



Department: Attorney
Cost Center: 1500
For Agenda of: 1/20/2026
Placement: Consent
Estimated Time: NA

FROM: Christine Dietrick, City Attorney

SUBJECT: Final Adoption of Ordinance Implementing Citywide Single Vote for City Council Elections

RECOMMENDATION

Adopt Ordinance No. 1754 (2026 Series) adding Chapter 2.38, entitled “Citywide Single Vote Method of Electing City Councilmembers” to the San Luis Obispo Municipal Code, implementing a new method for elections of City Councilmembers and adopting regulations providing for the administration of City Council elections by Citywide Single Vote beginning in November 2026

POLICY CONTEXT

On January 13, 2026, the City Council voted unanimously to introduce a new ordinance to implement a new method of electing City Councilmembers, beginning in the 2026 election, that will be known as Citywide Single Vote. The introduction included minor, non-substantive modifications to the language reflected in the originally published draft ordinance, which were provided to the Council and public in an agenda correspondence in advance of the introduction. Staff also recommended that the Council adopt the ordinance in accordance with the standard introduction and second reading/adoption process. This is the second step in that process. The minor language modifications have been incorporated into the final version of the ordinance attached to this staff report. (Attachment A) The recommended final adoption of the ordinance is the next step toward complying with the requirements of a previously approved settlement agreement and a stipulated judgement, discussed further below.

In November 2024, the City Council approved a settlement of a California Voting Rights Act (“CVRA”) demand letter served on the City by attorney Kevin Shenkman on behalf of his client Southwest Voter Registration Education Project on February 17, 2023. Part of the settlement was agreement to a Stipulated Judgement under which the parties agreed that the City would transition to a “Citywide Single Vote” model for electing Councilmembers, beginning in the 2026 election cycle.

The recommended action implements the settlement agreement and the Stipulated Judgement, ensuring the City’s compliance with its contractual and legal obligations. The ordinance is also consistent with the San Luis Obispo City Charter because it maintains

an at-large system of electing Councilmembers, as required by the [City's Charter, Section 402](#). The transition to Citywide Single Vote is also consistent with the City's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Major City Goal, in that it advances voter equity and reduces the potential for unlawful minority vote dilution that otherwise may be associated with standard at-large elections systems.

Finally, the recommended action also seeks to ensure that the County Registrar of Voters will be able to administer the new elections model as part of a consolidated election, consistent with historical practices to consolidate the administration of City elections with state and federal elections, which is considerably less expensive, more convenient for voters, and more efficient than the City running its own separate municipal elections. As such, the recommended action is consistent with the City's Cultural Vitality, Economic Resiliency and Fiscal Sustainability Major City Goal.

DISCUSSION

Background

The Council authorized staff to enter into settlement negotiations throughout 2023 and 2024 to reach a mutually beneficial settlement of the CVRA demand. Council ultimately approved the settlement that is the basis of the currently recommended action in November of 2024. The staff report and more substantial background discussion can be reviewed [here](#). The San Luis Superior Court approved the Stipulated Judgement that was part of the settlement on January 27, 2025.

The recommended ordinance adoption is the next step in the implementation of the settlement agreement and Stipulated Judgement and ensuring a smooth transition and implementation of the Citywide Single Vote. In short, the recommended ordinance formally establishes Citywide Single Vote as the method of electing City Councilmembers in 2026 and subsequent elections. The ordinance would codify the local legal structure for the City to move from the current "vote-for-two candidates to elect two Councilmembers" model, to a "vote-for-one candidate to elect two Councilmembers" model, whereby the top two candidates receiving the most single votes are elected to Council.

The ordinance also includes ballot instructions to ensure clear direction to voters and adds clarity for the elections official administering City Council elections regarding implementation of the Citywide Single Vote system. The ordinance clarifies and resolves inconsistencies between the generally applicable Elections Code ballot language and the specific ballot language necessary to implement the new system.

The ordinance was introduced by unanimous vote of the Council on January 13, 2026. If finally adopted by the Council as recommended at it January 20, 2026 meeting, the ordinance will become effective thirty (30) days after adoption.

Public Engagement

Since approval of the settlement and Stipulated Judgement by the City Council and the Superior Court, respectively, staff has been working to develop a robust public outreach, education and engagement plan. Voter education is already underway and will continue, expanding significantly as the 2026 election nears.

City staff will present an overview of the outreach plan at the same City Council meeting on January 20, 2026.

In November 2025, staff presented and recorded a significant Candidate Education Forum in collaboration with the Latino Outreach Council to ensure that current and prospective voters and prospective Council candidates are aware of and have access to information and resources about the new elections system well in advance of the 2026 election. That presentation recording and other information and resources can be accessed here www.slocity.org/SingleVote.

CONCURRENCE

The City Clerk and County Clerk Recorder concur with the recommendation.

ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW

The adoption of the recommended ordinance is a policy measure and does not have any foreseeable impact on the environment and is therefore exempt from environmental review.

FISCAL IMPACT

Budgeted: Yes

Budget Year: 2025-26, 2026-2027

Funding Identified: Yes

Fiscal Analysis:

Funding Sources	Total Budget Available	Current Funding Request	Remaining Balance	Annual Ongoing Cost
General Fund	\$	\$90,000	\$0	\$0
State				
Federal				
Fees				
Other:				
Total	\$	\$90,000	\$0	\$0

As a part of the adoption of the 2025-27 Financial Plan, Council approved a total of \$120,000 to support community outreach and engagement for the transition to Citywide

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Single Vote system with \$90,000 in the 2025-26 Fiscal Year and \$30,000 in the 2026-27 Fiscal Year. As noted, an overview of the plan will be presented at the January 20, 2026 City Council meeting, following final adoption of this ordinance.

ALTERNATIVES

The recommended ordinance adoption is a necessary step to implement the settlement agreement and stipulated judgement to which the City previously agreed, so there is not a realistic alternative to adoption. If the Council directs any substantive modifications to the ordinance as introduced, re-introduction will be required, which will delay the effective date of the ordinance.

ATTACHMENTS

- A - Ordinance No 1753 (2026 Series) adopting adding Chapter 2.38 to the Municipal Code to implement and provide regulations for administration of Citywide Single Vote
- B - Prior staff report regarding the settlement recommendation and related actions [here](#)