



# ETHICS COMMISSION

## CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO

NOREEN AMBROSE  
CHAIR

YVONNE LEE  
VICE-CHAIR

DAINA CHIU  
COMMISSIONER

LARRY BUSH  
COMMISSIONER

JAMES BELL  
COMMISSIONER

LEEANN PELHAM  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Date: May 10, 2021

To: Members of the Ethics Commission

From: Pat Ford, Senior Policy and Legislative Affairs Counsel  
Robb Hodge, Auditor

Re: **AGENDA ITEM 5 – Discussion of staff report, “Report on San Francisco’s Public Campaign Financing Program: November 3, 2020 Election.”**

---

**Summary** Staff will present a report on the City’s public campaign financing program and its use by candidates in the November 2021 election. The report is attached as Attachment 1.

**Action Requested** No action is required as this item is presented for informational purposes only.

The Campaign and Governmental Conduct Code requires that “[f]ollowing each election at which the Mayor or members of the Board of Supervisors are elected, the Ethics Commission shall submit a report to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors” that provides certain information about the use of the City’s public campaign financing program in that election.<sup>1</sup> In the November 3, 2020 election, voters selected members of the Board of Supervisors representing Districts 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11. As described more fully in the report, which is attached as Attachment 1, sixteen of the twenty-six candidates vying for these offices (62%) participated in the public financing program. A total of \$3.45 million was distributed to the candidates through the program.

The information in the report is based on data reported in campaign disclosure statements covering the start of the candidates’ campaigns through December 31, 2020, the latest date for which disclosures are currently available. It also includes information from disclosures filed by non-candidate committees and from Commission records of public funds disbursements to participating candidates.

Additionally, the concluding section of the report provides general observations about public financing in the 2020 election. Appendix 1 of the report contains high-level

---

<sup>1</sup> Campaign & Gov. Conduct Code § 1.156.

historical data regarding the public financing program in supervisorial elections since 2002.

We look forward to presenting the report and to answering any questions you may have.



**ETHICS COMMISSION  
CITY AND COUNTY OF SAN FRANCISCO**

**Report on  
San Francisco's Public Campaign Financing Program  
November 3, 2020 Election**

San Francisco Ethics Commission  
25 Van Ness Avenue, Suite 220  
San Francisco, CA 94102  
415.252.3100  
[ethics.commission@sfgov.org](mailto:ethics.commission@sfgov.org)  
[sfethics.org](http://sfethics.org)

**Public service that builds public trust.**



May 10, 2021

## **I. Introduction**

The San Francisco Ethics Commission administers a public campaign financing program for qualifying candidates running for Mayor or Supervisor. The Campaign and Governmental Conduct Code requires that “[f]ollowing each election at which the Mayor or members of the Board of Supervisors are elected, the Ethics Commission shall submit a report to the Mayor and Board of Supervisors” that provides certain information about the use of the public financing program in that election.<sup>1</sup> The report may also contain other relevant information the Commission may wish to include and provides those observations in the concluding section of the report. The Ethics Commission prepared this report to provide background for benchmarking program components across election cycles to help increase understanding of the program and maximize its effectiveness in City campaigns.

In the November 3, 2020 election, voters elected members of the Board of Supervisors representing Districts 1, 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11. The information presented in this report is based on disclosure statements filed by campaign committees covering the period ending December 31, 2020, the last date for which information is available at the time this report was prepared. The report also includes information from disclosures filed by independent committees and from Commission records of public funds disbursements to participating candidates.

## **II. Program Goals and Overview**

San Francisco’s voluntary program of limited public campaign financing for candidates was first established by Proposition O, a ballot measure approved by the voters in November 2000. Prop O established public financing for candidates for the Board of Supervisors, and in 2006 the program was expanded to include Mayoral candidates. This section discusses the programs goals, describes recent changes to the program, and provides an overview of the program’s rules.

### **A. Program Goals**

The City’s public campaign financing program serves many important public policy goals. The program seeks to ensure that candidates with a demonstrated level of community support can secure sufficient resources to mount a viable campaign. In doing so, public financing reduces candidates’ dependence on large private contributions, which lessens the potential for and appearance of undue influence by contributors and serves to improve the public’s trust in local government. Public financing also seeks to enable candidates to spend less time fundraising and more time interacting with voters and engaging in discussions on important issues. The availability of public funds also encourages citizens to be more politically active by incentivizing and empowering small-dollar contributions. By supporting candidates who have community support, public financing can also lead to more competitive races, which is important in ensuring quality representation of constituents.

