City adopts resolution for Municipal Officer Election Day

Written by By Cody Begaye Sun Correspondent
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The Gallup City Council recently approved a resolution that concerned scheduled election dates.

Once adopted, the resolution would establish the first Tuesday in March of even-numbered years as Municipal Officer Election Day for Gallup.

The resolution would establish that the city clerk shall conduct the election for municipal officers on the next Municipal Officer Election Day on March 3, 2020. This will be done through utilizing appropriate statutes, administrative code regulations, and provisions for the Gallup City Charter and City Code.

“We have a lot of faith in the city clerk,” Mayor Jackie McKinney said Feb. 19. “We are all more comfortable having our elections in the city confines.”

By not opting into the Regular Local Election Day ordinance, the municipal officer will run regular and special municipal elections for Gallup. The McKinley County Clerk will run recall elections for Gallup, and the city’s elections will fall into the state’s Election Cycle.

Last year, the New Mexico Local Election Act established the first Tuesday in March of even-numbered years as the date for municipal elections across the state as part of their Election Cycle.

While the Gallup City Charter and Gallup City Election Code designated the first Tuesday in March of odd-numbered years as election day, the state statute overrides the city's charters.

City Manager Maryann Ustick confirmed these details during the city council's Feb. 12 regular meeting, and said that the city has no choice due to the statute and has to act immediately.

If municipalities adopt the Regular Local Election Day ordinance, their elections must be held in November of odd-numbered years. The City of Gallup chose to not opt into the Regular Local Election Day ordinance.

McKinney said that municipalities can opt in or opt out of the ordinance any year, and it will influence whether the city or the county will handle the city's local elections.

"Opting in would take the elections out of the city and turn it over to the county," he said.

So, if a municipality opts into the Regular Local Election Day ordinance, the county it resides in will handle local elections, while the city having the elections would pay an annual assessment to the local election fund.

According to New Mexico Secretary of State's office, this assessment is $250 for every $1 million in general fund expenditures.

McKinney said the local election act was passed in July. He added that the majority of municipalities in the state hold their municipal officer elections in even-numbered years while Gallup traditionally held their elections in odd-numbered years.

He added that the state wanted their municipal elections done in even-numbered years.

At the regular meeting, McKinney said in order for the municipal officer elections to be held in November, a city councilor has to request that date specifically, but added that none of the city council came forward to do so.

As a result of the New Mexico Local Election Act and the City of Gallup having to vote whether to opt in or not to a regular election day, the terms of some existing council members were extended by one year. Elections for these positions will be held in March 2020.

Specifically, the serving term for the mayor, District 2 and 4 councilors, and the municipal judge were extended to April 2020 through this decision.

When asked if this extension came as a result of the state's actions, McKinney said that was correct.

"This is because of the state's moves, so we have no choice," he said.

The item was approved with a 4-0-0 vote.

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