

San Francisco Board of Supervisors
Budget and Appropriations Committee Meeting
June 17, 2026

Caption Notes From SFGOV TV

**Hearing on Municipal Elections Code —
Ballot Argument Fees (Agenda Item #6) and Voter Information Pamphlet (Agenda Item #7)**

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>> **Budget Chair Connie Chan:** With that Mr. Clerk please call Item Six and Seven together.

>> (25:26) **Committee Clerk Brent Jalipa:** Items Six and Seven our Ordinance Ordinances amending the municipal elections code as follows Item Number six increases the filing fee and per word fee for paid ballot arguments, and Item Number seven removes the requirement that the Department of Elections publish the legal text of ballot measures in the voter Information Pamphlet sent to voters before each election, and allows the Director of Elections to determine the format of the Voter Information Pamphlet without the Ballot Simplification Committee's approval. Madam Chair

>> (25:40) **Chair Chan:** Thank you. And today we have **Department of Elections here.**

>> (25:41) **Mayor 's Budget Director Sophia Kittler:** Oh, thank you. I believe that they are making their way up from the offices downstairs. In the meantime, Sophia Kittler from the Mayor's Budget Office speaking to "Table" Item Number six. We've had some good meetings with a number of community groups and at this point **the Mayor's Office would request respectfully that you table Item Six** and we will revisit at a later date. Thank you.

>> (26:10) **Chair Chan:** Director [of Elections] Arntz probably running really, really fast. So, we'll give him a couple of minutes and we appreciate we appreciate the tabling item number six which is for escalation for the department. I do have some questions about the Voter Information Pamphlet and just kind of get some clarity on that. In that case there is a great good morning.

>> (26:55) **Director of Elections John Arntz:** Good morning. So, should I start on item number 6?

>> (26:57) **Chair Chan:** The Mayor's office Director Sophia Kittler has indicated that we will we will be tabling item six and therefore we would appreciate presentation on Item Seven so specifically on the voter information pamphlets.

>> (27:215) **Director Arntz:** The proposed Ordinance amending the elections codes to remove the requirement that the Elections Department publish the legal text of ballot measures in the Voter Information Pamphlet sent to voters before each election and to allow the director of elections to determine the format of the Voter Information Pamphlet without the Ballot Simplification Committee's approval then the impact of the Ordinance would be **to remove the full legal text associated with local ballot measures.** It would reduce printing and mailing costs, **reduce formatting and publication costs which due to the fewer pages in the VIP** and then just to clean up language to assign the formatting of the VIP to the Director of Elections as legal ~~tax~~ **[text]** for local measures will continue to be available on the department's website at

the department's office by email every public library branch and upon request by email. just to give some some context so the average count of legal text and VIP is 46 pages. The average page count for the past four elections has been around 230 pages. Then our our budget is set with the 46 page reduction so our budget set for 190 page VIP and then the average cost for printing the legal text is around \$330,000 and from there I can take any questions.

>> **Chair Chan:** Thank you and want to clarify VIP is ...

>> **Director Arntz:** Oh voter information ~~path-list~~ [pamphlet], the book that everyone receives in the mail who received the physical copy before every election.

>> **Chair Chan:** Thank you. Actually also have some questions about that too. But Vice Chair Dorsey?

>> (29:02) **Vice Chair Matt Dorsey:** Okay thank you Chair Chan. So I'm curious if there is going to be a place on the record where the the legal text is captured or what was what were the vote voters voting on? That's not on paper but it's preserved somewhere. I will tell you in my own research I often go to the to the library's online version even recently on Prop J or so you know, things like that to go look look at what what was the measure what was there and I often find myself looking at the legal text of what that was about mostly because when I go to the administrative the website of the the Administrative Code or Charter or whatever I'm looking at, it's sometimes hard to unpack the history of that so I'm sympathetic to trying to get the costs down for a big document and you know but I'm just wondering is is there going to be a version that is preserved for you know, at the the database and for for those who don't know, the Public Library maintains the Voter Information Pamphlet archive that goes back I think a century it's it's phenomenal work if you ever doing legislative or legal research what would give me pause on this is losing a phenomenal research tool so I'm just curious how that would be what we're going to be capturing somewhere.

