

ORDINANCE NO. 029, 2025  
OF THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF FORT COLLINS  
AMENDING 7-145 OF THE CODE OF THE CITY OF FORT  
COLLINS TO CLARIFY AND REVISE THE PROCESS FOR  
ENFORCEMENT OF CAMPAIGN VIOLATIONS

A. In 2015, the City Council formed an ad hoc committee to review, discuss and recommend the most beneficial changes to the Code and City Charter regarding elections and other related matters.

B. In January 2017, Council made the ad hoc Committee a standing committee of Council for the purpose of identifying and evaluating ideas for improvements to City election laws and practices and anticipating adjustments that may be needed to adapt to a changing legal and technological environment, for Council consideration.

C. As a result of the Committee's work (as both an ad hoc committee and a standing committee), Ordinance No. 021, 2016, Ordinance No. 005, 2017, Ordinance No. 045, 2018, Ordinance No. 077, 2018, and Ordinance No. 113, 2018, Ordinance No. 109, 2020, Ordinance No. 112, 2020, and Ordinance No. 079, 2022 were considered and adopted by the Council to update various provisions of Chapter 7 of the City Code.

D. The Committee has continued to meet and has consider additional revisions to Chapter 7, including the repeal of City Code Section 7-145 in its entirety, to be replaced with an updated enforcement process for campaign violations.

E. The Committee has recommended these changes to Section 7-145 to generally improve and clarify the City's campaign enforcement procedures and processes.

F. These updates further the City's and the public's interest in shedding light for the public on the enforcement process for alleged campaign violations, while ensuring that the complainant and respondent are both notified at each crucial stage.

G. The Council desires to enact the recommendations of the Committee and staff to clarify and improve Section 7-145, as set forth below.

In light of the foregoing recitals, which the Council hereby makes and adopts as determinations and findings, BE IT ORDAINED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF FORT COLLINS that Section 7-145 of the Code of the City of Fort Collins is hereby repealed in its entirety and replaced to read as follows:

**Sec. 7-145. - Allegation of campaign violation.**

(a) **Filing a Complaint:** Any candidate or registered elector of the City ("complainant") who has reasonable, good faith belief, based on factual information, that any person, candidate, candidate committee, issue committee, small-scale committee, or political

committee has violated Chapter 7, Article V, of this Code may file a written complaint with the City Clerk, no later than sixty (60) days after the date of the alleged violation.

- (1) The complaint must contain:
  - a. The name of the alleged violator;
  - b. The Code provision allegedly violated;
  - c. A brief statement or description of the offense allegedly committed and the basis for the allegation;
  - d. All documentation or other factual evidence known to the complainant to support the allegation;
  - e. Identification of any witnesses or persons with relevant knowledge; and
  - f. The name, address and telephone number of the complainant.

(b) **Complaint Process:** All complaints filed under this section will be reviewed in the following manner, however if a complaint is dismissed at any stage it will end at that stage and will not proceed to the next:

- (1) Preliminary Review;
- (2) Separation of Criminal Complaints from Civil Infractions, only Civil Infractions proceed to the next stage;
- (3) Evidentiary Review;
- (4) Investigation; and
- (5) Referral to Municipal Court.

(c) **Preliminary Review:** The City Clerk, in consultation with the City Attorney, will conduct a preliminary review to determine whether the complaint is sufficient and notify both the complainant and respondent within three (3) working days of receipt of the complaint. A sufficient complaint must comply with the following:

- (1) Was timely filed under § 7-145(a);
- (2) Contains the information required by § 7-145(a)(1); and
- (3) Properly alleges a violation of Chapter 7, Article V, of this Code.

(d) **Insufficient Complaints:** If the City Clerk, in consultation with the City Attorney, determines that the complaint is insufficient, the City Clerk will:

- (1) Notify the complainant that the complaint has been dismissed and provide a brief explanation of the determination; and

(2) Forward the complaint to the person who is the subject to the complaint (“respondent”) and notify them that the complaint has been dismissed.

(e) **Conflict:** If the complaint is determined by the City Clerk, in consultation with the City Attorney, and if the respondent to the complaint is a candidate for an elected position for municipal office or if the City Clerk, in consultation with the City Attorney, determines internal review of the complaint may raise conflict concerns, the City Attorney will retain special legal counsel to conduct the evaluation of the complaint using the process described below.