### **B. New Features of the Program in 2020**

From 2018 to 2019, the Ethics Commission undertook a comprehensive review of the public financing program. The review project was undertaken by the Commission through a year-long review process that examined all aspects of the program to strengthen its impact while also reducing unnecessary administrative burdens for participating candidates. The Commission engaged at length with community stakeholders, former candidates, good government advocates, and professional campaign treasurers to understand how the program could be improved. The review project resulted in two ordinances, three sets of regulation amendments, and various improvements to the Commission’s written compliance materials regarding public financing. The project also improved the candidate application process. The November 2020 election was the

---

<sup>1</sup> Campaign & Gov. Conduct Code § 1.156.

first election in which all of the changes instituted by the project were in place.

Prior to the review project, candidates for the Board of Supervisors could qualify to receive only up to \$155,000 in public funding for non-incumbents and \$152,500 for incumbent candidates. But beginning in 2020, candidates for the Board of Supervisors were able to qualify to receive up to \$255,000, as explained above in Section II.C below.<sup>2</sup> This change was made to allow publicly financed candidates to access funds needed to run a viable campaign as the cost of campaigning in San Francisco continues to increase.

In addition, a new formula for allocating public funds to candidates was instituted in 2020. Previously, eligible contributions from San Francisco residents were matched at a two-to-one rate and were matched up to the full \$500 limit that candidates are permitted to receive from any individual contributor. Beginning in 2020, contributions were matched at a six-to-one rate, but only the first \$150 of an eligible contribution was matched. This change was designed to encourage candidates to focus their fundraising on a broader base of donors and to engage more with all voters, including those who cannot afford to contribute \$500 to a candidate. By enabling smaller contributions to have a larger impact by being matched at a six-to-one rate, this change also serves as an incentive for a broader base of voters to become more active in local campaigns.

Finally, the initial level of a candidate's spending limit (individual expenditure ceiling, or IEC) was different beginning in 2020. Previously, Supervisorial candidates had a starting IEC of \$250,000. Beginning in 2020, Supervisorial candidates began with an IEC of \$350,000.<sup>3</sup> As described in Section II.C below, the initial IEC is only a starting spending limit. The law requires candidates' IECs to be adjusted upward based on financial activity in the candidate's race. The higher initial IECs are designed to more accurately reflect the average cost of running a competitive campaign for elective office in San Francisco so that participating candidates may be competitive without having to rely on excessive adjustments to their IECs.

### C. Program Overview

#### 1. Program Funding Source

San Francisco's public financing program is funded through the Election Campaign Fund (the "Fund") established by the City's Campaign Finance Reform Ordinance ("CFRO"). CFRO requires that the Fund receive an annual General Fund appropriation of \$2.75 per resident each fiscal year.<sup>4</sup> Given a current City population of approximately 875,000, this results in a required annual appropriation of approximately \$2.4 million be added to the Fund. Money in the fund that is not used is required to be carried forward to the next year.<sup>5</sup> Notwithstanding the baseline annual appropriations formula and the carry-forward provision, annual appropriations should not make the Fund's balance exceed \$7 million.<sup>6</sup> When a special election is held to fill a vacancy for the office of Mayor or Supervisor, CFRO may require additional appropriations into the Fund to ensure that sufficient funds are available to allow for the program's effectiveness in that election.<sup>7</sup> Additional appropriations may occur before a regularly scheduled election as well if the Fund's balance does not meet prescribed statutory minimums.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Candidates for Mayor could previously qualify to receive only up to \$975,000. Candidates for Mayor are now able to receive up to \$1.2 million.

<sup>3</sup> Mayoral candidates previously began with an IEC of \$1,475,000, and will now begin with an IEC of \$1,700,000.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.* at § 1.138(b).

<sup>5</sup> *Id.* at § 1.138(b)(1).

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> *Id.* at § 1.138(b)(3)–(4).

<sup>8</sup> *Id.* at § 1.154(b)(1)–(2). CFRO sets \$7.50 per resident, plus fifteen percent for administrative costs, as the minimum for a regularly scheduled mayoral election and \$1.50 per resident plus fifteen percent as the minimum for a regular Supervisorial election.

These funding requirements are established in CFRO, a chapter of the Campaign and Governmental Conduct Code. On January 1, 2020 the available balance in the election campaign fund was \$11.20 million, which was adjusted to \$7 million by the Controller's Office at the end of that fiscal year.

## 2. Eligibility

To establish eligibility to receive public financing, candidates must demonstrate a base of community support by raising a minimum number and total dollar amount of contributions from City residents. To be certified for public funding in the 2020 election, a non-incumbent Supervisorial candidate was required to raise contributions of at least \$10,000 from at least one hundred City residents, while an incumbent candidate was required to raise at least \$15,000 in qualifying contributions from at least 150 residents. Only contributions of \$10 to \$100 count as qualifying contributions.<sup>9</sup> These qualifying contributions must be received by the candidate no earlier than 18 months before the date of the election and no later than the 70<sup>th</sup> day before the election.

