

Ordinance limits use of campaign signs

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SCOTTSDALE - Voters will have to look a little harder for political messages during this year's campaigns for Scottsdale City Council.

In Scottsdale's first city election since a 2007 ordinance banning non-commercial signs on public right-of-ways, political candidates will be forced to find new ways of getting their names out.

And because Scottsdale for the first time is holding its elections during the Sept. 2 statewide primary, city candidates could be overshadowed by higher-profile races. If a city runoff election is needed, it will be further overshadowed by the presidential election on Nov. 4. Council candidates might be forced to pay for more costly advertising and depend on citizens to offer up private property to post signs.

"I'm very concerned about over-regulating," said Councilman Jim Lane, who is challenging Mayor Mary Manross in the Sept. 2 election.

Lane, who voted against the ordinance, said, "As far as I'm concerned, it's political free speech."

Manross who voted for the sign ban, said she doesn't see it harming her effort to be elected to a third four-year term.

"A lot of other cities have the same right-of-way restrictions (on public signs)," Manross said. "It won't affect my campaigning."

How ordinance works

The council's ordinance banning all non-commercial signs - including political advertising - means that any non-commercial sign must be placed on private property, at least 15 feet from the edge of a city curb.

Campaign signs, labeled "temporary non-commercial signage" by the city, must follow the same city guidelines and regulations as any other signs, including a 120-day time limit, a city approved sticker and campaign contact information. Failure to follow the guidelines could result in citations and fines.

Mike Phillips, a city spokesperson, said if private citizens want to put up signs to endorse their favorite candidates, they should call the candidates' offices and offer their properties. That way, he said, the responsibility of getting city approval will be on the candidate, rather than the citizen.

What candidates might change

Lane, who was first elected to the council in 2004, said the sign ordinance puts him at a disadvantage, running against an established and recognized figure like Manross, who was first elected to the council in 1992.

Manross may "already have constituents who are willing to run their signs on private property and offices," Lane said. "That disadvantage adds up to costs."

Lane said he expects the added costs of mailers and fliers to make up for a loss in campaign endorsement signs to be "fairly significant."

Manross said she will focus on direct campaigning, going door-to-door, and using other forms of advertising.

"I've been in (public) office 16 years. The public knows my record well," Manross said. "With or without signs, I expect to do well."

Manross said she has always supported the sign restrictions because it was what the public wanted. She said the amount of signs on city streets was overwhelming.

"It really had gotten out of hand, and none of the neighbors care for it," said Manross who still plans to use signs, with permission, on private properties.