



# City of Huntington Beach

2000 Main Street ♦ Huntington Beach, CA 92648  
(714) 536-5227 ♦ [www.huntingtonbeachca.gov](http://www.huntingtonbeachca.gov)

---

**Office of the City Clerk**  
**Robin Estanislau, City Clerk**

**SUPPLEMENTAL  
COMMUNICATION**

September 5, 2023

Mayor and City Council  
City of Huntington Beach  
2000 Main Street  
Huntington Beach CA 92648

Meeting Date: 9/5/2023

Agenda Item No.: 30 (23-700)

Re: Proposed Amendments to Sections 300, 301 and 302 of the City Charter

Mayor Strickland and Councilmembers,

While I oppose action taken by the Charter Ad Hoc Committee to move forward in presenting any Charter amendment to the voters without providing the public with opportunity for input, as your City Clerk and Elections Official, I strongly urge you to consider removal of language related to the management of elections, election cycles, and City Clerk qualifications included in proposed Charter amendments #1 and #2.

First, I would like to express my extreme disappointment and confusion in how the amendments are being compiled and presented to the voters. Comingling with other non-related and perhaps more controversial subjects will result in a citizen rendering a "yes" or "no" vote in part to a question, and not the measure as a whole. While there may be a cost savings in collective presentation of information, the end result will not truly represent the will of the people.

**Charter Amendment No. 1:** "require Voter ID for elections, more in-person voting locations, and monitoring of drop-boxes." Approval of Charter amendment #1 would result in the addition of SECTION 705. SPECIAL PROVISIONS RELATING TO MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, to the Charter. The proposed language of Section 705 states, "The City shall verify the eligibility of Electors by voter identification. Beginning in 2026, the City shall provide at least 12 polling locations for in-person voting dispersed evenly throughout the City. The City shall monitor ballot drop boxes located within the City for compliance with applicable laws." Additional language states, "As provided for in Section 300 of this Charter, the City shall also determine the term of the City's elective officers, the length of term, and the election cycle in which the election for those offices occur for the City's elective offices." Please explain what is meant by the term "City" ... this needs to be made clear to avoid potential abuse. As this sentence relates to the proposed change in election cycles for the office of City Clerk and City Treasurer, I provide additional comments under Charter Amendment No. 2, below.

**Require Voter ID:** The California Constitution provides that charter cities have plenary (wide-ranging) authority with respect to specific municipal affairs, including the conduct of local elections. Upon presentation of the proposed Charter amendments during the August 1 City Council meeting, Mayor

---

*Sister City: Anjo, Japan*

---

Strickland clarified his understanding that the Ad Hoc Committee's Voter ID proposal would first need to be confirmed as feasible, and described examples of voting alternatives such as rank choice voting in Northern California, and also cited examples of other actions that require voter identification such as boarding a plane, etc., to support the proposed amendment. He shared his understanding that the proposed amendment was not meant to disregard the provisions of the State elections code, but allow additional control (if feasible), stating he is not recommending removing the County from the elections process as they go a good job.

It is my opinion that the City Council does not fully understand that taking action to require Voter ID would result in the City conducting municipal elections on its own, without the assistance of the County. In California, voters are required to provide valid identification at the time they register to vote, and not at the poll site unless limited circumstances apply:

- You are a first time voter and you registered by mail, and
- You did not provide your driver license, or California identification number, or the last four digits of your social security number on your voter registration form.

Does the City Council believe that the County of Orange would consider incorporation of our "home rules" into their Board-approved voting model and violate state law? I think not.

At their August 1 meeting, I heard members of the City Council express concerns about voter fraud, and shared ideas about how other counties and states are taking action to address and combat these concerns. I would like to remind the Council that in both 2022 and 2023, the Orange County Registrar of Voters was granted ISA 9001:2015 certification, an internationally recognized standard that ensures its services meet the needs of the stakeholders through use of an effective quality management system. I'm told recognition of this standard is quite rare. In addition, following the 2022 General Election, Orange County conducted a ballot comparison Risk-Limiting Audit that identified "0" discrepancies. A copy of the report, including a video recording of the random seed generating process along with the ballot manifest can be found online at [ocvote.gov/rla](https://ocvote.gov/rla).

