



CITY MANAGER'S OFFICE

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CITY COUNCIL STAFF REPORT

Meeting: May 19, 2026

Subject

Setting a voluntary campaign expenditure limit of \$50,000 for the November 3, 2026 City Council election.

Recommended Action

Adopt Resolution No. 26-___ setting a voluntary campaign expenditure limit of \$50,000 for the November 3, 2026 City Council election.

Background

Voluntary expenditure limits enable candidates to spend less time on fundraising and more time communicating issues of importance to voters and constituents. Beginning in 1997, the City Council established a voluntary campaign expenditure limit of \$15,000. Over time, the limit has been periodically adjusted to reflect increases in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) and changes in registered voter population. Table 1 below provides the history of voluntary campaign expenditure limits adopted by the City Council since 1997.

As of April 9, 2026, the number of registered voters in the City of Cupertino is 33,716, based on the most recent Report of Registration from the Santa Clara County Registrar of Voters.

A General Municipal Election will be held on November 3, 2026 to fill three City Council seats. The voluntary expenditure limit is not required and has no force of law. Candidates choose whether to accept or decline the limit at the time of filing nomination papers. Candidates who accept the limit receive an asterisk designation next to their name in the Santa Clara County Voter Information Guide.

Campaign expenditures include, but are not limited to, costs associated with mailing or distribution of campaign literature, broadcast, print or electronic media,

digital advertising, telephone outreach, professional services, overhead expenditures, and fundraising activities.

Reasons for Recommendation

The City has historically adjusted the voluntary expenditure limit using Consumer Price Index (CPI) changes applied to the prior Council adopted limit. Applying the CPI-U change from February 2025 to February 2026 (1.0242), the 2022 adopted limit of \$34,470 results in an inflation adjusted value of approximately \$35,304 for the 2026 election cycle.

While the historical methodology reflects inflationary changes over time, additional consideration was given to current campaign practices and costs, including digital advertising, consulting services, printed materials, signage, and expanded voter outreach methods. Consultant and campaign planning guidance for medium-sized city council elections commonly reflects campaign budgets ranging from approximately \$25,000 to \$75,000. Within this range, a representative \$50,000 campaign includes costs associated with direct mail, digital advertising, campaign consulting, signage, field operations, and outreach activities.

Based on these considerations, the proposed voluntary expenditure limit of \$50,000 reflects an updated approach intended to align the City’s voluntary expenditure limit with current campaign conditions and practices.

The draft resolution approves a voluntary campaign expenditure limit of \$50,000 for the November 3, 2026 City Council election (Attachment A). Exhibit A reflects the expenditure categories identified in FPPC regulations and provides general guidance regarding expenditures that count toward the voluntary limit. If adopted, candidates may voluntarily agree to limit their campaign expenditures to this amount when filing nomination papers. If the Council does not adopt the draft resolution, no voluntary campaign expenditure limit will apply to candidates for the November 3, 2026 City Council election.

Table 1: History of Voluntary Campaign Expenditure Limit Adoptions (1997–2026)

ELECTION YEAR	VOLUNTARY EXPENDITURE LIMIT
1997	\$15,000
1999	\$20,000
2001	\$20,000
2003	\$20,000

2005	\$26,000
2007	\$26,500
2008 Special Election	\$26,500
2009	\$28,000
2011	\$28,000
2014	\$28,000
2016	\$33,000
2018	\$29,000
2020	\$30,000
2022	\$34,470
2024	No limit established
2026 (Recommended)	\$50,000

City Work Program (CWP) Item/Description:

N/A

Council Goal:

Fiscal Strategy

Sustainability Impact

No sustainability impact.

Fiscal Impact

No fiscal impact.

California Environmental Quality Act

No California Environmental Quality Act Impact

Prepared by: Lauren Sapudar, City Clerk

Reviewed by: Kirsten Squarcia, Deputy City Manager

Approved for Submission by: Tina Kapoor, City Manager

Attachments:

A - Draft Resolution (and Exhibit A)

References

- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U), Series CUUR0000SA0," <https://data.bls.gov/timeseries/CUUR0000SA0> (accessed 2026).

- Sutton & Smart Political Consulting, "Political Consultant Cost for Local Elections," <https://suttonsmart.com/political-consulting/political-consultant-cost-for-local-election/>
- Local Campaign Pros, "Political Campaign Cost Guide – Medium Cities / Santa Clara County," <https://www.localcampaignpros.com/advice/political-campaign-costs/>
- OneCampaign, "Real Cost of Running for Local Office (2026)," <https://onecampaign.ai/blog/real-cost-running-for-local-office-2026>