

## COUNTY GOVERNMENT

# Supervisors Vote to Disclose Costs on Ballot Measures

By Thy Vo (<http://voiceofoc.org/author/tvo/>) 13 hours ago

Orange County Supervisors Tuesday voted unanimously to place a county charter amendment before voters in June, which if approved would require the county's auditor-controller to provide a fiscal impact statement for all future ballot measures.

According to the language of the ballot measure, the auditor-controller, an office now held by Eric Woolery, would prepare "a fiscal impact statement which estimates the amount of any increase or decrease in revenues or costs to the county as well as any applicable funding source or funding mechanism if the proposed measure is adopted."

If approved by voters in June, the fiscal impact statements would start appearing on ballots as soon as this November's election.

Previously, it was up to a vote of county supervisors to decide whether a fiscal impact statement should accompany any individual ballot measure. The language of Tuesday's amendment, proposed by Supervisor Andrew Do, would require it for every ballot measure.

"It forces the proponent of any ballot measure to define more clearly what would be entailed with that ballot measure, in terms of staffing, in terms of the kind of work for the measure or the department, and then based on that level of clarity, then our auditor controller can do the fiscal analysis and prepare a statement," Do said.

Supervisor Todd Spitzer expressed concern that the cost and impact of some ballot measures might not be immediately clear and requested additional language be added to avoid speculation.

"If the fiscal impact is vague or indiscernible, the auditor-controller should state that. It will explain there isn't enough information. But I don't want them to speculate," Spitzer said.

Board Chairwoman Lisa Bartlett also added that the fiscal impact statement should comment on any applicable funding source or mechanism if the ballot measure is adopted.

Woolery thinks the amendment is a good idea and would encourage supervisors to flesh out proposals before placing them on the ballot.

"I think it's a very valuable thing, whenever you have voters trying to make a decision, more information is better," Woolery said. "It's incumbent on the board to make sure they flesh out their proposal to make it is succinct, to know what their intent is. "

If the charter amendment is approved, Woolery would prepare the fiscal analysis for each measure and it would go directly on the ballot without any further approval from supervisors. If supervisors disagree with the analysis, the board could seek to appeal it during a 10-day review period in which members of the public can challenge it in court.

The proposed charter amendment comes just a week after the board declined a languishing proposal by Supervisor Michelle Steel to name a price for another initiative on the June ballot that would create a county ethics commission.

Steel, who was the only supervisor to oppose placing the commission proposal on the ballot, first proposed the fiscal analysis be done in November. She has said that the ethics commission will cost taxpayers between \$500,000 to \$1 million, based on a county staff analysis of other ethics commissions across the state.

But other supervisors have said that estimate is overinflated.

At their Feb. 23 meeting, Supervisor Shawn Nelson argued that, unless it is a major election year, it is unlikely the commission will demand a full-time staff.

"There's not going to be much to do...there's no one doing anything involving ethics, there's no one raising any money, we just need to be careful what we attribute," Nelson said.

Supervisors have also said that the existing commission proposal does not contain enough information for Woolery to do an accurate analysis. Absent a more detailed proposal by Steel, Spitzer said he would not be voting to request the analysis.

"This board has made very strong pronouncements that this is not going to be some monolith with price tags that go out of control...[the ethics commission] has some limited enforcement powers, it does not take away the powers of the district attorney," Spitzer said. "As much as I wanted to support this, I've waited for it to come back in a way that's explainable, and it has not."

Steel reiterated previous statements that she was not against the ethics commission itself but was concerned about whether it would be duplicating the work of the state's Fair Political Practices Commission.

She also said she was amenable to narrowing down the costs, but did not offer any alternatives at the meeting.

"Something is gonna cost for ethics commission, so I'm asking supervisors to work with Eric Woolery and we can come out with certain numbers," Steel said.

Do questioned whether Steel's suggestion -- for supervisors to work through staff rather than hash out the details of the commission during an open meeting -- would violate state open meetings laws, an observation that county counsel Leon Page

agreed with.

Supervisors ultimately voted 2-3 against Steel's proposal. Do voted with Steel; and Spitzer, Nelson and Bartlett voted not to request the fiscal analysis.

Steel did not respond to a request for comment.

*Correction: A previous version of this story incorrectly stated the supervisors who voted for and against Supervisor Michelle Steel's proposal. We regret the error.*

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