



City of Sunnyvale

Agenda Item-No Attachments (PDF)

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REPORT TO COUNCIL

SUBJECT

Campaign Ethics Subcommittee (Information Only)

BACKGROUND

In 2006 the City Council created a Campaign Ethics Public Education Outreach Program and appointed a Subcommittee to work with City staff to develop a campaign ethics brochure for general distribution to the public. The Council also approved funding for the printing and distribution of the brochure. In 2007 the Council approved an ethics brochure ("Campaign Ethics Guide") and subsequently distributed it to the public prior to that year's November election.

Most recently, in 2013, the Council limited the responsibility of the subcommittee to potentially running a "Last Word" event to address any negative campaign issues. The task of updating the Campaign Ethics Guide (Guide) was left to staff since most revisions were limited to changing dates and updating the percentage of voters with vote-by-mail status.

EXISTING POLICY

Council Policy 7.0 Long-term Advocacy Positions - Planning and Management A(2): In cooperation with County Registrar of Voters, support practices which would increase voter turnout in local elections (e.g., mail ballots, more information to voters for judicial elections).

DISCUSSION

City staff has reviewed past practice and is preparing for the 2016 election cycle. This report presents the plan staff will pursue unless Council desires to place this matter on a future agenda and provide other direction and/or resources, if applicable.

For each election cycle since 2007, the City Council has updated the Campaign Ethics Guide and explored the possibility of hosting a candidate forum, including an option for a Last Word event to discuss any negative campaign issues; all of this has been completed based on the recommendations of an appointed Campaign Ethics Subcommittee. In 2011 the Council took action to consider the appointment of an Ethics Subcommittee prior to September of every election year. The early presentation timeline of this report is due to the August 16 Special Election for the vacant Council Seat Four.

Campaign Ethics Guide

During the election season, members of the public often have questions regarding City Council candidate campaigns and campaign disclosure guidelines. Providing information on the campaign and ethics guidelines for candidates provides the public with valuable information during an election season and could inspire a greater level of participation in the political process.

In 2013, Council left the task of updating the Guide to staff since previous revisions were limited to non-substantive changes. The FY 2016/17 Recommended Budget includes the cost for the production and distribution of the document.

Typically the Guide is distributed as an insert to the Quarterly Report in the fall. However, in anticipation of the August 2016 Special Election, the timeline for distribution of the Guide will be advanced to the July Quarterly Report. Therefore, staff plans to publish an updated, condensed, and streamlined version of the Campaign Ethics Guide via the July edition of the Quarterly Report for the Special Election in August and the October edition ahead of the General Election in November. Instead of having the Guide as an *insert* to the Quarterly Report, the information will be printed *within* the Quarterly Report.

Candidate Forum(s)

Prior to the 2009 and 2011 elections, the Subcommittee considered the potential for conducting candidate debates. In 2011, the consideration was limited to debates beyond those already scheduled and moderated by the League of Women Voters. By 2013, the subcommittee recommended and Council approved further limiting the effort in this area to the Last Word Event (discussed further below). Council also agreed to keep the role of City staff limited to providing information and logistical support to non-partisan moderators selected on the basis of their experience in conducting similar events (e.g., the League of Women Voters or the Markula Center).

The League of Women Voters (LWV) has worked with staff to secure the Council Chambers in order to hold a candidate forum ahead of the November election; coordination for a candidate forum ahead of the August Special Election is underway. The LWV will also host a ballot measure information session in the Library Program Room in the fall. The use of these facilities is provided at no cost since the organization is providing a community service and voter education. Staff does not plan to coordinate any candidate forum/debate outside of those already scheduled by the League of Women Voters.

Last Word Event

As noted above, by 2013 the Subcommittee recommended and Council approved limiting City efforts in the area of candidate forums to that of a potential Last Word Event. The concept of a Last Word event was created to address any negative campaign pieces that may surface just prior to Election Day. The Event would be held the night before the election at the discretion of the pre-determined, independent moderator.

Since the inception of the Last Word Event in 2009 none have been held. The value in holding an event the night before an election with the intent of influencing voters seems to have diminished with the sharp increase in Vote by Mail voters and the increased use of social media for election campaigns. According to the Santa Clara County Registrar of Voters (ROV), there are 759,810 registered voters in Santa Clara County. Of those, 545,878 are permanent Vote by Mail voters (72% of the total) and 4,759 are military and overseas voters. At this time, staff does not plan to coordinate a Last Word Event for the August or November elections.

Campaign Ethics Subcommittee

In the past, this Council Subcommittee was tasked with updating the Campaign Ethics Guide and potentially hosting candidate forum(s) and/or Last Word event. As presented in this report, the path forward for the 2016 election cycle maintains the final actions of the City in the 2013 election cycle,

with staff updating the Guide and not hosting a Last Word event. As such, there are no remaining tasks proposed for the Subcommittee unless otherwise directed by the Council.

PUBLIC CONTACT

Public contact was made by posting the Council agenda on the City's official-notice bulletin board outside City Hall, at the Sunnyvale Senior Center, Community Center and Department of Public Safety; and by making the agenda and report available at the Sunnyvale Public Library, the Office of the City Clerk and on the City's website.

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