To get an idea of the time and expense needed to procure qualified elections equipment and services to the City electorate, my staff and I made inquiries from three Los Angeles County charter cities that currently conduct their own municipal elections. The City of Whittier responded to our request with a 2021 Council staff report that detailed actions to purchase ballot counting equipment, enter into an agreement for printing and mailing of election materials, and organize community meetings for the purpose of identifying election related services. The projected costs to initiate the aforementioned equipment and services, including staff and outreach components, was estimated at **\$386,156.00**.

**Provide for at least 12 polling locations:** In 2019, the Orange County Board of Supervisors approved transitioning to the current Vote Center model that was implemented at the March 3, 2020 Presidential Primary Election, providing all registered voters with a vote-by-mail ballot that they could chose to return by way of the United States Postal Service, drop into any ballot drop box located within County boundaries, or opt to vote in-person at any Vote Center in Orange County. The logistics of this voting model can be found in California Elections Code Division 4 – Mail Ballot Elections (4000-4108), and section 4005 provides a formula to determine the number of voting locations each city must provide for within their jurisdiction. In the General Municipal Election of 2022, Huntington Beach hosted 13 Vote Centers, and for the March 2024 Primary Election, is estimated to host 13 Vote Centers as well. Why



does the Ad Hoc Committee feel it necessary to name a minimum number of voting locations in the Charter when the code-identified formula already serves the voting needs for our citizens? The County Registrar of Voters has recently stated that to date, the ROV has not received a request to increase the number of polling locations within a jurisdiction.

**Monitoring of Ballot Drop Boxes:** Does the Ad Hoc Committee believe that existing ballot drop boxes securely locked and maintained by the County and used by voters county-wide are susceptible to illegal actions that interfere with safe elections? The language offered in Section 705 provides no example of what type of monitoring of ballot drop box locations the City is recommending. While the City would have no authority to attach any security-related equipment to County-owned property, would it move to install surveillance equipment on adjacent City structures to monitor presumed or reported suspicious activity? I'm not aware of any documented evidence that suggests this type of action is necessary, and it seems to me that considering such an action may be intended to keep voters from using a drop box altogether.

**Charter Amendment No. 1:** "... update the qualifications of candidates for City Clerk." SECTION 310. CITY CLERK. POWER AND DUTIES. in its current form reads, "*To become and remain eligible for City Clerk, the person elected or appointed shall have a Bachelor's Degree in business, public administration, or a related field,*" and hold a certification as a Municipal Clerk or obtain such certification within the first three years in office. The Ad Hoc Committee is recommending removal of language identifying the type of qualifying degree (i.e., business, public administration and the phrase, "or a related field") to allow candidacy of anyone possessing any type of Bachelor's Degree.

The City Clerk's profession, one of the oldest public servant professions in history, has evolved over time. Today, a City Clerk's level of responsibility far exceeds what is described in Charter Section 310. The City Clerk is the Elections Official for the City and partners with County officials to meet the demands of that role successfully, serves on various regional and State boards, and interacts with Clerks and other high-level officials throughout the year. In addition, the organizational responsibilities of a City Clerk include serving as a department head, overseeing the department's budget, adhering to management and legislative policies and procedures, providing input on agency-wide issues, and many others.

In 2010, a Charter Review Committee was formed to conduct a comprehensive review of the City Charter. One of the proposed amendments was to update education requirements for the City Clerk to align the position with other executive level positions within the City. The proposal was presented as currently written, and was approved by the City Attorney, the City Council, and ultimately by the voters as Measure "N" at the General Municipal ballot of November 2, 2010. Opinions have been shared that the language *Bachelor's Degree in business* is not valid, so if the Council prefers to strengthen the description, I simply recommend that the term *administration* be inserted after the term *business* ... problem solved.