Candidates must also abide by a campaign spending limit, cannot accept loans from others, can contribute only a limited amount of their own funds to their campaigns, and must agree to debate their opponents.<sup>10</sup> Finally, in order to qualify, a candidate must be opposed by a candidate who has received contributions or made expenditures over a certain amount; Supervisorial candidates must face an opponent that has raised or spent at least \$10,000 in order to be eligible.

## 3. Candidate Disbursements

Once certified as eligible for the program, candidates receive an initial grant. Supervisorial candidates receive an initial grant of \$60,000. After receiving the initial grant, a candidate may receive matching funds distributed at a six-to-one ratio for every dollar of contributions received, but only up to \$150 from any contributor can be matched. Non-incumbent candidates can have up to \$32,500 in private contributions matched (for a maximum of \$255,000 of public financing), while incumbent candidates can have up to \$32,000 in contributions matched (for a maximum of \$252,000 of public financing).

## 4. Spending Limit Adjustments

Based on financial activity in a candidate's race, the candidate's spending limit (or Individual Expenditure Ceiling, "IEC") must be raised by the Ethics Commission. This provision intends for candidates who are bound by a spending limit to have the ability to respond when independent expenditures and opponent fundraising exceed the candidate's initial IEC. Three factors are assessed to increase a candidate's IEC: (1) contributions received by the candidate's best funded opponent, (2) independent expenditures in support of the candidate's best funded opponent, and (3) independent expenditures in opposition of the candidate. If these three factors, together, exceed the candidate's current IEC by any amount, then the candidate's spending limit must be increased. Each Supervisorial candidate's IEC starts at \$350,000 and is adjusted in increments of \$50,000. Spending limits are regularly reviewed by Commission staff and, if necessary, adjusted daily on a candidate-by-candidate basis.

### III. Information Regarding the November 2020 Election

In the November 2020 general election, all odd-numbered Supervisorial districts appeared on the ballot, and candidates running in those races could apply to receive funds under the public financing program. This section provides information about the amount of funds received by these candidates (including private contributions and public financing), how much the candidates spent, changes in their respective spending

---

<sup>9</sup> For a contribution over \$100, up to \$100 of such a contribution is counted as a qualifying contribution.

<sup>10</sup> Campaign & Gov. Conduct Code § 1.140.

limits, and independent expenditures in the races reported by third parties.

#### A. Candidates

The following table indicates for each Supervisorial race the number of candidates qualified by the Department of Elections to appear on the ballot and how many candidates the Ethics Commission certified as eligible to receive public financing. For the November 2020 election, 16, or roughly 62 percent, of the 26 Supervisorial candidates who qualified to appear on the ballot applied for public financing by filing a Qualifying Request. One hundred percent of the 16 candidates who applied were certified as eligible to receive public financing.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 1 – Candidates in November 2020 Election**

<b>Supervisor Election Race</b>	<b>Candidates Qualified to Appear on Ballot</b>	<b>Candidates Certified as Eligible for Public Financing</b>	<b>Percent</b>
District 1	7	4	57%
District 3*	4	2	50%
District 5*	4	2	50%
District 7	7	6	86%
District 9**	1	0	0%
District 11*	3	2	67%
<b>Total</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>62%</b>

\*Denotes election with incumbent candidate

\*\* Incumbent was not opposed and therefore not eligible for public financing in this election.

#### B. Candidate Fundraising, Public Financing, and Spending

As discussed above, of the 26 Supervisorial candidates appearing on the November 2020 ballot, 16 (62 percent) were certified as eligible to receive public financing. Together, those candidates received over \$3.45 million under the program. Table 2 below shows the total amount of public funds disbursed, as well as the average per participating candidate average.

**Table 2 –Total Public Funds Disbursed**

	<b>Total</b>	<b>Participating Candidate Average</b>
Public Funds Disbursed	\$3,455,177	\$215,949

Of the 16 candidates certified as eligible to receive matching funds, eight (50 percent) qualified to receive the maximum amount of public financing allowed. On average, candidates qualified to receive approximately 85 percent of the maximum amount of public financing allowed. Table 3 summarizes the amount each candidate was eligible to receive based on program maximums and the actual amount disbursed based on the candidate's submissions.

---

<sup>11</sup> Candidates apply for public financing by submitting a Qualifying Request, also known as a Declaration. In this filing, a candidate must agree to all program rules and must demonstrate having met all requirements, including the minimum fundraising threshold.

