

ALBANY CALIFORNIA



CITY OF ALBANY
1000 SAN PABLO AVENUE
ALBANY, CA 94706
www.AlbanyCA.org

2 May 2022

MEMORANDUM

To: Albany City Council Members

From: Mayor Jordan

Re: Waive candidate's statement fee

RECOMMENDATIONS

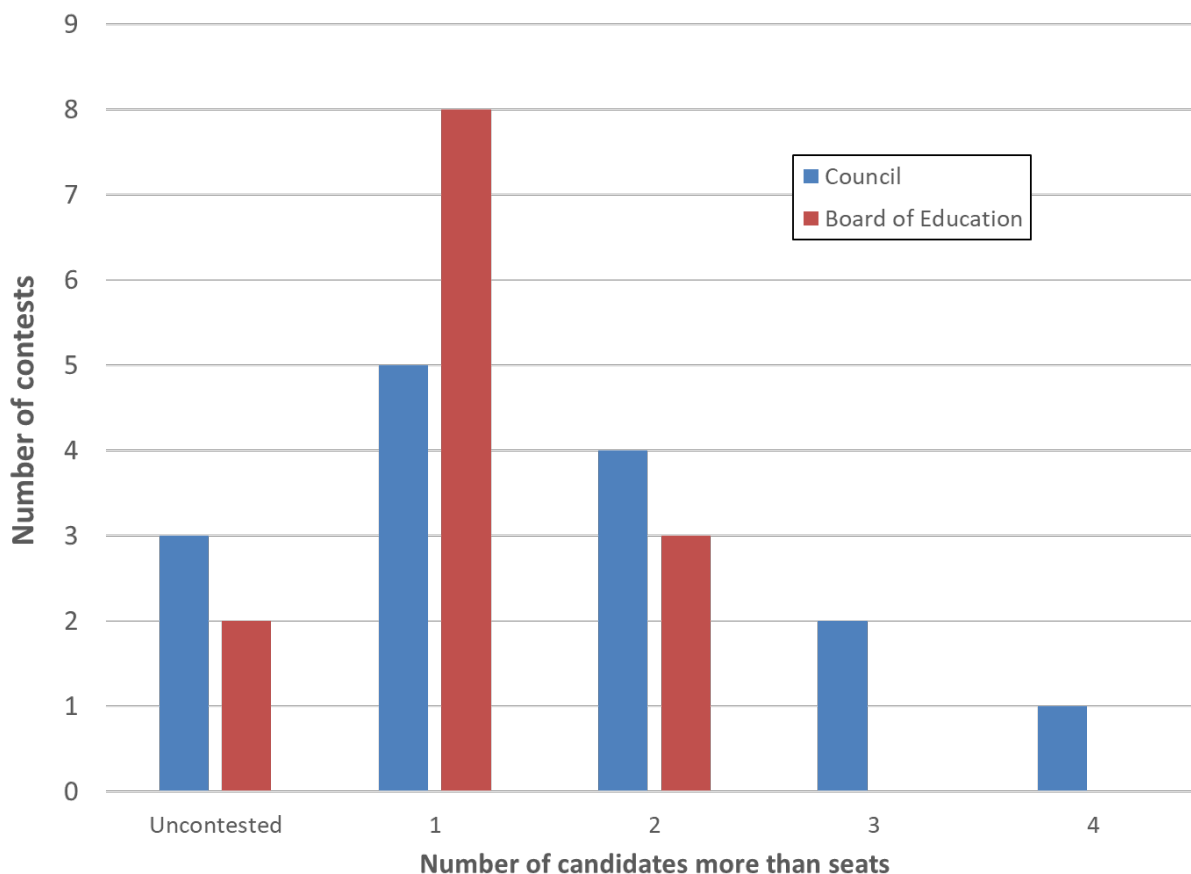
Direct staff to prepare an amendment to the Master Fee Schedule waiving the fee for printing of a candidate's statement in the voter information guide.

BACKGROUND

Per the Master Fee Schedule, candidates must pay the "entire fee, as set by the County of Alameda", for having their statement of qualifications printed in the voter information guide. This fee was \$1,000 for the 2020 election.

The figure below shows the historic distribution of the number of candidates in excess of the number of seats to be filled running for office. These data are for contests from 1996 through 2020. The data are from the [California Elections Data Archive](#). The archive is a joint project of the Center for California Studies and Institute for Social Research of California State University, Sacramento, and the California Secretary of State. It has archived the results of all county, city, and school district contests from 1995 to current.

One fifth and about one sixth of Council and Board of Education contests have been uncontested, respectively. One third and about thirds of Council and Board of Education contests have almost been uncontested (only one candidate more than seats to be filled), respectively. Together about one half and three quarters of Council and Board of Education elections have either been uncontested or almost uncontested.



DISCUSSION

To the extent a democracy is healthy as indicated by more people interested in serving in office than there are seats, Albany's democracy is on the edge. At times only as many people seek to serve as there are seats to be filled. When this occurs, it does not allow voters to choose among approaches to and styles of representing them they prefer. It also does not allow the electorate to express its judgement of which policy matters are a priority and what positions on those matters it supports. When an election is almost uncontested, the voters are only able to weakly express both of the above because the choices are likely limited relative to perspective among them.

At the outset of its review of potential election methods for Albany early last decade, the Charter Review Committee asked the Board of Education and the Council for criteria important to each with regard to judging methods against each other. Out of its concern for uncontested elections the Board asked the Committee to use the number of candidates relative to seats. The Committee duly applied this criterion to the methods it researched, which were all at large. It found no difference between the methods (section starting on page 26 of the Committee's [election method review report](#), which is page 13 of its research appendix).

Consequently, if Albany desires to improve the health of its democracy by increasing the number of people seeking to serve in office, it needs to do something differently than it has done in the recent past. One of the actions it is taking in association with the change in election method this year is providing education for potential candidates.

Another action Albany can take is waiving the fee for a candidate to have their statement of qualifications printed in the voter information guide. This is one of, if not the, source of information on each candidate most used by voters. While data are not available, its high cost relative to personal incomes at the outset of what is typically the campaign period for candidates in Albany may dissuade some from running for office. In contrast, waiving the fee, at a cost of several thousand to less than ten thousand dollars, will have negligible impact on the City's general revenues, which were \$28 million in fiscal year 2021 (per page 25 of the 2021 [Annual Comprehensive Financial Report](#)).

For Board of Education candidates, at its meeting on April 26th, the Board requested the City waive the candidate statement printing fee and committed the Albany Unified School District to reimburse the City for the cost. As such, it would be consistent for the City to waive the statement printing fee for Council candidates.

SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

There are no direct environmental sustainability consequences or benefits of the recommended action.

SOCIAL EQUITY AND INCLUSIVITY CONSIDERATIONS

The less a potential candidate's income, the more substantial the cost of the candidate's statement printing fee. Due to social network effects, this obtains even if the potential candidate raises funds to pay the fee rather than paying it themselves. The effect being that on average people know more people in their socioeconomic class than in a class with more wealth. Consequently, the fee is an economically unjust barrier for which the City is responsible.

A theoretically more economically just approach would be to charge a fee based on a sliding scale relative to a candidate's income. The burden and privacy concern of administering this, as it would require a candidate to submit proof of income in the form of a tax return, is sufficiently high and onerous, respectively, to make this approach not pragmatically viable.

CITY COUNCIL STRATEGIC PLAN INITIATIVES

Waiving the candidate statement printing fee is not a work item in the Strategic Plan. More generally, this action would support Goal 2, Engage Our Diverse Community, to the extent it results in people choosing to run for Council that would more closely meet the desire of the electorate, in whole or part.

FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

As relayed above, the cost of waiving the candidate statement printing fee, which would be several thousand to less than ten thousand dollars, is minimal relative to the City's general revenues, which were \$28 million in fiscal year 2021.