



[First Last name]
Councilmember District [District No.]

SUPPLEMENTAL REVISED AGENDA MATERIAL for Supplemental Packet 2

Meeting Date: February 4, 2020

Item Number: 2

Item Description: Statement on Item 2 - Amendments to the Berkeley Election Reform Act to prohibit Officeholder Accounts; Amending BMC Chapter 2.12

Submitted by: Councilmember Hahn

This item seeks to outlaw Officeholder Accounts in Berkeley. I would like to offer an alternative: to allow Officeholder Accounts but establish regulations to limit them in ways that reflect Berkeley's limitations on campaign donations and consider narrowing the uses for which Officeholder Account funds can be used.

The action I advocate for Council to take is to refer a discussion of Officeholder accounts to the Agenda and Rules Committee, to consider a reasonable set of limitations and rules for such accounts and bring back recommendations to the full Council, for the Council to consider referring to the Fair Campaign Practices Committee.



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ACTION CALENDAR

February 4, 2020

To: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Council
From: Vice Mayor Sophie Hahn
Subject: Statement on Item 2 - Amendments to the Berkeley Election Reform Act to prohibit Officeholder Accounts; Amending BMC Chapter 2.12

RECOMMENDATION

This item seeks to outlaw Officeholder Accounts in Berkeley. I would like to offer an alternative: to allow Officeholder Accounts but establish regulations to limit them in ways that reflect Berkeley's limitations on campaign donations and consider narrowing the uses for which Officeholder Account funds can be used.

The action I advocate for Council to take is to refer a discussion of Officeholder accounts to the Agenda and Rules Committee, to consider a reasonable set of limitations and rules for such accounts and bring back recommendations to the full Council, for the Council to consider referring to the Fair Campaign Practices Committee.

Officeholder accounts are accounts an elected official can open, and raise funds for, to pay for expenses related to the office they hold.¹ They are not campaign accounts, and cannot be used for campaign purposes. The types of expenses Officeholder Accounts can be used for include research, conferences, events attended in the performance of government duties, printed newsletters, office supplies, travel related to official duties, etc. Cities can place limits on Officeholder Accounts, as Oakland has done.² Officeholder Accounts must be registered as official "Committees" and adhere to strict public reporting requirements, like campaign accounts. They provide full transparency to the public about sources and uses of funds.

The FCPC bases its recommendation to prohibit Officeholder Accounts on arguments about "equity" and potential "corruption" in elections. The report refers repeatedly to "challengers" and "incumbents," suggesting that Officeholder Accounts are vehicles for unfairness in the election context.

I believe that the FCPC's recommendations reflect a misunderstanding of the purpose and uses of Officeholder Accounts, equating them with campaign accounts and suggesting that they create an imbalance between community members who apparently have already decided to run against an incumbent (so-called "challengers") and elected officials who are presumed to be

¹ <http://www.fppc.ca.gov/content/dam/fppc/NS-Documents/LegalDiv/Regulations/Index/Chapter5/18531.62.pdf>

² <http://www2.oaklandnet.com/w/OAK052051>

always running for office. The recommendations do not take into account some important framing: the question of what funds are otherwise available to pay for Officeholder-type expenses for Officeholders or members of the public. Contrary to the conclusions of the FCPC, I believe Officeholder accounts are an important vehicle to redress a significant disadvantage for elected officials, whose ability to exercise free speech in the community and participate in conferences and events related to their profession is constrained by virtue of holding public office, as compared to community members, whose speech rights are unrestricted in any manner whatsoever, and who can raise money to use for whatever purposes they desire.

Outlawing Officeholder Accounts is also posited as a means to create equity between more and less wealthy Officeholders, on the theory that less affluent Officeholders will have less access to fundraising for Officeholder Accounts than more affluent Officeholders. Because there are no prohibition on using personal funds for many of the purposes for which Officeholder Account funds can be used, prohibiting Officeholder Accounts I believe has the opposite effect; it leaves more affluent Officeholders with the ability to pay for Officeholder expenses from personal funds, without providing an avenue for less affluent Officeholders, who may not have available personal funds, to raise money from their supporters to pay for such Officeholder expenses.

The question of whether Officeholder Accounts should be allowed in Berkeley plays out in the context of a number of rules and realities that are important to framing any analysis.

First, by State Law, elected officials are prohibited from using public funds for a variety of communications that many constituents nevertheless expect. For example, an elected official may not use public funds to send a mailing announcing municipal information to constituents, “such as a newsletter or brochure, [...] delivered, by any means [...] to a person’s residence, place of employment or business, or post office box.”³ Nor may an elected official mail an item using public funds that features a reference to the elected official affiliated with their public position.⁴ Note that Electronic newsletters are not covered by these rules, and can and do include all of these features, even if the newsletter service is paid for by the public entity. That said, while technically not required, many elected officials prefer to use email newsletter distribution services (Constant Contact, MailChimp, Nationbuilder, etc.) paid for with personal (or “Officeholder”) funds, to operate in the spirit of the original rules against using public funds for communications that include a photo of, or references to, the elected official.

