
R-21-53
Meeting 21-10
May 27, 2021

AGENDA ITEM #6

To: Board of Directors
Open Space Authority

From: Andrea Mackenzie
General Manager

SUBJECT

Informational Item: Summary of Costs for Past Four General Elections

REVENUE/COST

There are no costs associated with this item.

BACKGROUND

The Santa Clara Valley Open Space Authority (Authority) is governed by a seven-member Board of Directors (Board) elected to four-year terms.

All elections, including measures and nominations of candidates for Directors, occur bi-annually (in even-numbered years) and the Authority's Board authorizes the Board of Supervisors of the County of Santa Clara to consolidate the elections, canvass the returns, and cause the results to be properly certified to the Authority's Board.

In anticipation of an upcoming election year, staff would submit a Request for Cost Estimates form with the County's Registrar of Voters (ROV) to obtain an approximate budget for election-related expenditures. Board member election expenditures are typically approved by the Board through the approval of the annual budget. Consideration and approval of proposing a new measure on the ballot and its related expenditures are approved by resolution of the Board at a publicly-held regular meeting.

In the past four (4) general elections, the Authority has placed two (2) measures and four (4) board member elections on the ballot. Unopposed, qualified candidates are deemed elected and do not appear on the ballot.

DISCUSSION

Types of Costs

Cost estimates provided by the Registrar of Voters (ROV) are based on projected voter registration and subject to change upon final billing following an election. Estimates include base charges for measures and board member elections, mailing costs, printing costs, as well as appointment fees and candidate statement costs.

Base Charges – base fees charged by ROV to cities, schools, and special districts in primary and general elections. As of November 2019, the ROV charges \$2.66 per registered voter for the first item on ballot and \$0.76 for each additional item on ballot for the same registration. The minimum charge per jurisdiction per contest is \$6,182. However, during an election year, if there is a single candidate

qualified to appear on the ballot, such candidate is deemed elected and will not have his/her name on the ballot, as per the Board-approved Board Operating Rules and Procedures (BRD-028-07). In such case, the Authority does not incur any base charges for that candidate.

Absentee Voters Fee (applicable to elections prior to 2020) – vote-by-mail fees charged by ROV to cities, schools, and special districts in primary and general elections. Prior to the 2020 election year, the ROV charged \$0.31 per registered absentee voter for the first item on ballot and \$0.11 for each additional item on ballot for the same registration. Like the base charges, the Authority does not incur any absentee voters fee if there is only a single candidate qualified to appear on the ballot. In November 2019, the ROV removed this fee and consolidated this cost into its base charges.

Measure Pages – as of November 2019, the ROV charges a fixed fee of \$7,405 per full page of 800 words in five languages, plus cost of printing the text pages in the County Voter Information Guide (CVIG). The ROV also charges varying fixed fees for impartial analysis, arguments, and rebuttals for the measure. Charges are only incurred if the Authority's Board approves placing a measure on the ballot.

Shared Printing Costs – cost of ballot printing in nine languages. The ROV provides the Authority with an estimated sharing printing cost of \$0.25 per registered voter for the first item on ballot and \$0.13 for each additional item on ballot for the same registration.

Legal Publications – cost of any required legal publications. The ROV does not include this cost in the estimate but, in general, this cost is minimal. The Authority incurs costs associated with legal notices regardless whether the contest is opposed or unopposed.

Candidate Statements – candidates have the option to submit a statement to be included in the CVIG. As outlined in the Board Operating Rules and Procedures (BRD-028-07), all candidates opting to submit a statement of no more than 200 words are financially responsible for paying \$500 to cover the cost of printing, handling, translating, and mailing the candidate statements. The ROV bills the Authority the balance of all candidates' statement costs in excess of \$500.

Appointment Fees – the minimum charge for special districts that do not go on the ballot due to insufficient number of candidates. As of November 2019, the ROV charges \$2,048 per special district per contest. In the event the Authority has an unopposed candidate, the agency only incurs the minimum charge of \$2,048, plus the costs of any legal publications as mentioned above.

Summary of Costs Incurred

Since 2014, the Authority's election costs are as summarized:

Type of Charges	2014	2016	2018	2020	Totals
Base Charge	698,254	117,929	80,261	2,072,287	2,968,731
Absentee Voters Fee	167,581	29,246	19,905		216,732
Measure Pages	119,691			168,583	288,274
Shared Printing Costs	59,685	12,227	9,590	207,979	289,481
Notice of Election Polling Places	4,357	232	194	362	5,145
Candidate Statements		3,524	2,194	9,594	15,312
Appointment Fee	4,376	2,188	3,282	2,048	11,894
Total Fees	1,053,944	165,346	115,426	2,460,853	3,795,569

	2014	2016	2018	2020
Number of Candidate Statements	0	2	1	3
Number of Appointees (Unopposed)	4	2	3	1

In 2014, the Authority placed the Open Space, Wildlife Habitat, Clean Water, and Increased Public Access Measure on the ballot. Of the total election cost of \$1,053,944, the cost of the measure (Measure Q) was \$1,049,472. All four candidacies were unopposed, resulting in a much lower-than-usual election expense of \$4,472 (\$4,376 in appointment fees and \$96 in legal notices).

In 2016, an election was called for three seats on the Board. Two candidates ran unopposed. One district had two candidates, resulting in slightly increased candidate statement fees. However, the increase in election costs was mainly due to higher voter turnout during a presidential general election year.

In 2018, three candidacies were unopposed. A fourth candidate published a candidate statement.

In 2020, the Authority placed a renewal of Measure Q on the ballot. Of the total election cost of \$2,460,853, the cost of the measure (Measure T) was \$2,260,108. Costs for the election of board members (\$200,745) were much higher compared to the costs incurred in 2016 due to several factors:

- The Registrar of Voters revised its fee schedule in November 2019, increasing base charges by almost 70% and measure costs by over 40%
- 2020 was a presidential general election and voter turnout was extremely high
- Only one of three candidates ran unopposed

A total of three candidates submitted candidate statements during the 2020 election. In 2018, the agency paid approximately \$2,200 for one candidate statement. By 2020, after the ROV increased the cost of candidate statements, the agency paid approximately \$9,600 for three candidate statements.

Future Considerations

Several factors may affect the future costs of elections for the Authority:

- Political climate leading to higher voter turnout will increase base charges.
- As the Authority's recognition expands, more candidates may be interested in serving on the Board. Elections with multiple nominations will incur base charges whereas unopposed candidacies only incur a flat-rate appointment fee.
- The ROV may continue to increase costs. They recently increased costs in Nov 2019.

Considering that the Authority's annual revenues are leveled, the potential for rising election costs in every even-numbered year causes a strain on the annual budget. A majority of revenues received from the District 1 Benefit Assessments cover a majority of the agency's non-discretionary operating expenses, salaries and benefits, and capital purchases. Revenues previously received from the Measure Q Parcel Tax do not allow the agency to use funds to cover election costs. While the Reserve Fund is an unrestricted fund, no recurring revenues replenish into that fund; therefore, utilizing monies from a non-replenishing fund to cover recurring costs will rapidly deplete the fund.

Staff will continue to look to the Board for guidance and direction as staff develops annual budgets and work plans that allow the agency to fiscally support both non-discretionary expenses, such as election costs, and projects that fulfill the agency's mission and priorities.

RECOMMENDATION

This report is for informational purposes only and does not require Board action.

Prepared by:

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