**Table 3 – Public Funds Disbursed vs. Maximum Eligible Funds, by Candidate**

<b>Candidate Name</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Public Funds Disbursed</b>	<b>Maximum Eligible Funds</b>	<b>Percent of Eligible Max. Received</b>
Chan, Connie	1	\$255,000	\$255,000	100%
Lee, David	1	\$255,000	\$255,000	100%
Philhour, Marjan	1	\$255,000	\$255,000	100%
Brown, Vallie	5	\$255,000	\$255,000	100%
Preston, Dean (I)	5	\$252,000	\$252,000	100%
Engardio, Joel	7	\$255,000	\$255,000	100%
Melgar, Myrna	7	\$255,000	\$255,000	100%
Nguyen, Vilaska	7	\$255,000	\$255,000	100%
Avalos, John	11	\$254,430	\$255,000	99.8%
Murase, Emily	7	\$236,064	\$255,000	92.6%
Sauter, Danny	3	\$234,381	\$255,000	92%
Peskin, Aaron (I)	3	\$203,598	\$252,000	80.8%
Matranga, Ben	7	\$178,710	\$255,000	70%
Safai, Ahsha (I)	11	\$141,049	\$252,000	56%
Martin-Pinto, Stephen	7	\$101,478	\$255,000	39.8%
Shinzato, Veronica	1	\$68,466	\$255,000	26.8%

(I) denotes an Incumbent

Tables 3a through 3e indicate, by District, the level and make-up of each Supervisorial candidate's fundraising, and the candidate's total reported expenditures. The table shows how much public financing each candidate received through the program, how much each candidate raised in private fund (not including loans or non-monetary contributions), total campaign funds, the percentage of total campaign funds attributable to public funds received through the program, and total campaign expenditures reported through December 31, 2020.

The tables below include only candidates whose committees reached at least \$2,000 in contributions raised or expenditures made, and therefore were required to file the FPPC Form 460 Campaign Statement. Candidates who qualified to appear on the ballot but did not reach the required disclosure threshold have been excluded. The Supervisorial election for District 9 was not included in the tables below as no candidate reached the \$2,000 reporting threshold.



**Table 3a – District 1 Candidates: Public Funds, Contributions, and Spending in the November 2020 Election**

Candidate Name	Public Funds	Private Contributions	Total Funds	Public Funds as % of Total Funds	Total Expenditures
Chan, Connie*	\$255,000	\$121,427	\$376,427	67.74%	\$372,281
Lee, David	\$255,000	\$69,504	\$324,504	78.58%	\$325,172
Philhour, Marjan	\$255,000	\$193,483	\$448,483	56.86%	\$448,483
Shinzato, Veronica	\$68,466	\$21,241	\$89,707	76.32%	\$97,359
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$833,466</b>	<b>\$405,655</b>	<b>\$1,239,121</b>		<b>\$1,243,295</b>

\* Indicates candidate elected. (I) indicates incumbent.

**Table 3b – District 3 Candidates: Public Funds, Contributions, and Spending in the November 2020 Election**

Candidate Name	Public Funds	Private Contributions	Total Funds	Public Funds as % of Total Funds	Total Expenditures
Peskin, Aaron (I)*	\$203,598	\$195,817	\$399,415	50.97%	\$353,881
Sauter, Danny	\$234,381	\$88,550	\$322,931	72.58%	\$310,036
Simonsen, Spencer	N/A	\$13,983	\$13,983	N/A	\$13,986
Belle, Charles	N/A	\$9,333	\$9,333	N/A	\$21,358
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$437,979</b>	<b>\$307,683</b>	<b>\$745,662</b>		<b>\$699,261</b>

\* Indicates candidate elected. (I) indicates incumbent.

**Table 3c – District 5 Candidates: Public Funds, Contributions, and Spending in the November 2020 Election**

Candidate Name	Public Funds	Private Contributions	Total Funds	Public Funds as % of Total Funds	Total Expenditures
Brown, Vallie	\$255,000	\$246,449	\$501,449	50.85%	\$501,464
Cook, Stevon	N/A	\$26,432	\$26,432	N/A	\$27,862
Preston, Dean (I)*	\$252,000	\$231,595	\$483,595	52.11%	\$485,131
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$507,000</b>	<b>\$505,906</b>	<b>\$1,012,906</b>		<b>\$1,016,486</b>

\* Indicates candidate elected. (I) indicates incumbent.