Without the ability to raise funds for an Officeholder Account, for an elected official to send a paper newsletter to constituents or to use an email newsletter service that is not paid for with public funds, they must use personal funds. A printed newsletter mailed to 5-6,000 households (a typical number of households in a Berkeley City Council District) can easily cost \$5,000+, and an electronic mail service subscription typically costs \$10 (for the most basic service) to \$45 per month, a cost of \$120.00 to over \$500 per year - in personal funds.

³ <http://www.fppc.ca.gov/learn/public-officials-and-employees-rules-/communications-sent-using-public-funds/campaign-related-communications.html>

⁴ <http://www.fppc.ca.gov/learn/public-officials-and-employees-rules-/communications-sent-using-public-funds/campaign-related-communications.html>

Second, Berkeley City Councilmembers and the Mayor of Berkeley are not paid enough for there to be any reasonable expectation that personal funds should be used for these types of expenses.⁵ For many Councilmembers and/or the Mayor, work hours are full time - or more - and there is no other source of income.

Finally, and most importantly, local elected officials are restricted from accepting money or gifts. An elected official cannot under any circumstances raise money to pay for Officeholder expenses such as printed communications, email newsletter services, travel and admission to industry conferences for which the elected official is not an official delegate (e.g., conferences on City Planning, Green Cities, Municipal Finance, etc.), and other expenses related to holding office that are not covered by public funds. Again, without the possibility of an Officeholder Account, an elected official generally must use personal funds for these expenses, allowing more affluent elected officials to participate while placing a hardship or in some cases a prohibition on the ability of less affluent elected officials to undertake these Officeholder-type activities - which support expected communications with constituents and participation in industry activities that improve the elected official's effectiveness.

The elected official's inability to raise funds from others must be contrasted with the ability of a community member - a potential "challenger" who has not yet declared themselves to be an actual candidate - or perhaps a neighborhood association, business or corporation (Chevron, for example) - to engage in similar activities. Nothing restricts any community member or organization from using their own funds - or funds obtained from anyone - a wealthy friend, a corporation, a local business, a community organization or their neighbors - for any purpose whatsoever.

Someone who doesn't like the job an elected official is doing could raise money from family or connections anywhere in the community - or the world - and mail a letter to every person in the District or City criticizing the elected official, or buy up every billboard or banner ad on Facebook or Berkeleyside to broadcast their point of view. By contrast, the elected official, without access to an Officeholder Account, could only use personal funds to "speak" with their own printed letter, billboard or advertisement. Community members (including future "challengers") can also attend any and all conferences they want, engage in travel to visit interesting cities and projects that might inform their thoughts on how a city should be run, and pay for those things with money raised from friends, colleagues, businesses, corporations, foreign governments - *anyone*. They are private citizens with full first amendment rights and have no limitations, no reporting requirements, no requirements of transparency or accountability whatsoever.

The imbalance is significant. Outside of the campaign setting, where all declared candidates can raise funds and must abide by the same rules of spending and communications, *elected officials cannot raise money for any expenses whatsoever, from any source, while community*

⁵ Councilmembers receive annual compensation of approximately \$36,000, while the Mayor receives annual compensation of approximately \$55,000.⁵

members, including organizations and private companies, can raise as much money as they want from any sources, and use that money for anything they choose.

Without the ability to establish and fund an Officeholder Account, the only option an elected official has is to use personal funds, which exacerbates the potential imbalance between elected officials with more and less personal funds to spend. Elected officials work within a highly regulated system, which can limit their ability to “speak” and engage in other activities members of the public are able to undertake without restriction. Officeholder Accounts restore some flexibility by allowing elected officials to raise money for expenses related to holding office, so long as the sources and uses of those funds is made transparent.

By allowing Officeholder Accounts and regulating them, Berkeley can place limits on amounts that can be raised, and on the individuals/entities from whom funds can be accepted, similar (or identical) to the limits Berkeley places on sources of campaign funds. Similarly, Berkeley can restrict uses of funds beyond the State’s restrictions, to ensure funds are not used for things like family members’ travel, as is currently allowed by the State. Oakland has taken this approach, and has a set of Officeholder Account regulations that provide a good starting point for Berkeley to consider.⁶

I respectfully ask for a vote to send the question of potential allowance for, and regulation of, Officeholder Accounts to the Agenda and Rules Committee for further consideration.

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⁶ <http://www2.oaklandnet.com/w/OAK052051>