>> (30:34) **Director Arntz:** Yeah, I agree. I didn't think about that actually. And what the remedy would be when it quick remedy that comes to mind is to add because we have to still create a printed hard copy version of the legal text anyway so if we get a request by mail we would we would send it to voters and also wait to provide copies to the libraries so we provide the Voter Information Pamphlets to the Library after each election. So, that's so there's already an exchange a formalize exchange that occurs we can include a hardcopy version of the legal texts and if you want to maybe at it is an amendment that makes sense to so it's not forgotten going forward. So, that also gets included in the posting of the Voter Information Pamphlet on the library site.

>> (31:17) **Chair Chan:** All right, great. Supervisor Sauter?

>> (31:19) **Supervisor Danny Sauter:** Thank you Chair. And so I mean this would remove the requirement to publish for legal text it is that then what you intend to do you intend to not publish the full legal text going forward?

>> (31:32) **Director Arntz:** Correct in the Voter Information Pamphlet we would still create we would still call collect collect the legal ~~tax~~ [text] and it would be posted on our website which it does now before every election they would continue and then we would have still provide hard copies to the libraries and then the the amendment allows for the mailing of the hard copy upon request from voters.

>> (31:52) **Supervisor Sauter:** And what is the approximate savings you think this would result in?

>> (32:01) **Director Arntz:** Just applying cost from the previous four elections the savings would be around \$330,000 per election.

>> (32:03) **Supervisor Sauter:** Do you do you have any sense of other cities? I mean this is a standard to to include this or not include this? What are other Department of Elections doing?

>> (32:11) **Director Arntz:** I have not canvassed other counties but it's not it's not uncommon for a legal ~~tax~~ [text] to be excluded from the pamphlets that are mailed to voters.

>> (32:20) **Supervisor Sauter:** And when you say it would be available upon request, what is that process? what would that process look like?

>> (32:26) **Director Arntz:** We could we could put information in the Voter Information Pamphlet itself. We could have information on the online voter information pamphlet. I have a link on our website. Someone just can fill out the information on there on the from the link and email it to us. They could call us, they could email us, they could visit our office.

>> (32:47) **Supervisor Sauter:** I mean, have you contemplated maybe flipping that where you get this by default but you can opt out? I think there's something else there's some other maybe within your department there's something else like that where you can opt out. you can currently opt out from from this right from a from the full packet. But then I guess this would be a whole nother process. but but what I'm what I'm saying is rather than uh putting it upon a resident a voter to request this, do you let them opt out, you know, in some sort of cost and environmental savings process right.

>> (33:23) **Director Arntz:** I understand. And we have an opt out program for the physical VIP that we mail to voters and we've we have undertaken this program to to offer the opt out option for for many years. I think maybe up to ~~an hour~~ **less than 10% of voters have actually responded to opt out**. And I think if you have another opt out for legal ~~tax~~ **[text]** I don't know what the pick up would be but also then we are potentially creating two versions of the VIP if we were to go that route.

>> (34:00) **Supervisor Sauter:** yeah. yeah I think I struggle with this a little bit because it's I think this is one of those things where **probably the vast majority of people don't use this but there's probably 10 or 20% of the voters that really really do use this**. I mean that's from what I've observed and from what I've heard, you know, on the campaign trail knocking on doors I mean people it's kind of a ritual for some for some folks where they sit down at the table, they get all the information together and I worry about you know, I worry about for for people that are getting their ballot in another language if this makes it harder I worry about you know right now we're cutting digital access and then we're at the same time saying that we should put more of this online. So I have some reservations on this.

>> (34:50) **Chair Chan:** I, I do concur somewhat with that sentiment, in a sense, where that I do know there are organized groups even house parties people get together and going through I mean it's what I love about ~~darren cisco~~ **[San Francisco]** but I do also understand \$330,000 of cost saving per election and potentially more if we have like special election it could **easily come up to almost \$1 million of saving per year per fiscal year**. So, I think that colleagues unless we start to really have a very honest conversation about how do we fund the Department of Elections and that's also inclusive of the ballot measure fees that we just talked about that we just now upon the request of the Mayor has tabled to understand that **even with the fees** [increases] that was going to be presented and that even should we agree to it **it would still not considered as [full] cost recovery** for the Department in the Elections.

Now I do think that is worthwhile to fund from the City government's point of view to fund those costs so that we have providing easy access and both not just to file for ballot measure arguments but to also have access of the **[legal]** text both online and in-person. So, it's a cause that I think that we should actually have a conversation not to just I think that Director ~~arts~~ **[Arntz]** I want to express my gratitude that you've been trying to actually figured this out and how to create a system for cost recovery without coming to this body and to the City asking for more General Funds to subsidize some of these.