I support Section 310 of the Charter remaining as currently written for continued recognition of the professional nature of the City Clerk's position. Allowing candidacy for individuals possessing **any** type of Bachelor's Degree would not only minimize the importance of the City Clerk's powers and duties, but it would open the field to applicants unable to honor the position and its identified duties, or would provide a favorable opportunity for individuals seeking political gains or those simply interested in obtaining a full time government job with benefits. Members of our community have historically

supported the City Clerk as an elected position, and have the right to elect only qualified applicants that fully understand and commit to providing a means for Huntington Beach citizens to participate in their local government, whether it be through Brown "Open Meetings" Act compliance, staying informed of opportunities for service on City boards, commissions and committees, having access to public records, receiving assistance when considering a run public office, or simply being available to meet a variety of the public's needs on a daily basis.

At the August 1 City Council, I shared verbal concerns from the podium about the proposed, election-related amendments with specific attention to the amendment to reduce education requirements for City Clerk. I educated the public of the City Attorney's involvement in this amendment, and his wife's plans to run for the office in 2024 which she has publicly acknowledged. The City Attorney chose to respond to my comments from the podium, calling them "discouraging," and describing the City Clerk's duties as "to keep the official records of the City and to keep the official minutes of the meetings ... It's not technical, it's not a profession."

Mayor Strickland attempted to provide support for the Ad Hoc Committee's recommendation to remove language related to the type of Bachelor's degree, and phrase "or a related elated field" language, calling it "subjective." City Attorney Gates stated that the educational requirement as currently worded, generated past questions and required research which never resulted in a clear, non-subjective interpretation.

On August 2, the Los Angeles Times/Daily Pilot newspaper reported on actions taken at the meeting (see attached), and the City Attorney's public response to what I shared from the podium, including his misguided opinion of the role of City Clerk. The City Clerk's Association of California (CCAC) took issue with the City Attorney's unqualified mischaracterization of the City Clerk profession, and held a special meeting on August 28 to discuss not only approval of a letter of support for the City of Huntington Beach City Clerk's Office (attached, including Special Agenda and staff report), but also to direct the Director Legislative Affairs to work with CCAC's lobbyist firm to determine any proposed legislative solutions regarding the City Clerk profession. I attended that meeting, and during discussion on the item was informed by the Legislative Director that the League (Cal Cities) and Secretary of State's office have been alerted of Huntington Beach's pending actions, and are paying close attention to how these actions track.

I polled all Orange County cities for their education requirements for City Clerk, and all but three responded (see table, below). For those requiring a four-year or Bachelor's degree, the majority of degree titles identified included Business Administration, Public Administration, Public Policy, and Records Management. It is also interesting that the phrase "or related field" described by Mayor Strickland as "subjective," was included in 25 of the 31 requirement descriptions. It is my understanding that the phrase "or related field" is meant to demonstrate a candidate's knowledge/experience/connection to the job assignment. This phrase is found in most job applications and is present in education requirements listed in job descriptions for the City of Huntington Beach department head positions of Assistant City Manager, Chief Financial Officer, Director of Public Works, Director of Human Resources, Community Development Director, Chief Information Officer, and others.



