



CITY OF ATLANTA ETHICS DIVISION

Ethics Advisory on Use of City Property during Political Campaigns

Background

The City's Code of Ethics bans the use of public property for private advantage. To assist elected officials, employees, and candidates for municipal office, the Ethics Division has established the following guidelines that apply to the use of city property during campaigns.

City website

- No city official or employee may use the City of Atlanta's website to solicit campaign contributions, seek volunteers, advertise a campaign, or provide a link to any campaign website.
- Candidates may place a link to the City's website on their campaign website(s).

City e-mail addresses

- No official, candidate, or employee should use the city's email directory or city email addresses to solicit political support.
- Neighborhood planning unit membership lists should be used solely for NPU and official city business and may not be used for campaign-related purposes.
- City elected officials may not use their city email addresses to electronically file their campaign contribution disclosure reports.

City facilities

- A candidate may only use city property to campaign *if* the property is a public forum open to the general public, such as the City Hall steps, sidewalks, or public parks.
- Campaign events in public parks are subject to the same rules as any other event in a park and may require an application or fee depending on the size of the event and the use of a stage, tent, or amplification.
- City buildings may be used for political forums (such as town halls or debates) when the forum is open to *all* candidates in a specific race and the general public is invited to attend the event.
- City officials may not campaign, distribute, or post political campaign literature in a city building or on a city vehicle.

City equipment, vehicles, and staff

- City officials and employees may not use city computers, telephones, copiers, or staff to promote a candidacy of any individual running for elective office.
- City employees may not endorse candidates, participate in political advertisements, or engage in political activity while on city time, wearing an official uniform, or using a city vehicle.
- A city employee who receives inquiries about a candidate for municipal office may refer the caller or correspondent to the candidate's campaign committee or campaign office.

City funds

- City funds may not be used for campaign purposes. For example:
 - A Council member may not hand out a city-funded newsletter during a campaign event or while soliciting votes after *filing* as a candidate for municipal office.
 - A Council member may not use photographs or other digital media paid for with city funds for political campaign purposes.
 - A Council member cannot use city funds to pay for email services and mailings for political campaign purposes.

Social media accounts (Twitter, Facebook, etc.)

- Candidates for municipal office may not post city-funded photographs, videos, or newsletters to a social media account when the account is used wholly or in part for campaign purposes.
- City funded materials may not contain links or references to the social media account of candidates for municipal office when the account is used wholly or in part for campaign purposes.
- Candidates may place a link to the City's website on their campaign affiliated social media accounts.

Disclaimer: This advisory is limited to sections 2-801 to 2-825 in the City's Code of Ethics and does not cover any code sections under state law or other parts of Atlanta's Code of Ordinances.