

So You Want to Run for Local Office...

**A GUIDE FOR PROSPECTIVE CITY ELECTED OFFICIALS
FOR THE CITY OF ABILENE**

What every person interested in becoming an elected official should know about roles, responsibilities, and representing their community and city government.



WELCOME!

The number of people willing to run for an elected local office is pretty small, and for good reason: it's not an easy job if you want to do it right. But if you are looking for a way to use your knowledge, experience and wisdom to help make the City of Abilene a better, more functional place, you may find that lending your hand to local government is one of the most rewarding endeavors you've ever undertaken.

If you haven't already gotten your feet wet by volunteering for a City board or commission, you should seriously consider doing so before you declare candidacy. Having some experience like this is a good way to get a better idea about what you're likely to spend your time doing as a city councilmember or mayor, and will better prepare you to answer the sorts of questions you're likely to get as a candidate.

If you haven't already started attending city council meetings, start doing so now. They are a great way to become familiar with both the issues in Abilene, and the way the Council conducts business before you're up on the dais. If you're running because there's a single burning issue that's compelled you to run, remember that there are hundreds of other issues you're going to have to wrestle with during your term of office. If you want to do a good job, you'll want to know what those are, and tackle them with just as much energy and honest consideration as you would your pet issue.

Remember that your opponents (and your eventual fellow Council members) are people too. Assume the best of them – that they are also running for office because of a genuine desire to help the community. The people you will meet in this process will not just go away after the election, and likely you will find yourself working with them in the not-so-distant future. So, feel free to explain why you disagree with their proposed policies, but remember to take the high road.

Once you've won the election and you're seated on the council, the work isn't over. Instead, that's when it begins in earnest, and the learning curve can be pretty steep.

This guide is full of helpful information to give you a better understanding of what is expected of you, should you run for City Council.

CITY OF ABILENE GOVERNMENT

Abilene is a home rule city, which means its authority to set policy and manage its own affairs comes from the City Charter. A charter can be thought of as the City's constitution and may be amended only by a vote of the citizens of that city. All powers of the City are vested in an elected City Council, which enacts legislations, adopts budgets, and determines policies.

The municipal government provided by our City Charter is known as the "Council-Manager Government". The City Manager is the chief administrative officer of the City, who executes the laws and administers the government of the City. While the City Council sets the policies, they appoint the City Manager and entrust the administration of the City to him/her. The City's fiscal year begins on October 1 of each year, and ends on the following September 30.

The City Council consists of six (6) Council members and a Mayor, all of whom are elected at large. Each Council member serves for a term of three (3) years. The terms are on a staggered basis, such that two (2) Council members are elected each year. The Mayor and each Council member receive a salary of one dollar per year for each year he or she serves as Mayor or Council member.

The Mayor appoints the City Manager, City Secretary, City Attorney, and the Judge of the Municipal Court, with the approval of the Council.

QUALIFICATIONS FOR OFFICE

City elections are held on the first Saturday in May of each year.

Places 1, 3 and 5 candidates shall be residents of the City **North** of the Texas & Pacific Railroad Company main line. Places 2, 4 and 6 shall be residents of the City **South** of the Texas & Pacific Railroad Company main line. Candidates for Mayor are not restricted to live in any specific section of the City.

Additional qualifications:

- At least 21 years of age
- A citizen and qualified voter of the State of Texas and the City
 - Shall have resided within the City for at least 12 months preceding election day
 - Residence requirements shall be effective only as of the date of the election of each member of the Council, but a member of the Council or the Mayor ceasing to reside in the City shall immediately forfeit office
- Not hold any other office or employment under City Government while a member of the Council, nor hold any other paid employment under City Government within two (2) years thereafter, unless such employment be an elective office.
- Have not been determined mentally incapacitated by a final judgement of a court
- Have not been finally convicted of a felony from which the person has not been pardoned or otherwise released from the resulting disabilities

STARTING YOUR CANDIDACY

The first step to apply to run for an elected office, is to file an Application for a Place on the Ballot with the City Secretary's Office. Applications for a Place on the Ballot are accepted between the 108th day before Election Day and the 78th day before Election Day. You will be required to swear an oath that you meet all the qualifications described above.