**Table 3d – District 7 Candidates: Public Funds, Contributions, and Spending in the November 2020 Election**

Candidate Name	Public Funds	Private Contributions	Total Funds	Public Funds as % of Total Funds	Total Expenditures
Engardio, Joel	\$255,000	\$188,845	\$443,854	57.45%	\$448,802
Martin-Pinto, Stephen	\$101,478	\$29,700	\$131,178	77.36%	\$128,908
Matranga, Ben	\$178,710	\$63,516	\$242,226	73.78%	\$249,940
Melgar, Myrna*	\$255,000	\$143,625	\$398,625	63.97%	\$129,908
Murase, Emily	\$236,064	\$98,908	\$334,972	70.47%	\$310,539
Nguyen, Vilaska	\$255,000	\$185,178	\$440,178	57.93%	\$440,551
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,281,252</b>	<b>\$709,772</b>	<b>\$1,991,033</b>		<b>\$1,708,648</b>

\* Indicates candidate elected. (I) indicates incumbent.

**Table 3e – District 11 Candidates: Public Funds, Contributions, and Spending in the November 2020 Election**

Candidate Name	Public Funds	Private Contributions	Total Funds	Public Funds as % of Total Funds	Total Expenditures
Safai, Ahsha (I)*	\$141,050	\$266,751	\$407,801	34.59%	\$403,551
Avalos, John	\$254,430	\$122,905	\$377,335	67.43%	\$357,441
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$395,480</b>	<b>\$389,656</b>	<b>\$785,136</b>		<b>\$760,992</b>

\* Indicates candidate elected. (I) indicates incumbent.

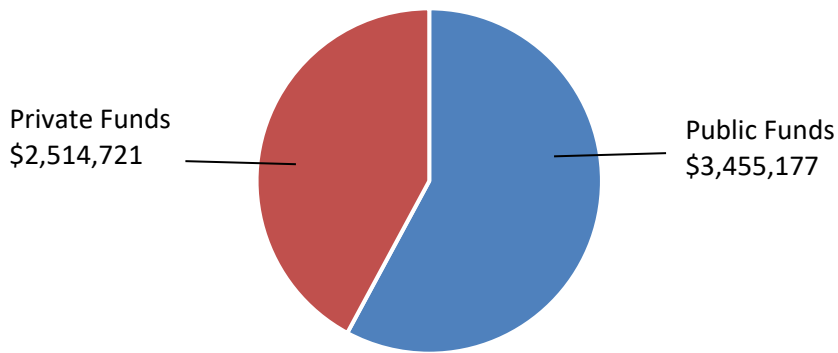
Overall, in these five District elections, public financing represented approximately 60 percent of these Supervisorial candidates' total campaign funds for the November 2020 election.<sup>12</sup> Table 4 and Chart 1 show the total amount of public financing received and private contributions raised by candidates across all districts.

**Table 4 – All Five Supervisorial Districts: Total Public Funds Disbursed vs. Private Contributions Raised**

Total Public Funds Disbursed	Total Private Contributions Raised	Total Funds Received	Public Funds as % of Total Funds Raised
\$3,455,177	\$2,318,672	\$5,773,858	59.8%

<sup>12</sup> As noted in Appendix 1, if candidate expenditures (rather than candidate total funds received) are analyzed, distributions made through the program were equal to approximately 64 percent of candidate expenditures.

**Chart 1 - All Five Supervisorial Districts: Total Public Funds Disbursed vs. Private Contributions Raised**



**C. Candidate Individual Expenditure Ceilings**

As described in Section II above, spending limits are in place for publicly financed candidates that limit the total amount of expenditures a candidate can make or accrue. The Commission is required to increase the Individual Expenditure Ceiling (IEC) for an individual candidate based on the reported fundraising, spending, and independent expenditures in that candidate's race.

For the November 2020 elections, Commission staff determined that a total of 46 adjustments to candidate's spending limits were required. Of the 16 candidates certified eligible to receive public financing, 15 had their IEC limit raised. At the end of the election cycle, none of these candidates had total funds that were near their respective final IEC limit.

