



## **BASTROPVOTES.COM INITIATIVE POLICY & PROCEDURE**

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### **I. Objective of Policy**

Advocacy is of utmost importance to the Bastrop Chamber of Commerce. BastropVotes.com is an initiative of the Governmental Affairs (GA) Committee 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: actively registering voters, maintaining a website with information about candidates seeking elected office, and hosting candidate forums.

This policy outlines the procedures of the Bastrop Votes initiative, specifically candidate information and candidate forums, and 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. Chamber Membership**

Candidates running for elected office may join the Chamber as Individual Candidate for Office member and will be listed on [www.bastropchamber.com](http://www.bastropchamber.com) as such. As an Individual Candidate for Office member, candidates for elected office may attend Chamber functions at member pricing, subscribe to the monthly Chamber e-newsletter, and be listed by candidate’s first and last name and office for which they are running on their Member Profile Page. None of the benefits afforded to a business membership will be given to an Individual Candidate for Office member.

### **IV. Distribution of Campaign Promotion Information and Advertising**

A candidate for elected office may not under any circumstance distribute promotional information for their candidacy at monthly luncheons, mixers, annual banquets, or any other event organized by the Bastrop Chamber of Commerce. This includes but is not limited to handouts, campaign signs, stickers, apparel, or any other forms of candidate promotional items. If any are found, the candidate and/or their volunteers will be asked to remove them. Our Luncheon Policy states that tabletop spaces are reserved exclusively for promotion of the Bastrop Chamber of Commerce, the luncheon sponsor(s), and/or the luncheon speaker.

The candidate may wear a campaign button or a name tag identifying themselves as a candidate of elected office.

The Chamber will not allow advertising of any sort at our events either in print material, on our website or in our PowerPoints.

## **V. Election Cycles**

The BastropVotes.com initiative will focus primarily on:

- May runoff election following the March primaries for the Democratic and Republican parties (if applicable)
- May general and special elections for School Board Trustee and City Council, or Mayor
- November general election

## **VI. Candidate Information**

For any local race, the Bastrop Chamber of Commerce will request by email (or certified mail, if no email address available) 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 (if provided) 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 that process is complete.

## **VII. Candidate Forums**

- A. 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 candidate forums for any uncontested race. If a forum is being held for contested races, i.e. City Council or School Board Trustee, unopposed candidates will be invited to make an opening statement.
- B. 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.

### **C. Candidate Materials and Technology Policy**

Candidates are allowed to reference paper notes while on the dais during the forums. However, the use of electronic devices—including laptops, tablets, and cell phones—is strictly prohibited. In addition, no visual aids or displays of any kind are permitted on the dais or within the forum room.

No visible campaign paraphernalia of any kind, including but not limited to signs, 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. A designated area outside of the Forum Room will be provided for the display of Candidate materials.

### **D. Forum Questions**

Questions are developed by the Bastrop Chamber of Commerce to address a range of important issues affecting our community. These questions are intended to provide voters with valuable insights into each candidate's positions and visions. Multiple questions are prepared but not all will be asked during the forum. To uphold fairness and spontaneity in their responses, candidates are not provided with the questions in advance. Additional questions will be solicited from the audience and may be considered for inclusion during the forum. Audience questions may not be addressed to an individual candidate. Inflammatory or derogatory questions will be excluded. Due to time constraints, not all audience questions may be addressed.

### **E. Moderators**

The GA Committee will seek neutral, trained 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.

### **F. Timekeepers**

The GA Committee will supply a timekeeper for each candidate forum being 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.

### **G. 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. No candidates, elected officials, special interest groups, or parties may sponsor the forums. All sponsors are subject to approval by the Governmental Affairs Committee and/or the Bastrop Chamber of Commerce.

## **VIII. Bastropvotes.com Website**

The BastropVotes.com website displays general election information, including:

### **ABOUT**

Governmental Affairs Committee Listing

[www.bastropchamber.com](http://www.bastropchamber.com)

Public Policy Guide

BastropVotes.com Policy

Helpful Links – links to external websites with voter information

Contact Us

**CANDIDATES** - lists the elected offices for which the GA Committee could potentially have candidate forums for, focusing on local races. Candidate information will be included based on the guidelines in Section V, Candidate Information, of this policy.

**VOTER INFO** - directs users to Poll information, Current & Upcoming Elections date information, Voter Registration Info, Bastrop County Precinct Map, Voting Record for the most recent Texas Legislature, and the Voting Record for the US Congress.

**ELECTED OFFICIALS** – links to elected officials’ websites, including city, county, state, and federal offices.

**FORUMS** - each office for which forums will be held are 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 **Forums** tab will display in the drop-down box, “No Current Elections” and “Candidate Forum Archives.”

**UPCOMING EVENTS** – links to events that are relevant to elections and/or Governmental Affairs.