

Bastrop Chamber of Commerce
BastropVotes.com Initiative Policy & Procedure

I. Purpose

Advocacy is of utmost importance to the Bastrop Chamber of Commerce. The Governmental Affairs (GA) committee has an initiative called Bastrop Votes to “Promote the Vote” in Bastrop County and to advocate for citizens to be engaged in our democracy. The goal is to be a resource for fair, impartial, and accurate information about upcoming elections and candidates seeking elected office. The GA Committee does this in three ways: to actively register voters, to maintain a website with information about candidates seeking elected office, and to host candidate forums.

This policy outlines the procedures of the Bastrop Votes initiative, specifically candidate information and candidate forums, on the BastropVotes.com website.

II. General Information

Chambers of Commerce have authority under state and federal law through our 501(c)6 status to represent members in public policy debates. Chambers may lobby, take positions on actual or proposed legislation, and legally endorse candidates for public office and ballot propositions. The Bastrop Chamber of Commerce has historically not endorsed political candidates and will not be using BastropVotes.com to do so. Instead, the Bastrop Chamber of Commerce will educate and inform our membership and the community at-large regarding candidates running for public office.

III. Election Cycles

The BastropVotes.com initiative will focus primarily on the May runoff election following the March primaries for the Democratic and Republican parties, May general and special elections for School Board Trustee and City Council, and the November general election.

IV. Candidate Forums

The GA Committee will determine each year which elections will have candidate forums. The decision will be made based on venue availability (including the capability to record and produce a professional forum), moderator availability, timekeeper availability, Chamber staff availability, and in consideration of the Bastrop Chamber of Commerce event calendar. The Chamber will not host a candidate forum for uncontested races.

No visible campaign paraphernalia of any kind including but not limited to literature, buttons, apparel, or any other form of candidate promotion or advertisement may be distributed or worn inside the room where Candidate Forums are being held.

The Bastrop Chamber of Commerce has unrestricted and exclusive rights to capture and distribute live or recorded audio and/or visual material of Candidate Forums. No unauthorized recording, creation, or distribution of the Candidate Forum of any kind without prior written authorization is permitted.

V. Candidate Information

For any local race, the Bastrop Chamber of Commerce will request by email and mail for candidates to complete a questionnaire, submit a biography of 350-400 words, and submit a headshot. A deadline will be set to reply. If a candidate does not respond by the set deadline, a basic web presence will be created for a candidate using a blank placeholder image and a text field with the phrase “This candidate did not respond to requests for information by the deadline.” Any submission received after the deadline will not be added to the website. Candidates who submit their information by the deadline will have the questionnaire, bio, email address, candidate’s website and headshot uploaded to the BastropVotes.com website.

The timeframe for updating Candidate Information on the Bastropvotes.com is as follows:

Once an election cycle is completed, the Chamber will update the BastropVotes.com website as soon as it is feasible, considering filing dates and activities of the Bastrop Chamber.

Following the Texas primaries, by law, candidates seeking office outside the two major parties have 30 days to gather 500 signatures and verification can take up to 70 days. In the meantime, a drop-down box under the Elections tab will display “No Current Elections” until all candidates are certified for the ballot. No candidates’ information (Democrat, Green Party, Independent, Libertarian, Republican, Tea Party or other certified party) will be posted on the BastropVotes.com website until the that process is complete.

VI. Moderators

The GA Committee will seek neutral moderators preferably from outside Bastrop County, with preference given to those from the League of Women Voters (LWV) or who have received training from the LWV.

VII. Timekeepers

The GA Committee will supply a timekeeper for each candidate forum held. Rules regarding time for each question and answer will be established with the moderator and communicated to the candidates and audience prior to the start of each forum.

VIII. Sponsorships

The Bastrop Chamber of Commerce will seek sponsorships to offset the cost of any candidate forum that the GA Committee seeks to conduct and produce.

IX. Bastropvotes.com Website

The BastropVotes.com website will display information on candidates seeking elected office for the next upcoming election.

The **Home** tab will direct users to the Bastrop Chamber of Commerce main website.

The **Voter Info** tab will direct users to Poll information, Current & Upcoming Elections date information, Voter Registration Info, Who Represents Me?, Bastrop County Precinct Map, Voter Record for that Texas Legislature, Voting Record for the US Congress, and the current approved Public Policy Guide.

The **Description of Office** tab will list the descriptions of elected offices the GA Committee could potentially have candidate forums for, focusing on local races.

Under the **Elections** tab, each office that forums will be held for will be listed in a drop-down box with information on each candidate. It is the practice of the GA Committee to list candidates for each office in alphabetical order. When no election is happening, the **Elections** tab will display in the drop-down box, “No Current Elections”.

Under the **Forums** tab, a drop-down box will list the date, time, and location for each forum that is scheduled. When no election is happening, the **Forums** tab will display in the drop-down box, “Candidate Forum Archives”.