City	Education Requirements
Aliso Viejo	Bachelor's degree in public administration, business administration, <b>or related field</b>
Anaheim	Bachelor's in public administration, business administration, <b>or related field</b>
Brea	Coursework, training, or certification in public records management
Buena Park	Bachelor's from an accredited college or university in public administration <b>or related field</b> desirable
Costa Mesa	Bachelor's in public administration <b>or related field</b> from an accredited college or university
Cypress	Bachelor's in Public Administration, Business Administration, <b>or closely related field</b>
Dana Point	Bachelor's from an accredited college or university in public administration, public policy <b>or closely related field</b>
Fountain Valley	Bachelor's from an accredited college or university with major coursework in business, public administration, <b>or a related field</b>
Fullerton	Bachelor's in Management, Business Administration, Public Administration, <b>or related field</b> from accredited college or university
Garden Grove	two years of coursework from an accredited college or university (minimum 60 semester units) with major work in records management, office management, <b>or a related field</b>
Huntington Beach	Bachelor's in business, public administration, <b>or a related field</b>
Irvine	Bachelor's with courses in public administration, records management, public policy <b>or related field</b>
Laguna Beach	No education requirements identified - elected position
Laguna Hills	No education requirements identified
Laguna Niguel	Equivalent to a Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university with major course work in business, public or personnel administration, <b>or a related field</b>
Laguna Woods	No information provided
La Habra	No information provided
Lake Forest	Bachelor's in public administration, business administration, <b>or closely related field</b>
La Palma	12 <sup>th</sup> grade education supplemented by college-level coursework or specialized training related to the City Clerk profession <b>or related field</b>
Los Alamitos	Equivalent to a Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university with major course work in public administration, business administration, records management <b>or a related field</b>
Mission Viejo	Bachelor's in business, public administration <b>or a related field</b>
Newport Beach	Bachelor's in Public Administration, records management, public policy <b>or related field</b> from an accredited college or university, or equivalent educational achievement in another discipline
Orange	Equivalent to an Associate of Arts in public or business administration; Bachelor's degree preferred

Placentia	Bachelor's in public administration, information systems, human resources, <b>or related field</b> (position is Director of Administrative Services which includes HR, emergency/disaster preparedness, City Clerk/Records operations, and special projects)
Rancho Santa Margarita	Equivalent to a Bachelor's from an accredited college or university with major course work in public administration, business administration <b>or a related field</b>
San Clemente	Title Legislative Administrator; Equivalent to a Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university with major course work in public administration, business administration, <b>or a related field</b>
San Juan Capistrano	Equivalent to a Bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university with major course work in public administration, business administration, <b>or a related field</b>
Santa Ana	Equivalent to a Bachelor's degree in public or business administration from an accredited college or university
Seal Beach	No information provided
Stanton	Bachelor's in public administration, business administration, <b>or closely related field</b>
Tustin	Bachelor's in Public Administration, Business Administration, <b>or a related field</b>
Villa Park	City Manager/City Clerk function combined
Westminster	Equivalent to a Bachelor's from an accredited college or university with major course work in public administration, business administration, records management <b>or related field</b>
Yorba Linda	Bachelor's with major course work in Public or Business Administration <b>or closely related field</b>
Information retained from 31 of 34 OC Cities	23 of 31 cities include within City Clerk or related title qualifications reference to a Bachelor's or four-year equivalent in Business Administration, Public Administration, Public Policy, or Records Management  25 of 31 qualification descriptions include use of the phrase "or related field"

**Charter Amendment No. 2:** ".... and move the City Clerk and City Treasurer elections to the gubernatorial election cycle." SECTION 300. CITY COUNCIL. CITY ATTORNEY. CLERK AND TREASURER. TERMS., has been revised to include "A City Clerk and City Treasurer shall be elected **for a term of six years** at the general municipal election held in **2024, 1968, and each fourth year thereafter**. A City Attorney, **a City Clerk, and a City Treasurer** shall be elected in **2030** 1966, and each fourth year thereafter. The Ad Hoc Committee has proposed that the 2024 terms for City Clerk and City Treasurer will be adjusted to a 6-year term that will revert back to a 4-year term in the gubernatorial election of 2030. No justification has been provided for this change. Could it possibly be constructed this way to benefit a hand-picked City Clerk? Neither myself, nor the City Treasurer were approached by the Committee to discuss the merits or circumstances of this proposed amendment which in my opinion seems very calculated, and disingenuous.

In closing, it would be very remiss of me not to share my concerns about the Council's decision to form a Charter Ad Hoc Committee that met behind closed doors to consider their own personal ideas for change to our constitution without involvement of City staff (with the exception of the City Attorney), or our voting public. It is also difficult to understand why public funds estimated near **\$1.2M** would be spent to place non-vital Charter amendments on a Primary ballot.

Again, please reconsider movement forward of any charter amendment, but specifically those related to elections, election cycles and City Clerk qualifications, for placement on the March 5, 2024 Primary Election ballot.