But **it sounds to me though there seems to be a building sentiment** in my opinion that this body is going to have to recognize potentially that **we need to fund some of these costs so that we can ensure we're not suppressing voters and that we're encouraging access for information for voters**. So, I just wanted to put it out there that we also have to look within, or not within, but like on this body and then take it upon us to say well then are we going to champion for some of these calls **and to fund what we are proposing as a mandate** on Director ~~arts~~ **[Arntz]** and his team at the Elections Department. ~~present amendment~~ **President Mandelman?**

>> (37:13) **Board President Rafael Mandelman:** Thank you Madam Chair for those comments. I think I heard a little bit of I'm sorry I had to step outside. I heard a little bit about from my colleagues Supervisors Dorsey and Sauter who are **celebrating our small-D democracy** and supporting people gathering and poring over their voter handbooks and I think that is beautiful. The the the voter handbooks themselves are ginormous and we are printing them out as the Chair said multiple times a year to support this civic activity which is a good thing.

But if you think about all of the things that we are cutting right now, you know for me this is a reasonable proposal from the Department of Elections to reduce City costs and I think it, you know, is weighing kind of all the things that we're doing and **is this you know, the most important use for this you know, somewhere between \$300,000 and \$1 million** a year? you know, I think **there's probably some things that any of us would come up with as as higher priorities** given that we are all carrying computers. We are not we have been trained by by our capitalist overlords to carry these little computers around with us at all times that we all have access to to you know, the online versions of these things. **I think it might be time to phase this out** but I also sense that my colleagues are not completely comfortable with that.

So I don't know. Back to you, Mmadam Chair.

>> (38:45) **Chair Chan:** No problem. What I would say is now that let's go to public comments on these two items and then let's continue this conversation. Clearly I want to say that we're going to be tabling Item Six when you tabled an item essentially is that it will not be brought up for any discussion throughout this budget process so the fee will remain should we table this item in agreement? It **means that the fee will remain as it currently stands**. And for Item Seven again is for as proposed by the Department of Elections is to move the portion of the legal text not the entire thing but just a legal ~~tax~~ **[text]** if any measure online for online access only and that the voters information pamphlet which I sometimes called **the voter's guide will still be mailed out to voters overall** with the exception what removing the legal text of the measure and that unless the voters decide to to opt out for the hardcopy it will be mailed to them automatically still.

Actually before we go to public comment, just one more thing I do want to highlight this one thing that what I have noticed in the last couple of cycles of election is that there are actually voter guides out there are being designed being mailed out to voters purposefully had a similar design and layout as the official voter guy on a separate conversation I would like to circle back to kind of how do we mediate issues like that when there are organizations out there to try to fashion their voter guise not exactly the same but almost in a similar design and graphic and lay out as our own Department elections and how do we **either cease or desist letter from the Department of Elections or how do we approach that?**

I think it's a separate conversation ~~when~~ **[with]** the Elections Department and ~~when~~ **[with]** our City Attorney not in this setting, but I just wanted to put it out there that that it's also in the back of my mind again ~~the continue asli~~ **[it gets]** harder once you remove ~~those illegal tags~~ **[the legal text of the ballot measure language]** it's going to be become harder and harder for voters to differentiate between what is **official from the Department of Elections and then what is similarly from other political groups sending out a voter's guide?** So just just wanted to kind of [express] a thought about the design about how do we identify and differentiate ourselves as yourself as official voter voter information pamphlet.

So, thank you. And with that we'll go to public comments on these two items.

>> (41:25) **Clerk Jalipa:** Yes, we're now opening public comment on both is all on the tabling of Item Number Six and the consideration of Item Number Seven. If we have any members of the public who wish to address this committee.

>> (41:25) **Heather Davis:** Good morning Supervisor Chan. Supervisors I'm Heather Davies from District ~~for~~ **[Four]**. ~~susan~~ **[Citiizen]** involvement in the Ballot ~~implementation~~ **[Simplification]** Committee is essential to ensuring that the summaries of pending legislation are presented clearly, accurately and without any ~~other option~~ **[obsfucation]**. **Maintaining the full legal text of legislation is essential to an informed electorate** and is the overall cost of democracy just as paying to keep the lights on at City Hall and paying the Supervisors salaries. I recommend that the City levy a ~~tab~~ **[tax]** on private donations to City services to offset these costs, that are essential.

>> (42:22) **Clerk Jalipa:** Thank you, Heather Davies. Next speaker please.

