

Council approves city election date change

Written by By Molly Ann Howell Managing Editor
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For the past couple elections, the City of Gallup has chosen a different path than McKinley County and the rest of New Mexico. While the county and the rest of the state hold their elections in November, Gallup's elections have recently been in March.

But that's going to change for the next local election. During the Nov. 28 city council meeting, the council approved an ordinance that moves city elections to the first Tuesday in November during odd-numbered years instead of the first Tuesday in March of even-numbered years.

The change means that the councilors from District 1 and 3, Linda Garcia and Sarah Piano, will have their current terms extended to the end of 2027 instead of 2026. The mayor and the councilors from Districts 2 and 4, Michael Schaaf and Ron Molina, terms will last until the end of 2025 instead of ending next year.

Gallup citizens voiced their opinions on whether or not they wanted to change the date of city elections on the Nov. 7 ballot. To do so, the wording of a city charter, which is the legal document that establishes a municipality as a city or town, would need to be reformed slightly.

The official ballot read:

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“Authority to opt in: Notwithstanding any provision in this article VI or elsewhere in this charter to the contrary, the council of the City of Gallup shall have the authority to enact an ordinance opting in to the election of the city’s municipal officers in the regular local election in accordance with Section 3.1 of the Local Election Act (NMSA 1-22-3.1) and all other applicable provisions of the New Mexico Election Code (NMSA 1-1-1 - 1-26-6) as the same are currently formulated. Except as necessary to enact and M City of Gallup.”

Over 1,500 people voted on the issue, with 72% voting for the city to opt in and 28% saying they didn’t want the city to opt in.

During the July 25 city council meeting, City Attorney David Eason said shifting to November would save the city as much as \$55,000 per election. He also noted that more people typically show up to a November election.

“People are used to voting in November. They expect to vote in November,” Eason said. “... In local elections, participation by the voters is very important.”

Before the councilors voted on the ordinance change Piano said that many people approached her saying they were confused by the ballot item.

“[People tell me] they were very confused by the wording of [the ballot item], so they voted yes, but I think a lot of people didn’t understand what they were voting for,” she said. “Every single person I talked to was like ‘That was the most confusing thing I’ve ever voted for.’”

Despite her comments Piano said she could see both the pros and cons of changing the local election date.

“I see pros and cons of both sides. ... I like the idea of moving it to November in terms of hopefully getting more people out to vote. It would also allow us to start the year in January when people come on,” she said.

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But she also noted that some people have come up to her and said they don't want the change.

"I feel a little torn," Piano said.

The council put the decision up to a vote, and everyone approved the ordinance except for Piano. With a 4-1 vote, the ordinance passed.

By Molly Ann Howell
Managing Editor