Sincerely,



Robin Estanislau, CMC  
City Clerk

Att: August 2, 2023 Los Angeles Times/Daily Pilot news article  
CCAC Letter of Support, Special Meeting Agenda and Staff Report dated August 28, 2023

c: Al Zelinka, City Manager  
Matt Szabo, Daily Pilot



**2022-2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**MARC A. DONOHUE,**  
President  
City of Eastvale

**JESSICA BLAIR,**  
1<sup>st</sup> Vice-President  
City of Half Moon Bay

**ASHTON AROCHO,**  
2<sup>nd</sup> Vice-President  
City of Westminster

**DEBRA BLACK,**  
Recording Secretary  
City of San Dimas

**MITZI ORTIZ,**  
Communications Director  
City of Aliso Viejo

**RANDI JOHL-OLSON,**  
Legislative Director  
City of Temecula

**HOLLY CHARLÈTY,**  
Professional Development Director  
City of El Cerrito

**RICCA CHARLON,**  
Treasurer  
City of Ridgecrest

**TODD STERMER,**  
Conference Director  
City of Fresno

**MICHAEL MACDONALD,**  
Member Services Director  
City of Ventura

**CANDICE ALVAREZ,**  
Mentor Development Director  
City of Lake Elsinore

**ROXANNE BRECEDA,**  
Networking Director  
City of Glendora

**SYLVIA BERMUDEZ,**  
Scholarship Director  
Coachella Valley Water District



August 28, 2023

City of Huntington Beach  
Attn: Tony Strickland, Mayor  
2000 Main Street  
Huntington Beach, CA 92648

**Re: Letter of Support to the City of Huntington Beach City Clerks Office**

Dear Mayor Strickland:

This letter is in reference to comments made by the City of Huntington Beach City Attorney regarding the City Clerk profession. Comments stating that City Clerks only "keep official records and official minutes" and that the City Clerk position "isn't technical or a profession" is deeply unsettling and potentially very damaging to our local democratic process.

The municipal clerk profession is one of the oldest public servant positions in history and can be traced back to 1272 A.D. Normal duties for the City Clerk include but are not limited to serving as the Elections Official for the City, serving as the filing officer for Fair Political Practices Commission forms, serving as a passport agent and notary public, preparing legal notices, administering department budgets, administering City Council agendas, minutes, official records, and meeting management, compliance officer for federal, state, and local statutes, including the Political Reform Act, the Brown Act, and the Public Records Act, just to name a few.

Particularly during a time where increased spotlights and scrutiny are put on local election officials, we need to support and uplift our profession, not degrade or dismiss it. The City Clerks Association of California ("CCAC") stands in solidarity with the Huntington Beach City Clerks Office and hopes that the Huntington Beach City Council would do the same.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to me with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be "MAD", written over a light blue horizontal line.

Marc A. Donohue  
CCAC President

att #1





CITY CLERKS ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA

**CITY CLERKS ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

**Special Meeting Agenda**

**Monday, August 28, 2023**

**4:00 p.m.**

**Zoom Meeting Information**

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/86912676714>

Meeting ID: 869 1267 6714

One tap mobile

+16694449171,,82052907974# US

+16699006833,,82052907974# US (San Jose)

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

**2. ATTENDANCE/EXCUSED ABSENCES**

**3. PUBLIC COMMENT**

**4. CONSENT CALENDAR**

**A. Approval of Minutes**

Recommendation: It's recommended that the Board of Directors adopt the minutes from the regular meeting on May 11, 2023 and the special meeting on August 10, 2023.

**5. BOARD OF DIRECTOR BUSINESS/DISCUSSION ITEMS**

**A. Approval of an Agreement with California State University of San Marcos to provide Education Institutes**

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Board of Directors approve the Education Committee's recommendation to approve the agreement with California State University of San Marcos – Extended Learning, to provide CCAC's education institutes starting in 2024 and authorize the President to approve non-substantial amendments to the agreement.

