

Political Issues

As an organization representing the residents of Lower Downtown, the Lower Downtown Neighborhood Association can be expected to receive requests for support from individuals running for elected offices as well as from individuals and/or groups who are supporting either side of a variety of ballot issues.

SUPPORTING/OPPOSING CANDIDATES FOR ELECTED OFFICE

Because of our status as a tax-exempt 501(c)3 organization, we cannot support or oppose individual candidates for office. The tax language states “participating or intervening, directly or indirectly, in any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office” is prohibited. Furthermore, that “participation or intervention includes the publishing or distributing of statements.”

While we cannot oppose or support candidates or distribute their statements, we do have the opportunity to hear presentations from candidates during an election campaign. Therefore it could be appropriate to permit candidates to address our board and tell us about their qualifications and positions on issues. It could also be appropriate to conduct candidates’ nights for the general membership where all of the candidates for a position are invited to address the members in attendance. Candidate nights are frequently done, either by LoDoNA alone or in conjunction with other neighborhood organizations in and around Lower Downtown.

SUPPORTING/OPPOSING BALLOT ISSUES

While our tax status makes it inappropriate to endorse or support individual candidates, we are not prohibited from taking positions on ballot issues during a campaign. As a result, it is highly likely that LoDoNA will be asked to support or oppose one or more issues during a campaign.

In order to take an informed and appropriate position on an issue, we recommend the board use the following process:

1. Determine if the issue has relevance to Lower Downtown. Many issues are complex and broad in scope. While individual board members might feel strongly about regional or national ballot issues, we believe individual members can best make their own personal decisions on broad-based issues. A recommendation or official position on an issue of this type should be avoided in most cases.
2. If the issue has relevance to Lower Downtown, the board should make an attempt to hear both sides of the issue and to obtain as much relevant information as possible about the issue.

3. If the issue has relevance to Lower Downtown and has wide public interest or is highly controversial, the board should conduct a public forum on the issue and invite both proponents and opponents of the issue to speak at the forum.
4. Should the board feel a desire to take a position on an issue, it should conduct a thorough review of the issue at one or more board meetings and eventually vote a public position on the issue. The position taken should be disseminated to the general membership and, if timing allows, announced at any public forums held by LoDoNA on the issue.

LOBBYING

LoDoNA is permitted to “lobby” or advocate on behalf of a variety of issues in the civic or political arena, but tax laws limit the amount of money an organization can spend on lobbying to a percentage of the amount the group spends on tax exempt purpose. Accordingly, our efforts need to be limited to our communicating verbally or in writing with public decision-makers to express our views and beliefs as an organization.

CONTRIBUTIONS

The tax law does not allow LoDoNA to make a contribution to an individual running for office. However, it does allow LoDoNA to make a contribution to a ballot issue, although there are limits on the amounts that can be given. Because of this, it is recommended that contributions to ballot issues only be made by individual board members and only from their personal checking or banking accounts.