

Request of Mayor Torosis, Councilmember Hall and Councilmember Raskin to Direct Staff to Review and Clarify Neighborhood Organization Grant Program Guidance

We, therefore, move that the City Council direct staff to:

1. Review the unanimous Council direction from September 30, 2025 regarding the Neighborhood Organization Grant Program, confirming that public funds not be used to take positions on political candidates;
2. Ensure that the program application, guidelines, and related materials are fully consistent with Council direction;
3. Refine and clarify program guidance, including through updated application materials and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), to explicitly state that:
 - a. Neighborhood organizations may conduct education and outreach related to ballot measures, provided such activities are informational in nature;
 - b. The use of funds for communications, including mailers, to inform members about meetings, events, and programming is permissible;
 - c. Organizations are required to submit a proposed annual budget at the beginning of the grant period, consistent with prior practice, and are not required to obtain pre-approval for each individual expenditure;
 - d. Neighborhood organizations may host meetings between their members and individuals running for office, provided such activities are conducted in a neutral and information-sharing manner;
 - e. Any requests for demographic information from participating organizations or their members are strictly voluntary;
4. Confirm that Neighborhood Organizations may form or operate separate affiliated entities to perform political activities;
5. Clarify the City Council's intent that if a Neighborhood Association forms or operates an affiliated entity to exercise their First Amendment right to endorse political candidates, that entity cannot receive taxpayer resources or participate in the City's Neighborhood Organization Grant Program;
6. Reaffirm that Neighborhood Organizations participating in the City's grant program should be entities that are engaged in the performance of civic community building functions;

7. Confirm that only those groups that qualify, apply, and are identified as an official Neighborhood Organization will be listed by the City as an official participant of the City's Neighborhood Association Grant Program;
8. Further, confirm that elected officials and staff are not barred from meeting with groups who choose to endorse political candidates in their official capacity as representatives of the City to give briefings or answer questions;
9. Return with any additional recommendations necessary to ensure clarity, accessibility, and consistency in program implementation; and
10. Following the release of updated application materials and FAQs, re-open the application period for the 2025–26 Neighborhood Organization Grant Program to allow interested organizations to apply in light of the clarified guidance.