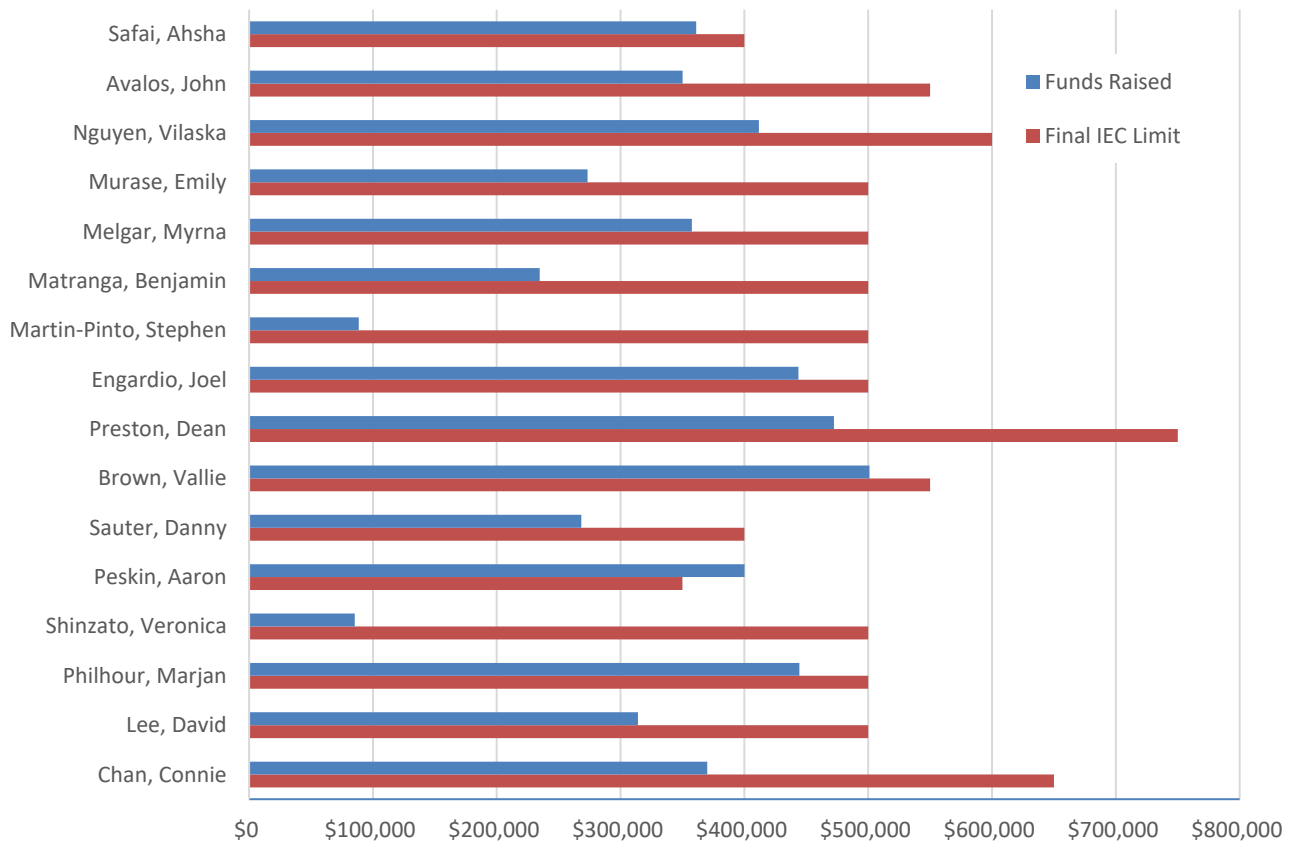
Table 5 below indicates the number of spending limit increases experienced by each publicly financed candidate and the final level to which each candidate's spending limit was adjusted. The table also indicates each candidate's level of total funds raised up to the date of the election.

**Table 5 – Highest Individual Expenditure Ceilings (IEC) for November 2020 Candidates**

Candidate	District	Number of IEC Adjustments	Highest Adjusted IEC	Total Funds Raised By Election Day
Chan, Connie	1	5	\$650,000	\$370,024
Lee, David	1	3	\$500,000	\$314,059
Philhour, Marjan	1	3	\$500,000	\$444,461
Shinzato, Veronica	1	3	\$500,000	\$85,306
Peskin, Aaron	3	0	\$350,000	\$400,099
Sauter, Danny	3	1	\$400,000	\$268,249
Brown, Vallie	5	2	\$550,000	\$500,999
Preston, Dean	5	5	\$750,000	\$472,326
Engardio, Joel	7	3	\$500,000	\$443,685
Martin-Pinto, Stephen	7	3	\$500,000	\$88,508
Matranga, Benjamin	7	3	\$500,000	\$234,726
Melgar, Myrna	7	3	\$500,000	\$357,527
Murase, Emily	7	3	\$500,000	\$273,329
Nguyen, Vilaska	7	5	\$600,000	\$411,794
Avalos, John	11	3	\$550,000	\$350,122
Safai, Ahsha	11	1	\$400,000	\$361,134

Chart 2 compares the total funds (private contributions plus public financing) raised by a candidate through the election date and the candidate’s final IEC limit.

**Chart 2 – Candidate Funds Raised and Final IEC Limit**



**D. Third-Party Spending (Independent Expenditures)**

A total of 116 third-party spending forms, were filed in connection with the November 2020 Supervisorial elections. Third-party committees (including general purpose and primarily formed independent expenditure committees) and individuals not affiliated with candidates reported spending a total of \$1,101,084 in connection with these races.