At the same time you file your Application for a Place on the Ballot, you will also need to fill out a form designating your Campaign Treasurer. It is important to remember that you are not to accept any political contributions, make any political expenditures, or even publicly announce your candidacy without having an Appointment of a Campaign Treasurer form on file with the City Secretary's Office. This can be filled out in advance of the Application for a Place on the ballot, should you choose to start your campaign before the filing period begins. This form stays on file with the City Secretary's office until you end your campaign by finalizing your campaign finance reports.

The second page of the Appointment of a Campaign Treasurer form is the Candidate Modified Reporting Declaration. If you do not intend to accept more than \$930 in political contributions, or make more than \$930 in political expenditures in connection with any election within the election cycle (including a runoff), you are able to sign this form in order to be exempt from filing campaign finance reports for this election cycle.

REQUIREMENTS FOR CANDIDATES

Campaign Finance Reports

If you have filed the Modified Reporting Declaration, you will not be required to fill out campaign finance reports, and this section will not apply to you.

Campaign finance reports are a very important, and often overlooked, part of your campaign. It is very important to remember that they do not end after Election Day. It is essential that you track all contributions, loans and expenditures pertinent to your campaign. The City Secretary, as the local filing authority, will be whom you turn your reports in to. Your first report will be due 30 days before Election Day, and a second report will be due 8 days before Election Day. If there is a runoff that you participate in, there is also a report due 8 days before the runoff Election Day. If you do not finalize your campaign after this time, you will be required to continue filing campaign finance reports semi-annually. Semi-annual campaign finance reports are due on January 15th and July 15th of every year.

If your campaign has ended (win or lose), and you have disposed of all your campaign funds appropriately, you may end your campaign by submitting a final report to the City Secretary with a zero dollar balance. Doing this is the only way to avoid filing any future semi-annual campaign finance reports. Please be aware that there could be legal penalties for not filing your campaign finance reports in a timely manner.

Personal Financial Statements

Every candidate and elected official must file a personal financial statement. Candidates must file their personal financial statement no later than the 40th day after the filing deadline for a place on the general election ballot. Non-candidates must file theirs before April 30th. This report covers personal financial information for the entire calendar year preceding the year the statement is due. This report is mandatory and there are penalties for not filing.

CANVASS OF ELECTION

Once Election Day is over and the votes are all in, the City Council will hold a special called meeting to canvass the election and make the results official. Newly elected officials will perform their oath of office, administered by the City Secretary, and be provided with a certificate of election.

AFTER YOU ARE ELECTED

The results are in, the election has been canvassed, and you are now a sworn City Council member. So what happens now? Now is when your work begins!

City Council meetings are held twice monthly in the City of Abilene:

- The 2nd and 4th Thursday of the months of January through September
- The 1st and 3rd Thursday of the months of November and December
- For October, regular meetings will be held either the 1st and 3rd Thursday of the month, or the 2nd and 4th Thursday of the month, depending on the meeting date of the Texas Municipal League's Annual meeting.

The first meeting of the month begins at 8:30 a.m., and the second meeting of the month begins at 4:30 p.m. All meetings are held in the City Council Chambers, unless otherwise noted.

There will be an annual Council retreat usually in February or March each year, and budget work sessions held in July. Other special called meetings can be scheduled as needed.

Although our Charter does not provide an attendance requirement, you are asked to attend all meetings, unless there are extenuating circumstances.

For an in-depth look at how our City Council meetings are ran, please take a look at the City Council Rules of Procedure, which are available online. The City Secretary's Office can provide you a copy, if you need.

QUESTIONS

The City Secretary's Office is available to answer any additional questions you may have regarding running for local office. If you have in depth questions regarding Campaign Finance Reports or Personal Financial Statements, please contact the Texas Ethics Commission.