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Initiative to Amend the Pacific Grove City Charter

Establishing Voter Approval Requirements for Mayor and Councilmember Compensation and Benefits

PACIFIC GROVE, CA (Feb. 3, 2026) – Transparent Pacific Grove has filed a notice of intent to circulate a petition that would qualify the proposed initiative measure for the November 3, 2026 ballot. The measure would place binding voter approval requirements directly into the City Charter, where they cannot be bypassed by future councils. It is intended to provide a permanent and transparent framework for decisions involving elected officials' compensation and benefits.

How We Got Here

This initiative is the direct result of a breakdown in trust that began in 2025, when the Pacific Grove City Council used its charter authority to approve an immediate 130 percent pay increase for the Mayor and Councilmembers. The decision was made at a time when the City had announced significant financial challenges only weeks earlier and without seeking voter approval. That decision bypassed the voter safeguards that apply in most California cities and prompted widespread public opposition. In response, residents organized a successful referendum to suspend the ordinance and demand accountability. Rather than placing the 2025 compensation increase before the voters once the referendum qualified, the City Council repealed the ordinance outright—avoiding a public vote and leaving the underlying authority unchanged. Although the referendum demonstrated overwhelming voter engagement and halted the pay increase, it also exposed a deeper structural problem: the City Charter still allows the Mayor and Council to repeat the same self-dealing actions unless voters intervene again.

What This Initiative Does

This ballot initiative fixes that problem permanently by amending the City Charter to require voter approval before the Mayor or Councilmembers may receive increased compensation or City-paid benefits. It establishes clear limits tied to state law, requires full public disclosure of fiscal impacts before any such measure appears on the ballot, and ensures these decisions are made only at regular general municipal elections—when voter participation is highest. As documented in Finding 9 and Exhibit B of the initiative, adding a City measure to an already consolidated general municipal election results in only minimal incremental cost, limited primarily to printing and ballot materials. By placing this authority where it belongs, with the voters, the initiative restores transparency, prevents conflicts of interest, and ensures that decisions about elected officials' pay and benefits reflect the informed consent of the community rather than the discretion of those who stand to benefit.

Reasons for the Initiative

The reasons for the proposed initiative are as follows:

- To respond to widespread public opposition regarding the Mayor and Council's existing authority to increase their own compensation and provide new benefits without voter approval.
- To reflect the electorate's demonstrated demand for binding safeguards to prevent recurrence of such actions.
- To affirm that elected officials serve as trustees of the public interest, not beneficiaries of their own authority.
- To prevent conflicts of interest and the risk of self-dealing that arise when elected officials are permitted to authorize their own compensation and benefits.
- To ensure that state safeguards are applied locally by incorporating them directly into the City Charter.
- To ensure that decisions concerning compensation and benefits are made at general municipal elections, when voter participation is highest.
- To strengthen accountability, oversight, and transparency in local government.

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