>> (42:29) **Eileen Boken:** Eileen Boken, **[CSFN (Coalition of San Francisco Neighborhoods)]** speaking on my behalf, strongly opposing item number seven **including the proposed Ordinance in the Mayor's budget submittal as trailing legislation** could be seen to be similar to Governor Newsom, Senator Wiener, and Assembly member Wicks using the State's budget process to gut ~~secure~~ **[CEQA]** in 2025 with budget trailer bills SB 131 and AB 130. **Amending the VIP itself using the budget and trailing legislation process is more than questionable. Eliminating the legal text from the VIP eliminates an easy way to cross-check the validity of paid ballot arguments. Allowing the Director of**

Elections to format the VIP without approval of the Ballot Simplification Cn committee eliminates yet another form of checks and balances. Thank you.

>> (43:27) **Clerk Jalipa:** Thank you, Eileen ~~Poan~~ [Boken]. Next speaker please go.

>> (43:36) **Sonny Angulo:** Good afternoon, Supervisors. My name is Sonny Angulo, a founding member of the S.F. League of Pissed-Off Voters, who issued the following statement today:

*“We oppose the Mayor’s amendments to the Elections Code in this budget trailing legislation added at the last minute with a waived 30 day rule that will make our elections less democratic. We have talked to thousands of San Francisco voters over 20 years of publishing our independent grassroots [Pissed]-Off voter guide and one of the most consistent things that we hear is that when people want to understand what these increasingly complicated measures do and how they will impact our communities, they turn to the full text of the Voter Information Pamphlet for the most detailed neutral take. **Removing the full text at a time when unprecedented amounts of money are being poured into S.F. elections is ridiculous.***

*We also oppose increasing the ballot argument fees. **San Francisco elections should not be in the business of pay-to-play. Ballot arguments are an important part of our democracy and drastically increasing these fees because restrict voices to only the most wealthy a disturbing trend** we are witnessing in real time in our electoral process.”* Thank you.

>> (44:42) **Clerk Jalipa:** Thank you much certainly, Ms. Angulo. Next speaker.

>> (44:45) **Kristin Evans:** Kristin Evans wearing a few hats today. I agree with what the previous speaker said. Last night at the Harvey Milk Democratic Club, Chris Evans shared his S.F. election map site which allows you to do interesting comparisons of the votes that happened in this most recent election, including comparisons with those precincts with the highest average household income. There was high correlation between the winners and very rich precincts. And there was also a low turnout in those precincts that are essentially already somewhat disfranchized. I think we have to do everything we possibly can to create access to the democratic process.

It’s really critical that we make the voter pamphlet guide accessible to all groups. [Raising it from] \$300 to \$700 is already pretty inaccessible for a lot of groups. Raising that to \$3,000 to \$5,000 is just insane. I saw that there was a proposal from the League of Women Voters to make a more reasonable increase that was correlated with inflation. But jumping from \$2 to \$10 [per word] is a five fold increase and not ...

>> (45:53) **Clerk Jalipa:** Tthank you much Kristin for addressing this Committee. Next speaker please.

>> (44:45) **Michelle Moritz:** Hello, I’m Michelle ~~Moretz~~ [Moritz], a board member of the League of Women Voters of San Francisco, a nonpartisan nonprofit that empowers voters and defends democracy. The League opposes, in particular, Ordinance six to increase filing fees for paid ballot arguments unless it’s amended. Supervisors, we sent a letter about this but wanted to make a comment so everyone here understands what’s at stake.

We support an update to these fees only to keep pace with inflation. But the Ordinance doesn’t stop there. It would raise the fees to \$1,000 per ballot argument plus \$10 per word by 2030. That’s five times what groups are paying today. **Steep fee increases won’t affect well-funded campaigns and wealthy individuals but many San Francisco communities will be silenced.**

The result will be **a Voter Information Pamphlet that includes only the voices of those who can afford it. Any significant increase deserves real public discussion not fast-tracked legislation.** Please oppose this Ordinance unless amended. Thank you much.

>> (47:06) **Clerk Jalipa:** Thank you, Michelle ~~Martz~~ [Moritz]. Seeing no other people in line, Madam Chair that completes our queue.

>> (47:13) **Chair Chan:** Thank you. Vice Chair Dorsey?