(f) **Criminal Complaints:** If the City Clerk, in consultation with the City Attorney, determines that the complaint is sufficient and alleges a criminal violation as set forth in § 7-143(b), the City Clerk will forward the complaint to the respondent and to the City Attorney, who will evaluate the complaint for probable cause as provided for in this Division 2.

(g) **Civil Infractions:** For sufficient complaints that do not allege a criminal violation, the complaints will be subject to a civil infraction process as follows:

(1) The City Clerk will forward the complaint to the respondent by electronic mail, notifying the respondent that the alleged violation may be subject to a civil infraction and of the presumptive fine in accordance with § 7-143(a).

(2) Upon receipt of the complaint and at any time prior to filing of the complaint with Municipal Court, the respondent may:

a. Pay the fine; or

b. Provide any responsive information to the City Clerk regarding the allegations in the complaint.

(3) **Evidentiary Review:** After providing notice to the respondent of the complaint, the City Clerk, in consultation with the City Attorney, will determine whether the complainant has provided credible evidence to support a finding that the respondent violated this Article so as to warrant further investigation. If the City Clerk determines that the complaint does not contain credible evidence or that the allegation does not warrant further investigation, the Clerk will dismiss the complaint and notify both the respondent and the complainant of the dismissal and the reason for the dismissal.

(4) **Cure:** Upon receipt of the complaint up until the initiation of an investigation, the respondent may provide evidence of a cure. A “cure” is defined to include evidence of substantial compliance with the applicable law. Upon receipt of evidence of a cure, the City Clerk, in consultation with the City Attorney, will determine whether the provided evidence sufficiently cures the violation. If a cure is found, the City Clerk will dismiss the complaint. The City Clerk will notify both

the respondent and the complainant. When reviewing the evidence, the City Clerk, in consultation with the City Attorney, will consider the following:

- a. The extent of the respondent's noncompliance;
- b. The purpose of the provision violated and whether that purpose was substantially achieved despite the noncompliance; and
- c. Whether the noncompliance may properly be viewed as a knowing attempt to mislead the electorate or election officials.

(5) **Investigation:** If the City Clerk, in consultation with the City Attorney, determines that the complaint contains credible evidence and warrants further investigation, the City Attorney will arrange for any necessary outside or internal investigators to assist in conducting an investigation. The City Clerk will notify the respondent and complainant that an investigation has begun, that they may be contacted for an interview or other information gathering. Any additional information that either the respondent or complainant wants to provide must be received by the City Clerk within ten (10) business days. Documentation must be received within the ten (10) working days in order to be considered during the investigation.

(6) **Payment of Civil Fine:** Upon receiving payment of the presumptive fine, the City Clerk will close the complaint and notify the respondent and complainant.

(7) Based on the outcome of the investigation the City Clerk, in consultation with the City Attorney, will determine whether a violation under Chapter 7, Article 5, of this Code occurred.

(8) If it is determined that a violation did occur, the complaint will be filed with the Municipal Court. If the City Clerk, in consultation with the City Attorney, determines that a violation under Chapter 7, Article 5 did not occur, the City Clerk will dismiss the complaint and notify the complainant and respondent of the dismissal and the reason for the dismissal.

(9) **Referral to Municipal Court:** Any complaint filed with the Municipal Court under this Section will be governed by Article V of Chapter 19 of this Code.

(10) A complainant or any other nonrespondent will not be a party to the City Attorney's initial review, cure proceedings, investigation, or any proceeding in the Municipal Court. A complainant may request permission from the Municipal Judge or their designee to file an amicus curiae brief.

(11) Any person that commits a violation of this Article will be personally liable for the penalties imposed. Any candidate will be personally liable for penalties imposed upon the candidate or the candidate's committee and may use campaign contributions to pay penalties.

Introduced, considered favorably on first reading on February 18, 2025, and approved on second reading for final passage on March 4, 2025.

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Mayor

ATTEST:

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City Clerk

Effective Date: March 14, 2025  
Approving Attorney: Sara Arfmann