluating a Local-Option Sales Tax Policy for Detroit](#)

RENTAL AFFORDABILITY



01 WHAT IS THE ISSUE + WHY IT MATTERS

Housing touches almost every issue on the ballot. Affordable, stable, and safe housing is the foundation for health, education, employment, and community. In Detroit, across Michigan, and around the country, that foundation is unstable for many people.

In Detroit, 62% of renters spend too much on housing, putting additional pressure on household budgets and often forcing difficult tradeoffs to cover other basic needs such as health care and food. More permanently affordable rental housing solutions are needed, along with home repair resources, to ensure rental housing is both affordable and safe.

Affordable Housing

Rental Housing

Home Repair

Zoning Reform

Housing Opportunity Tax Credit

02 WHY DETROIT IS DIFFERENT

Housing affordability in Detroit is not just a housing market problem; it is also an income problem and a policy problem at every level of government. Unlike many other places in Michigan and around the country, Detroit's housing affordability crisis is driven less by a shortage of housing and more by the low incomes of many residents.

- ① Low incomes are the primary cause of the city's affordability crisis.
- ② Much of Detroit's aging housing is in poor condition and may not always be safe or livable.

\$31,133

Median annual income of renters in Detroit.

\$778

Monthly rent and utilities that are affordable for the median renter household in Detroit.

\$1,091

Median monthly cost of rent and utilities in Detroit.

62%

Share of renters in Detroit who spend too much on housing.

- ③ Low rents in Detroit make repairs and renovations, which have become more expensive, difficult to finance.
- ④ High construction costs and low rents make the creation of new housing difficult.

04 WHAT IS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY

Decisions by state and local elected officials and policymakers directly shape whether these challenges improve or worsen. State departments such as the Michigan State Housing Development Authority set goals and policies that affect housing production and affordable housing across the state.

The Michigan Legislature passed legislation that would:

- ① Create a Housing Opportunity Tax Credit to help fund affordable rental housing.
- ② Limit the number of homes large institutional investors can own.
- ③ Allow some multifamily buildings to have a single staircase to help reduce costs.

There is also pending legislation that would place statewide limits on zoning and regulatory restrictions to help increase housing production.

At the local level, officials set rules and regulations, such as zoning, that guide what development can take place and how rentals are regulated.



Determine tax incentives



Shape zoning and regulatory reform



Decide investor ownership limits

05 QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AS YOU VOTE

- ① What are candidates' positions on providing subsidies for affordable rental housing development?
- ② Do candidates support policies that would increase or limit new housing production?
- ③ Do candidates have plans to improve the quality of existing housing?

Sources and additional resources

- [State of Michigan Housing Data Portal](#)
- [City of Detroit Housing and Revitalization Department - Strategic Plans, Reports and Data](#)
- [Detroit Future City - Research](#)

CRIME AND SAFETY



01 WHAT IS THE ISSUE + WHY IT MATTERS

Compared with peer cities, Detroit has relatively high crime rates, including high rates of homicide and motor vehicle theft. Public safety in Detroit is funded primarily at the local level through city income, property, casino, and utility users taxes. Policing alone receives almost one-third of the City of Detroit's General Fund budget.

The state of Michigan also plays a role in the resources available to local governments for public safety through state revenue-sharing programs and state appropriations, such as the recently created Public Safety Revenue Sharing Program. Launched through the fiscal year 2026 state budget process, the program provided \$43 million to local governments for public safety and distributed funds based on violent crime levels. The program requires local governments to use at least 75 percent of the funding they receive for law enforcement agencies or law enforcement officers. Up to 25 percent may be used for non-law-enforcement public safety purposes, such as training, recruitment, and programs designed to reduce identified public safety risks. Michigan also receives federal resources for public safety, law enforcement, and emergency management through federal grants.

Law Enforcement

Violence Prevention

Detroit Police Department

Public Safety Revenue Sharing Program

Community Violence Intervention

31

Homicides per 100,000 people in Detroit in 2024.

1,270

Motor vehicle thefts per 100,000 people in Detroit in 2024.

\$43 MILLION

Funds received through the Public Safety Revenue Sharing Program

\$446 MILLION

Detroit Police Department's budget for fiscal year 2027.

02 WHAT'S HAPPENING IN MICHIGAN?

Federal, state, and local legislators determine not only how much money is allocated to public safety, but also which approaches are used to address crime. In Michigan, state legislators are prioritizing both law enforcement and violence prevention, while also seeking to give communities the resources to tailor public safety solutions to their needs. Although efforts to create a Public Safety and Violence Prevention Fund were unsuccessful, new public safety funding moved forward in the 2026 budget through the creation of the Public Safety Revenue Sharing Program. Through this program, Detroit will have more resources for law enforcement officers, as well as funds that can be directed to other public safety priorities, including the Community Violence Intervention Program.

03 HOW YOUR VOTE IMPACTS PUBLIC SAFETY

Investments in public safety, policing, and crime prevention affect quality of life in Detroit. Public safety also influences the city's economic and population growth. A safer city can help retain current residents and attract new ones. This, in turn, can help increase property values and support economic growth, creating more opportunities for Detroiters.

Detroiters will elect congressional and state representatives who determine how much federal and state funding goes to local governments for public safety and influence the types of public safety initiatives local governments can pursue. They also elect city representatives who decide how federal, state, and local resources are spent to support public safety in Detroit.



