



STAFF REPORT
City of Dripping Springs
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Submitted By: Aniz Alani, City Attorney

Council Meeting Date: April 7, 2026

Agenda Item Wording: Discussion and possible action regarding a policy governing political candidate and political party participation, signage, and speech activities during the Founders Day Festival.

Agenda Item Sponsor: Council Member Parks

Background: Following a discussion at a recent Founders Day Committee meeting regarding the allocation of vendor booths to political parties and candidates in light of demand that exceeds supply, staff undertook a legal review and draft a policy to provide for the fair and neutral allocation of vendor booth and parade participant space to politically expressive groups.

Summary of Proposed Policy The policy states that it applies to vendor booths requested or operated in connection with the 2026 Festival, political expression during the 2026 parade by approved registered in-parade participants, and conduct by City officials and representatives attending in an official capacity.

The policy also states that nothing in it creates a vested right, entitlement, continuing permit expectation, or preference for any future Festival year, and that the City reserves the right to review, revise, further limit, eliminate, or otherwise regulate political-expression-related vendor booth registrations for subsequent years to the fullest extent permitted by law.

The proposed policy establishes rules for political-expression-related vendor booths, political expression by registered parade participants, and campaign-related conduct by officials attending in an official capacity during the 2026 Founders Day Festival and parade.

The policy is intended to promote orderly event administration, reduce disruption, preserve the family-oriented and civic character of the Festival, allocate limited event space, and provide clear, evenhanded rules for participants and City officials.

For 2026, the policy limits political expression vendor booths to no more than two booths, consisting of one booth for the returning local Republican Party organization and one booth for the returning local Democratic Party

organization. The policy does not allow booths for political candidates, candidate committees, campaign committees, political action committees, officeholder campaigns, write-in candidacies, exploratory committees, or persons or entities acting on behalf of a candidate. It also excludes other politically expressive booths, including advocacy organizations, issue campaigns, partisan clubs, ideological groups, and other persons or entities primarily communicating political campaign or partisan advocacy messages.

The policy separately allows political expression during the parade by political candidates and political parties that are themselves registered in-parade participants, subject to neutral parade rules. It further prohibits incumbent officeholders and other public officials attending in an official capacity from engaging in campaign activity while acting in that official capacity.

The policy regulates the use of non-political booths by limiting them to their approved booth purpose and prohibiting their use as a platform for campaign activity or unrelated partisan or candidate advocacy. It also states that, without regard to viewpoint, non-political booth operators may not distribute campaign literature, display campaign signs, solicit votes or campaign contributions, invite attendees to support or oppose a candidate or political party, or otherwise conduct in-person campaign activity unrelated to the booth's approved purpose.

The policy provides that political expression during the parade is limited to political candidates and political parties that are themselves registered in-parade participants, and that nonparticipants may not use the parade lineup, route, or a place within an approved parade entry to engage in organized campaigning or similar political expression as part of the parade presentation.

The policy authorizes specified City staff and designees to interpret and administer the policy in consultation with the City Attorney and to issue reasonable written procedures consistent with it. It also authorizes the City to deny, revoke, suspend, relocate, or condition booth registration or parade participation for noncompliance.

For persons or entities whose participation is directly, substantially, and adversely affected by the policy, the document provides for refund of registration fees paid prior to adoption to the extent participation is adversely limited by paragraph (b), and allows submission of a claim for reimbursement of expenses incurred in reasonable reliance on eligibility to participate, while stating that nothing requires the City to provide reimbursement and that reimbursement may not violate applicable law.

**Committee
Recommendations:**

The Founders Day Committee was briefed on the legal issues arising from the allocation of limited festival space to political groups and recommended approval of a policy consistent with the version attached for City Council's consideration.

**Recommended
Council Actions:**

Approval.

Attachments:

Draft resolution

Draft policy