



STAFF REPORT

City of Dripping Springs

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Submitted By: Aniz Alani, City Attorney

Council Meeting Date: September 15, 2026

Agenda Item Wording: Discussion and possible action regarding the proposed Founders Day Festival Official Participant Expression Ordinance and direction to staff concerning political campaign activity in the Festival's official program.

Agenda Item Sponsor: *Council Member Sherrie Parks*

A. Recommended Action

Discuss the proposed ordinance and provide direction on whether staff should bring an ordinance back for adoption, and, if so, whether the Council wants the proposed distinction between official Festival participation and speech in areas open to the general public.

B. Background and committee discussion

At its April 7, 2026 meeting, City Council approved a policy governing political candidate and political party participation, signage, and speech activities during the 2026 Founders Day Festival. City Council specifically reserved for future consideration a policy to address subsequent festivals and events.

Following the 2026 Founders Day Festival, the Founders Day Committee endorsed a broad policy direction against political expression at future Festivals. Staff then prepared a draft ordinance for committee review on August 24, 2026.

The draft proposes to regulate political campaign activity through official or registered participant roles and City-controlled Festival program elements. The committee discussed that narrower approach, including parade entries, vendor and cook-off booths, sponsor recognition, and the distinction between an elected official's factual identification and an appeal for votes. The committee requested feedback from City Council on its preferred approach and scope of a forward-looking policy before making a formal recommendation.

C. Proposed ordinance

The attached draft would add Article 16.05 to Chapter 16 of the Code of Ordinances. It prohibits use of City-controlled official Festival program elements for defined "Political Campaign Activity", including express advocacy concerning an identified candidate, political party, political committee, or ballot measure.

Covered elements include assigned booths and tables, parade entries and positions, stage access, sponsor space, and official Festival communications. Factual references to an officeholder or governmental matter that do not expressly support or oppose an election or ballot measure are excluded from the defined activity. Speech in general public areas is outside the ordinance's scope, subject to other applicable law and neutral Festival rules.

D. Points for Council direction

1. **Scope**

Does Council favor limiting the restriction to City-controlled participant opportunities, rather than attempting to regulate political expression throughout the Festival? The committee discussed the practical distinction between campaign material used in an assigned booth or parade entry and a sign or shirt displayed by someone walking in a public area.

2. **Officeholders and official roles**

Should the draft continue to permit factual identification of an officeholder participating in an official capacity, while barring campaign appeals through an official Festival opportunity? Members discussed how this would work for elected officials and first responders in the parade.

3. **Administration during the event**

Does Council want additional direction for correcting a violation at parade lineup or at a booth, including how written notice and a post-event appeal will function when immediate correction is necessary? The draft provides notice and an opportunity to cure when practicable, written decisions, and an administrative appeal.

E. Fiscal impact

No fiscal estimate or specific new expenditure was identified in the materials reviewed for this item.

F. Staff recommendation

Provide Council direction on the scope and administration of the proposed ordinance and direct staff to return with a final version if Council wishes to proceed.

G. Attachments

- Draft Ordinance
- Staff report to Founders Day Committee