



NEWS RELEASE

April 16, 2014

City Explains why District Elections Initiative was Declared Invalid

On Friday, April 11, 2014, a proponent of the initiative measure for district elections in Santa Maria submitted their organization's signed petitions to the City Clerk's Office. An elections official is instructed by statute to look at the four corners of the document and render an objective determination whether or not a petition complies with the Elections Code. The elections official has a duty to reject a Petition that does not "substantially conform" to the formal requirements of the Elections Code. There is no statute that informs an elections official to ignore technical defects on a petition because it is close enough.

On April 11, 2014, the City regrettably informed the proponent that their petition did not substantially conform to the requirements of the Elections Code; therefore, the City had no alternative than to return the petition to the proponent.

Specifically, the petition did not follow the correct formatting as indicated in the Elections Code, and the header of the petition did not have the words "Initiative Measure to be Submitted Directly to the Voters." In addition, the Declaration pages (of the petitions) omitted the required reference to the circulators being 18 years of age or older. This is a new requirement enacted by the Legislature that took effect on January 1, 2014.

The purpose of this initiative was to amend the Santa Maria City Charter and to change the method by which City voters elect members to the City Council - from an "at-large" process to a "by-district" system. The City currently elects its Mayor and City Councilmembers with an "at-large" method. The initiative proposed that the City be divided into four districts, with each district containing approximately equal population. The voters in each district would vote for candidates that must reside within the district. The Mayor would continue to be elected Citywide or "at-large". The plan would have called for two districts to elect a Councilmember in 2016 and the two remaining districts to elect Councilmembers in 2018.

Questions may be directed to the City Attorney's Office 925-0951 ext. 310 or the City Manager's Office, 925-0951 ext. 372.

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