>> (47:16) **Vice Chair Dorsey:** Chair Chan, I'm just curious is there a time pressure on this that we would have to ... Let me frame it this way: If we were to continue this so that we could give some thought to, for example an amendment that might make sure that we have a full version that's a PDF that's available electronically and we're going to provide that. It's preserved for posterity to the Library or you know, rethink some of the opt-in or opt-out kinds of things. **Would that put you in a position where you're going to now you're going to eat the cost no matter what?** Like are we are we running out of runway here in terms of your timing?

>> (47:53) **Director Arntz:** Operationally, now there's still time. Okay. Fiscally it's part of the budget process. **So, it sort of is on the timer of the budget process more so than the operation timer.** So, **I don't know if our budget has been set to include the reduction in costs for with the removal of the legal tax** [text]. So, operationally no, we have time fiscally. It depends on the process that's there were a part of today.

>> (48:26) **Chair Chan:** Supervisor Walton?

>> (48:27) **Committee Member Supervisor Walton:** Thank you Chair Chan. And I thank Director Arntz for presentation and really understand you know folks trying to make change that could save the City money and also try to lead to more efficiency. But I do believe **there's just been a lot of attempts to avoid democracy in the name of efficiency, in the name of saving resources.** And I think these items both of them are part of that even with the best intentions. I mean **we spend millions of dollars on many things and I think it's very important that protecting democratic voice and the political process continues.** And so I couldn't support either one of these items as is and just wanted to make sure that I stated that for the record. but i, I do understand some of why this will come forward. But this is not anything I could be supportive of. Thank you.

>> (49:31) **Chair Chan:** And so with that thank you, Director ~~arts~~ [Arntz] for your time and for your cause for your work on this. We appreciate it. And so with that Colleagues and if I'm hearing this correctly so first and foremost thank you to the Mayor's Office for suggesting **tabling item six which we will. I will make the motion to table Item Six.** What that means is that **essentially the fee will then remain as they currently exist** and then I will also make the motion to.

So let's do it separately apart separate separately. Okay.

>> (50:10) **Vice Chair Dorsey:** Second.

>> (50:12) **Chair Chan:** Seconded by Vice Chair Dorsey. I'm making the motion to table Item Six. And a roll call please.

>> (50:22) **Clerk Jalipa:** And on the Motion by Chair Chan and seconded by Vice Chair Dorsey that we table the Ordinance and item number six. Vice Chair Dorsey? Dorsey, aye. Member Sauter? Sauter, aye. Member Walton? Walton, aye. Member ~~Mandolin~~ [Mandelman]? ~~Mandolin~~ [Mandelman], aye. Chair Chan? Chan, aye. We have five eyes.

>> (50:33) **Chair Chan:** The motion passes. And as for Item Seven ... and as for Item Seven **I would like to continue with item seven to the Call of the Chair** allowing further conversation about how we can best approach this with the caveat colleagues should we decide to not move forward with Item Seven **it does mean that we should work with the Mayor and the Department of Elections to ensure that either we have a supplemental of \$330,000 for the upcoming election** and the following election in 2028. So, that means the next budget year we have some time to think about it how do we want the ~~ottman~~ [Admin ? unintelligible] Department and the election, I think that it warrants a conversation in advance of the Mayor's proposed budget for ~~cheryl~~ [trailing] legislation. So, I ... I urge everyone here to consider bringing this up perhaps sometimes in December for further discussion and further amendments before the Mayor proposed his upcoming budget to make sure that we include the funding for the voters information pamphlet. And so with that I would like to make the motion to continue Item Seven **to the Call of the Chair.**

>> (51:51) **Vice Chair Dorsey:** Second.

>> (51:52) **Chair Chan:** Seconded by Vice Chair Dorsey, and a roll call please.

>> (51:56) **Clerk Jalipa:** Actually, just to clarify, Madam Chair, is the intention to continue the Ordinance beyond the budget process?

>> (52:02) **Chair Chan:** Yes.

>> (52:03) **Clerk Jalipa:** Okay. Very well. And on that motion by ~~church~~ [**Chair Chan**] and seconded by Vice Chair Dorsey that we continue this Ordinance to the *Call of the Chair*, Vice Chair Dorsey? Dorsey, aye. Member Sauter? Sauter, aye. Member Walton? Walton, aye. Member ~~gentleman~~ [**Mandelman**]? Mandelman, aye. ~~high management~~ [**Chair Chan?**] Chan, aye. We have five ~~eyes~~, [**ayes**].

>> (52:32) **Chair Chan:** The motion passes. Thank you. And so with that, Mr. Clerk please call Items 8 and 9 together.

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