Of this third-party spending, \$538,308 (49 percent) was spent in support of a candidate, while \$562,775 (51 percent) was in opposition to a candidate, as represented in Chart 3.

**Chart 3 – Overall Third-Party Spending in November 2020 Election**

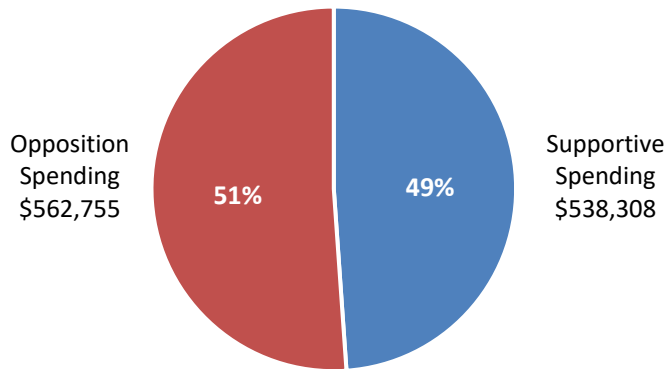


Table 6 outlines the amount of supportive and opposition third-party spending by election race. The elections for District 1 and 7 were open races that featured no incumbents, and the District 9 race was not contested and therefore could not have any publicly funded candidate. The elections for District 3, 5, and 11 featured incumbents who won re-election.

**Table 6 –Third-Party Spending in November 2020 by Supervisorial Race**

Contest	Supportive	Opposition	Total Spending
Board of Supervisors District 1	\$148,999	\$154,451	\$303,451
Board of Supervisors District 3	\$13,808	\$0	\$13,808
Board of Supervisors District 5	\$122,792	\$195,787	\$318,579
Board of Supervisors District 7	\$136,342	\$145,305	\$281,647
Board of Supervisors District 9	\$3,373	\$0	\$3,373
Board of Supervisors District 11	\$112,992	\$67,231	\$180,223
<b>Total for Election</b>	<b>\$538,308</b>	<b>\$562,775</b>	<b>\$1,101,084</b>

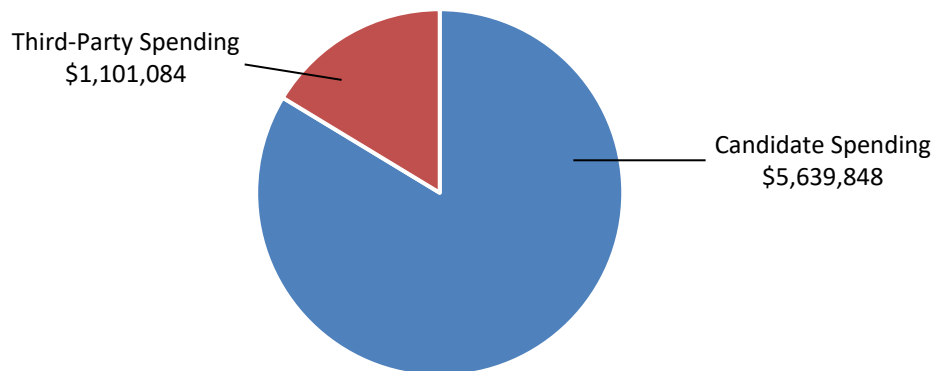
Table 7 compares and contrasts the total spending by all candidates and third parties (both supportive and opposition spending) in each Supervisorial race. As previously noted, no candidate in the District 9 race reached the reporting threshold and therefore information regarding candidate spending was not available.

**Table 7 –Candidate vs Third-Party Spending in November 2020 by Supervisorial Race**

Contest	Candidate Spending	Third-Party Spending	% of Spending by Third Parties
Board of Supervisors District 1	\$1,243,295	\$303,451	20%
Board of Supervisors District 3	\$699,261	\$13,809	2%
Board of Supervisors District 5	\$914,457	\$314,579	26%
Board of Supervisors District 7	\$2,021,843	\$281,648	12%
Board of Supervisors District 9	\$0	\$3,373	100%
Board of Supervisors District 11	\$760,992	\$184,224	19%
<b>Total for Election</b>	<b>\$5,639,848</b>	<b>\$1,101,084</b>	<b>16%</b>

Chart 4 shows the total amount of third-party spending relative to candidate spending across all Supervisorial races. Third-party spending represented approximately 16 percent of all spending.

**Chart 4 –Candidate vs Third-Party Spending in November 2020**



Third-party spending in the November 2020 Supervisorial races affected 13 candidates in six races. All 13 candidates received supportive spending, while seven candidates were also the object of opposition spending. Table 8 and Chart 6 show the amount of third-party supportive and opposition spending by candidate.

