

To: Sandy City Council
Fr: Council Member Zoltanski
Re: Campaign Contribution Limits & Reporting Requirements

Campaign Contribution Limits.

Sandy City has no limit in the amount of money an individual, business, or PAC can donate to a campaign for city office. Nor do we have any limit on how much a candidate can spend on his or her campaign. Should we? There is no legal restriction against a municipality imposing campaign finance limits.

While most cities do not set individual contribution limits, several larger, notable municipalities do: Salt Lake County, Salt Lake City, Ogden and Taylorsville all have contribution limits (See attached staff exhibit).

These limits are per election cycle, not annual limits.

Salt Lake County: \$6,0000 per candidate, per election cycle SL Co Ord 2.72A.104
Pre-convention/primary/general election are all separate election cycles
No cash contribution or county vendor contribution allowed over \$100.
No anonymous contributions in any amount. No proxy contributions.

Salt Lake City: \$3,500 for mayor, \$750 for city council and indexed for inflation

Ogden City: \$5,000 for mayor, \$1,500 for city council

Taylorsville: \$7,500 for mayor, \$1,500 for city council

This issue is ripe for discussion by the council as we the nation has just held a general election where the influence of campaign spending on the electorate cannot be ignored. The city council should take interest in maintaining a level playing field and keeping our local public offices open to a broad cross-section of the community, not just candidates with wealthy backers. We should incentivize leaders who are born of service to the community but lack the resources to compete with super-funded candidates.

Recommendations & Discussion Items for Campaign Limits

Limit on individual donation

Recommend \$1,000 per election cycle (ie \$1,000 for primary, \$1,000 for general)

Cap Total Campaign Spending

Recommend \$10,000 per election cycle? Discuss legality, limits.

Items for discussion. Should all races be subject to the same limits or should we distinguish council district races from the mayoral race? Anticipate and allow periodic adjustment tied to inflation or rising print or online advertising costs

Enhanced Disclosure Reporting.

Best practices recommendations Sandy City should adopt for enhanced reporting: see 2015 article from FollowtheMoney.org <https://www.followthemoney.org/research/institute-reports/best-practices-for-disclosure-of-local-candidates-campaign-finance-data> “The growing public interest in campaign finance makes it essential that local governments empower citizens to hold their elected officials accountable through campaign finance data that is complete, timely, and accessible.”

1. Disclosure of donor’s name, occupation, employer and complete address. Currently candidates are not required to disclose donor’s occupation or employer. Providing this information would give better transparency to the public, showing the type of economic or business interests influencing city elections.
2. Identify the type of contributor: Important to know type of donor, distinguish from individual vs PAC or political interest group.
3. List contributor’s aggregate contributions over reporting period. Shows how much a donor has given in total without having to analyze every report.
4. Establish automated online filing system with, digitized reports that can easily be accessed and analyzed. Allow data to be searchable and downloadable.

Action Item: Motion to direct staff to draft ordinance for campaign contribution limits and enhanced reporting disclosures, consistent with council discussion.

Resources:

Helpful articles examining the impact of campaign finance limits.

<https://localprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Campaign-Finance-Reforms.pdf>

“Contribution limits can promote faith in democracy, give candidates without access to large-donor networks a better chance of running competitive campaigns, and ensure that ultra-wealthy donors and industries cannot entirely bankroll their favored candidates’ campaigns.”

<https://www.commoncause.org/california/wp-content/uploads/sites/29/2018/06/CA-Contribution-Limits-Report-Apr-2016.pdf>

“Very large donations can create an actual or perceived risk that a candidate will feel indebted to the donor and not exercise impartial judgment on matters affecting that donor.”