**CITY CLERKS ASSOCIATION OF CALIFORNIA**

**BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING**

August 28, 2023

**B. Letter of Support for the City of Huntington Beach City Clerk's Office**

Recommendation: It is recommended that the Board of Directors:

1. Approve a letter of support for the City of Huntington Beach City Clerk's Office.
2. Direct the Director of Communications to develop an outreach plan to allow CCAC members to sign the proposed letter of support.
3. Direct the Director of Legislative Affairs to work with CCAC's lobbyist firm to determine any proposed legislative solutions regarding the City Clerk profession.

**6. ORAL REPORTS FROM OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS**

**7. ADJOURNMENT**

The next regular meeting of the CCAC Board of Directors is September 19, 2023, at 11:00 a.m.





**TO:** Board of Directors

**FROM:** Marc A. Donohue, MMC  
President

**DATE:** August 28, 2023

**SUBJECT:** CCAC Letter of Support to the City of Huntington Beach City Clerks Office

---

#### Summary

The attached letter of support for the City of Huntington Beach City Clerks Office is provided for the Board's consideration for approval. In addition to the proposed letter, it is recommended that the Director of Communications develop an outreach plan to allow CCAC members to also sign the proposed letter of support and for the Director of Legislative Affairs to work with CCAC's lobbyist firm to determine any proposed legislative solutions regarding the City Clerk profession.

#### Recommended Action

It is recommended that the Board of Directors:

1. Approve a letter of support for the City of Huntington Beach City Clerk's Office.
2. Direct the Director of Communications to develop an outreach plan to allow CCAC members to sign the proposed letter of support.
3. Direct the Director of Legislative Affairs to work with CCAC's lobbyist firm to determine any proposed legislative solutions regarding the City Clerk profession.

#### Background

At a recent City Council meeting, the Huntington Beach City Attorney made disparaging remarks regarding the City Clerk profession. The attached Los Angeles Times article details the comments that were made at the meeting.

At the CCAC special board meeting on August 10, 2023, the board reached consensus to bring back an item to provide a letter of support for the Huntington Beach City Clerks Office.

#### Attachments:

1. Proposed Letter of Support to the City of Huntington Beach City Clerks Office
2. Los Angeles Times Article Regarding the City of Huntington Beach

## Huntington Beach city clerk, attorney clash over proposed charter amendments

<https://www.latimes.com/socal/daily-pilot/news/story/2023-08-02/huntington-beach-city-clerk-attorney-clash-over-proposed-charter-amendments>



Huntington Beach City Clerk Robin Estanislau addresses the City Council about proposed charter amendments during Tuesday night's meeting.

(James Carbone)

BY MATT SZABOSTAFF WRITER

AUG. 2, 2023 3:31 PM PT

- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [Show more sharing options](#)

The city clerk sits just a few feet from Huntington Beach City Atty. Michael Gates on the City Council dais.



Both of these elected positions could be held by people with the same last name, Gates, in a couple of years. Not only that, but Gates and his wife, Kelly, could possibly even campaign together in 2026, if voters approve charter revisions.

The City Council moved forward with 11 possible charter revisions on Tuesday night, via straw poll voting. This step came after a council ad hoc committee was formed in June with the goal of getting the committee's proposed revisions on the California primary ballot next March.

A couple of the revisions deal with the city clerk position, currently held by Robin Estanislau. She was appointed in 2016 after former City Clerk Joan Flynn retired, and has been twice supported by voters since then.

One of the possible revisions would change the election cycles for the clerk and treasurer to the gubernatorial cycle, which is the same cycle the city attorney follows. The other revision would modify clerk qualifications so that the position requires any four-year bachelor's degree.

The city charter currently states the city clerk should hold a bachelor's degree in business, public administration or a related field. The clerk also must hold a certification as a municipal clerk or obtain such certification within the first three years in office.



Members of the Huntington Beach City Council listen to public comments during Tuesday night's meeting.

(James Carbone)

Both revisions were moved forward with a 4-3 straw vote, like most of the other charter amendments being proposed. Mayor Tony Strickland, Mayor Pro Tem Gracey Van Der Mark and Councilmen Casey McKeon and Pat Burns, the council's conservative majority, voted yes, while Councilman Dan Kalmick and Councilwomen Natalie Moser and Rhonda Bolton voted no.

Estanislau made the rare step of criticizing Michael Gates during public comments Tuesday night. She said that during a council meeting recess in June he told her that his wife was planning to run for clerk.

"He proceeded to fish for information on my plans for retirement," Estanislau said. "I asked if he saw Kelly's candidacy as a conflict of interest and he said no, suggesting that our positions as attorney and clerk did not interact much. I questioned Kelly's qualifications, and he said she had run a few businesses."

Estanislau added that her assistant clerk, Steven Aguilar, would be a most qualified candidate to replace her since he's already served as clerk in another city, Eastvale.

"Our citizens rely on unbiased service from a trained and educated clerk," Estanislau said. "The charter's existing requirements are appropriate and should not be undermined to provide opportunity to unqualified candidates or politicians, for that matter. I am confident that our voting public understands misuse of power when they see it."



Huntington Beach City Clerk Robin Estanislau, flanked by Assistant City Clerk Steven Aguilar, reads from the agenda during Tuesday night's meeting.

(James Carbone)



Gates made his own public comments Tuesday night, after first declaring that Estanislau was “a great clerk.”

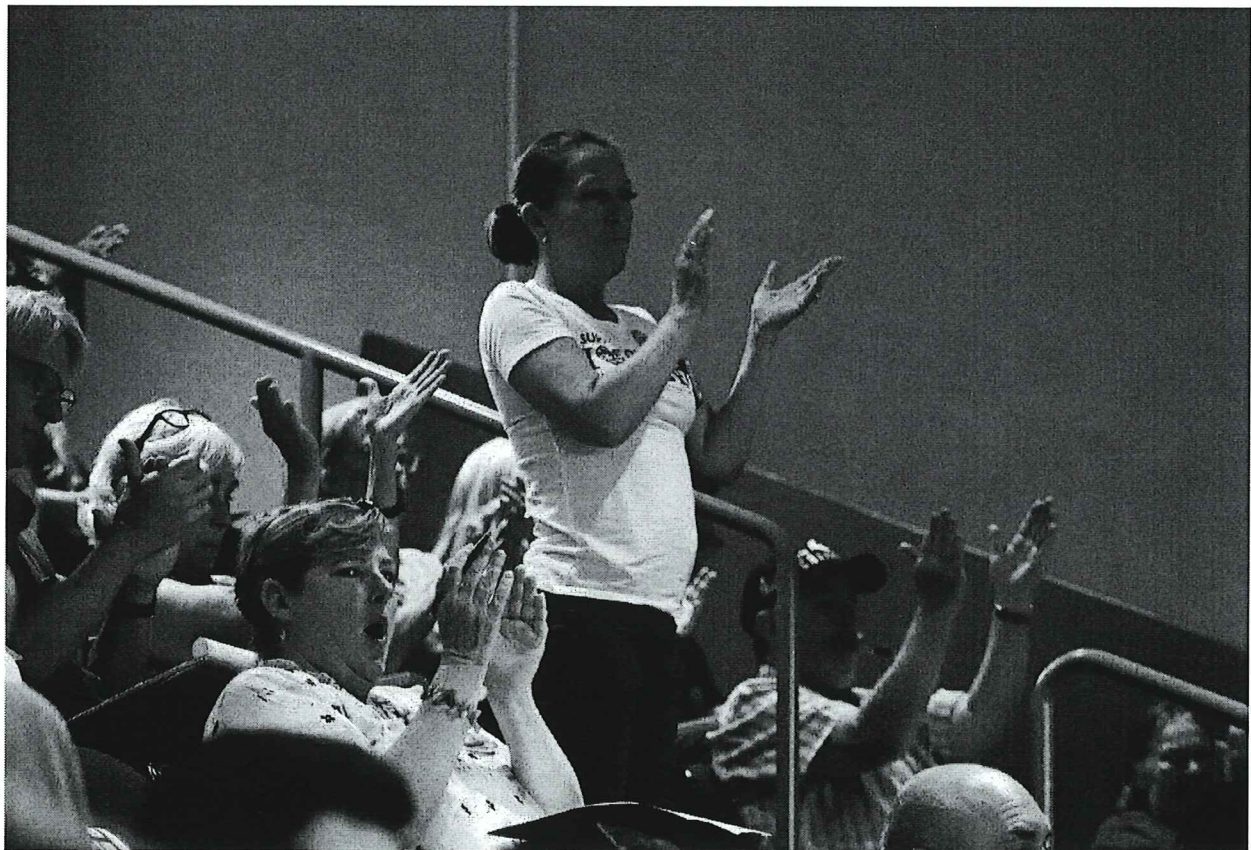
“I went to Robin as a courtesy to let [her] know that my wife was planning to run,” he said. “So many people have asked her to run ... I find it really discouraging, frankly, Robin, that our top elections official would come to the podium and shame and out somebody — yes, it’s my wife — when she hasn’t even decided to run. She hasn’t even pulled papers, yet you’re out here shaming her. It’s very anti-democratic and protectionist of you.”

Estanislau holds a bachelor’s degree in organizational management from Ashford University. Gates would not say what his wife’s college degree was in during a phone interview Wednesday but added it could arguably already be considered adequate under the current guidelines.

“If you look at what the city clerk’s duties are, they are to keep the official records of the city and to keep the official minutes of the meetings,” he said. “It’s not technical, it’s not a profession. They are clerk duties outlined in the charter. To say that the charter must require some super-high bar ... That’s just protectionism. That’s literally erecting barriers around incumbent clerks to protect their job.”

### **Local control over elections debated**

Another hotly debated possible charter amendment was over a recommendation from the ad hoc committee that the city maintain local control over municipal elections in three areas: checking voter identifications, requiring at least 12 locations citywide for in-person voting, and having the city monitor ballot drop boxes.



People cheer in support of Huntington Beach City Clerk Robin Estanislau as she speaks about the proposed charter amendments on Tuesday at City Hall.

(James Carbone)

The item received another 4-3 straw vote, with the same council members voting for and against.

Estanislau was not a fan of this proposed amendment, either, calling it unnecessary during her public comments and citing the sterling reputation of the Orange County Registrar of Voters.

“The time and money required to meet the objectives of this amendment and incorporate so-called ‘home rules’ doesn’t make sense to me,” she said. “I wonder about liability associated with interfering in our citizens’ right to vote in a legitimate system designed and managed by election experts.”

McKeon said requiring a voter ID when voting was reasonable.

“The most sacred thing is voting,” McKeon said. “Yet when you go to the polling place and say, ‘Can I show you my ID?’ they go, ‘We don’t accept that.’ This is just bringing faith in our elections. Georgia instituted voter ID, and they had the highest turnout in their history.”

Kalmick responded that no one in Huntington Beach is questioning whether their vote has been counted.

“Who’s asking for this?” he said. “I’m just trying to figure out what problem we’re trying to solve.”

Gates said his office’s initial research shows that the changes being proposed are legal.

But Ann Ravel, a former chair of both the California Fair Political Practices Commission and Federal Elections Commission, raised questions about the proposed amendment.

She noted that Shasta County, in Northern California, is now hand-counting its votes. She said these actions are an indirect result of questions raised following the 2020 presidential election, in which President Trump alleged voter fraud that has not been substantiated.

Ravel cited students or less wealthy people as two groups less likely to have the voter IDs that Huntington Beach could request.

“It definitely is a form of voter suppression to require those IDs,” said Ravel, now an adjunct professor at UC Berkeley. “The electoral process in California is particularly good. The people who are working as the registrars and have staff that are working on the elections are really devoted public servants. To question those things makes no sense. It looks to others like they cannot trust their government, which I think is really a bad symbol for the public.”

The recommended charter amendments will come back to City Council at a meeting in September to consider any recommendations, budget appropriation for each ballot measure and all ballot materials.

#### **NEWSHUNTINGTON BEACH**