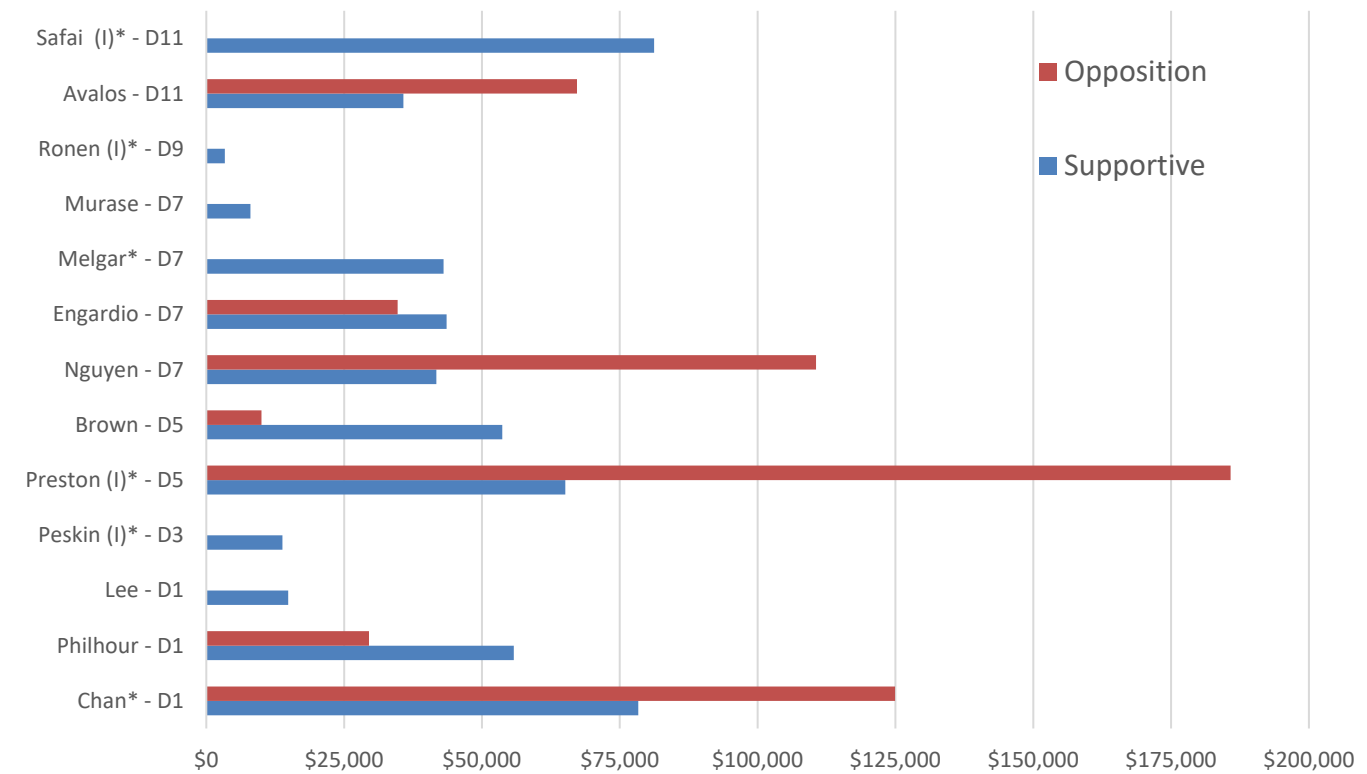
**Table 8 – Third-Party Spending in November 2020 Election by Candidate**

Affected Candidate	Race	Supportive Spending	Opposition Spending	Total 3rd Party Spending
Chan, Connie*	D1	\$78,365	\$124,943	\$203,309
Philhour, Marjan	D1	\$55,776	\$29,508	\$85,284
Lee, David	D1	\$14,857	N/A	\$14,857
Peskin, Aaron (I)*	D3	\$13,808	N/A	\$13,808
Preston, Dean (I)*	D5	\$65,117	\$185,787	\$250,905
Brown, Vallie	D5	\$53,674	\$10,000	\$63,674
Nguyen, Vilaska	D7	\$41,719	\$110,602	\$152,321
Engardio, Joel	D7	\$43,578	\$34,702	\$78,281
Melgar, Myrna*	D7	\$43,045	N/A	\$43,045
Murase, Emily	D7	\$8,000	N/A	\$8,000
Ronen, Hilary*	D9	\$3,373	N/A	\$3,373
Avalos, John	D11	\$35,753	\$67,231	\$102,984
Safai, