



CITY COUNCIL AGENDA REPORT

REPORTS AGENDA ITEM NO. M.1.

DATE: October 15, 2019

TO: City Council

FROM: Alexander Nguyen, City Manager, (805) 385-7430, alexander.nguyen@oxnard.org

SUBJECT: The Oxnard Government Accountability and Ethics Act. (10/25/15)

RECOMMENDATION

That the City Council approve a resolution placing the Oxnard Government Accountability and Ethics Act (the Act) on the March 3, 2020 primary election ballot.

BACKGROUND

The City of Oxnard (City) commissioned a Resident Satisfaction and Community Priorities Survey (Survey), conducted between August 29 - September 3, 2019, to solicit feedback from the community on a host of issues including City service priorities, quality of life concerns, and general community attitudes towards government accountability and increasing City revenues in order to maintain City services.

The City highly values the varied perspectives of the public it serves and seeks to continue to earn the community's trust and confidence in City practices, including institutionalizing good government provisions related to fiscal accountability, ethics, and transparency.

The current City administration is working to overcome a decades-long record of mismanagement and have made significant strides in reforming key areas of government:

1. **Sunshine Ordinance:** The City Council passed the Sunshine Ordinance in November 2018, requiring Council agendas and reports be published to the public twelve days before a regular meeting of Council and seven days before a special meeting. The Sunshine Ordinance policy is a substantial increase from the state law requirement of posting agendas only 72 hours before a regular City Council meeting. This ensures that residents of Oxnard have timely access to information and an opportunity to address the various legislative bodies of the City before governmental decisions are made.
2. **New Financial Leadership:** The City Manager hired a new Chief Financial Officer (CFO) and Assistant CFO, whose experiences both in municipal and private sector finance bring top-notch fiscal leadership to Oxnard. The new officers are working to implement best practices and internal controls to secure a sound financial future for the City.
3. **Improving the Planning and Permitting Process:** The City has created an expedited plan check resubmittal process for faster plan reviews, established specific expectations for turnaround times, automated procedures, and simplified approval authority
4. **Budgeting:** The City made severe cuts in the current budget to address the ongoing structural deficit.

DISCUSSION

Analyzing the results from the Survey, the Act was composed to amend the Oxnard City Code and take the next steps to address the public's desire to broaden and institutionalize good government practices. The Act would:

1. Prohibit elected officials and planning commissioners from accepting gifts from lobbyists or city contractors;
2. Impose, for the first time in Oxnard, contribution limits to the Mayor, City Council and other candidates running for an elected office;
3. Provide transparency by posting all high-value City contracts and monthly financial reports on the City's website for public review; and
4. Establishing a three-term limit for the City Council and Mayor, and changing the Mayor's term from two to four years, to be consistent with the City Council.

The benefits provided by this voter measure are important in establishing a high functioning City government. Prohibiting council members and commissioners from accepting gifts from lobbyists and City contractors eliminates conflict of interest and allows voters to feel confident that their decision-makers are uninfluenced by special interests.

Eliminating the influence of special interest in Oxnard by imposing contribution limits to any candidate for elective office ensures that the City's interests are protected. The City's interests are to provide a representative government that is accessible to all citizens, to deter corruption and the appearance of corruption caused by the coercive influence of large financial contributions on candidates' positions.

Posting City contracts and financial reports on the City's website expands transparency by allowing public review of documents related to how the City conducts business on behalf of its residents.

Establishing term limits for the Mayor and members of the City Council demonstrates that the City is listening to the community's feedback and is taking action to address this issue.

What the Act does not do is give the City any additional powers, but rather institutionalizes increased ethics, transparency, and fiscally responsible practices while seeking to eliminate special interest influence in our local elections all while being accountable to Oxnard residents.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

This agenda item supports the Quality of Life strategy. The purpose of the Quality of Life strategy is to build relationships and create opportunities within the community for safe and vibrant neighborhoods, which will showcase the promising future of Oxnard. This item supports the following goals and objectives:

Objective 3a. Create a renewed focus on establishing a positive outlook and orientation of our City, neighborhoods and overall community.

Objective 3c. Improve our methods of communicating with residents, businesses and neighborhoods (e.g. leverage social media and tools like Nextdoor).

This agenda item supports the Organizational Effectiveness strategy. The purpose of the Organizational Effectiveness strategy is to strengthen and stabilize the organizational foundation of the City in the areas of Finance, Information Technology, and Human Resources, and to improve workforce quality while increasing transparency to the public. This item supports the following goals and objectives:

Goal 1. To help foster a healthy and accountable corporate foundation by strengthening the support functions of the

organization, which include Finance, Information Technology and Human Resources.

Goal 2. Increase transparency with Council, community and staff related to the City's budget and financial management processes.

Objective 2b. Prepare Quarterly Budget Updates and have month-end financial reports available via City's Website.

Objective 2c. Create a standardized template to present financial and other data to the general public.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact.

COMMITTEE OUTCOME

This item did not originate in Committee.

Prepared by: Katie Casey, Communications Manager, Adam Smith, Project Manager

ATTACHMENTS

1. Oxnard Government Accountability and Ethics Act Resolution placing on ballot
2. Oxnard Government Accountability and Ethics Act Ordinance
3. Request for Specified Election Services - Measures
4. Oxnard Issues Survey
5. Presentation - Oxnard Government Accountability & Ethics Act