

# Summary of Voter-Owned Elections in Olympia

Proposed by the Olympia chapter of Washington Public Campaigns August 2008

## 1. How Candidates Qualify

- a. The voter-owned election program is voluntary. No candidate is required to participate.
- b. First, a candidate files a notice of intent to participate in the program, and signs a contract agreeing to abide by the rules of the program.
- c. Then, candidates must collect signatures and qualifying donations of \$10 (no more, no less, paid to the city) from at least 300 registered Olympia voters.
- d. The signatures and qualifying donations must be submitted to the city within 28 days after the candidate filing period.
- e. If the candidate fails to qualify, the qualifying donations are placed in the city's public campaign account.
- f. To help them collect signatures and donations, candidates may accept private seed-money donations for their campaign, up to \$1,000 total, with no more than \$100 from any single donor.

## 2. Prohibition on Private Donations

- a. Once they qualify for the voter-owned election program, candidates may not accept any private campaign donations nor spend their own money for their campaign.
- b. There is an exception for small in-kind donations (such as food for events), which are allowed up to a value of \$300 total, with no more than \$50 from any single donor, and only from Olympia residents.
- c. Traditional volunteering is not a donation, and is allowed. However, providing free professional services that would normally be paid for (as defined in state campaign finance law) is a donation.

## 3. Amount of Funds for Candidates

- a. For the primary election, candidates receive \$6,000 in public funds. Seed-money donations are deducted from this, so each candidate will have the same \$6,000 total for their primary campaign.
- b. Candidates who advance to the general election receive another \$9,000 in public funds.
- c. In future years, these amounts will be adjusted for inflation.

## 4. "Fair Fight" Funds

- a. When an opposing candidate raises or spends more campaign money than is provided in public funds, candidates in the voter-owned election program receive fair fight funds equal to the excess amount raised by their opponent, up to a limit.
- b. Fair fight funds are limited to \$6,000 for the primary election, and \$9,000 for the general election (cumulative, for a total of up to \$15,000).
- c. A third-party independent expenditure made on behalf of an opposing candidate, or attacking the publicly-funded candidate, is also matched with fair fight funds.

## 5. Overall Spending Cap

- a. The entire voter-owned election program will be limited to an overall spending cap of \$2.50 per Olympia resident per year.
- b. In future years, this amount will be adjusted for inflation and population growth.
- c. If it appears this limit may be reached, the city will hold in reserve enough public funds to ensure full funding for candidates in the general election.
- d. If this limit is reached, the available public funds will be distributed evenly to all qualified candidates.

## 6. Use of Public Funds

- a. Candidates may spend public funds for campaign purposes only (as defined by state campaign finance law).
- b. Candidates may not use public funds for private gain, nor pay or buy things from themselves, a relative, or their own business, nor give the funds to other candidates, ballot measure campaigns, or other organizations. (This requirement is more strict than state campaign finance law.)

## 7. Penalties for Misuse of Public Funds

- a. To knowingly use public funds for personal gain is a gross misdemeanor. The candidate must return all public funds (spent or unspent) to the city, plus 12% interest, plus a 20% administrative fee. The candidate may also face criminal penalties.
- b. An unintentional or minor violation of the voter-owned election rules is a civil infraction. The candidate must return the public funds involved plus pay a penalty. For unintentional first-time violations, the penalty is waived.
- c. If a candidate repeatedly violates the rules, or drops out of the race, then the candidate must return all public funds (spent or unspent) to the city, plus 12% interest, plus a 20% administrative fee.
- d. If the candidate must withdraw because of a personal emergency, or has money left over after the election, the candidate must return the unspent funds to the city, without penalty.

## 8. Public Records

- a. Candidates must still follow all campaign finance reporting requirements of the Washington State Public Disclosure Commission.
- b. Candidates must file the same state reports with the city.
- c. Privately-funded opposing candidates also must file reports with the city, to ensure that fair fight funds are provided promptly.
- d. All voter-owned election information is public record, is subject to full public disclosure, and will be posted on the city website.

**For more information** about Voter-Owned Elections in Olympia, or to get involved in this effort, please contact Monica Hoover, with the Olympia chapter of Washington Public Campaigns, at (360) 943-3070 or [thurston@washclean.org](mailto:thurston@washclean.org).