Impacts quality of life and safety in the city



Affects population and economic growth



Drives resource allocation and safety initiatives

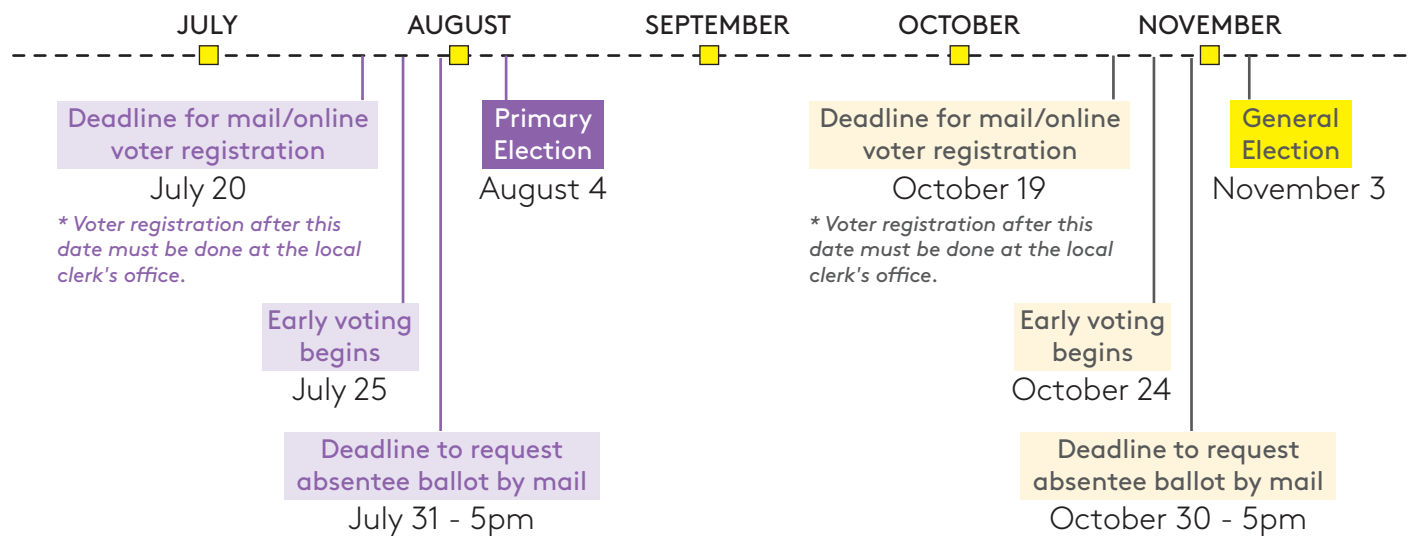
04 QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER AS YOU VOTE

- ① What are each candidate's plans to improve public safety in Detroit?
- ② How will candidates measure whether public safety investments are working?
- ③ What types of public safety strategies do candidates believe should be prioritized in your neighborhood?
- ④ How do candidates plan to reduce violent crime while building trust between law enforcement and the community?

Sources and additional resources

- [City of Detroit Budget](#)
- [Public Safety Revenue Sharing Program](#)
- [Community Violence Intervention](#)
- [Crime in the City – Identifying Detroit's Peer Cities](#)
- [Detroit Leads on Property Crime: Larceny and Motor Vehicle Theft on the Rise](#)
- [Detroit's Reduced Homicide Rates - Peer City Analysis](#)

VOTER RESOURCES



Register to vote and check registration status

Any U.S. citizen residing in Michigan and of 17.5-18 years of age by Election day can register. You can register online, by mail, or in-person at your local clerk's office using a valid ID.



Apply for an absentee ballot

Registered voters can request a mail ballot using a valid ID, up to 40 days before the election. You can apply online, by mail or in-person. Ballots must be received by 8pm on Election Day.



See what is on the ballot before you vote

Use your sample ballot to identify all the races you will be voting in, who the candidates are, and where they stand on issues.



Find your voting precinct and polling place

If you are casting your vote in-person early or on Election Day, look up your polling precinct and assigned polling place to ensure it has not changed.

Michigan Voter
Information Center

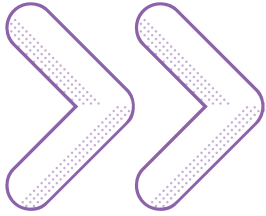
<https://mvic.sos.state.mi.us/>

City of Detroit
Department of Elections

<https://detroitmi.gov/departments/elections>

Detroit's Early Voting
Challenge

<https://early.onecivic.org/>



ON THE BALLOT: PRIMARY ELECTION

Voters will be nominating candidates from each political party to run in the General Election for the following races and also decide on 2 proposals.

- ① Governor
- ② U.S. Senator
- ③ U.S. Congressional Representative
- ④ State Senator
- ⑤ Representative in State Legislature
- ⑥ County Executive
- ⑦ Delegate to County Convention

PROPOSAL #1 Wayne County Transit Authority Wayne County Public Transportation Millage

PROPOSAL #2 Proposal S Detroit Public Schools Community District Operating Millage Replacement

ON THE BALLOT: GENERAL ELECTION

Selected candidates from the Primary Election will run against each other for the following races at the November General Election. Proposals, if any, for the General Election are yet to be finalized.

- ① Governor
- ② Attorney General
- ③ Secretary of State
- ④ U.S. Senator
- ⑤ U.S. Congressional Representative
- ⑥ State Senator
- ⑦ Representative in State Legislature
- ⑧ County Executive
- ⑨ County Commissioner
- ⑩ Delegate to County Convention
- ⑪ Judge - 3rd Circuit Court
- ⑫ Judge - Probate Court
- ⑬ Judge - 36th District Court



DETROIT
FUTURE
CITY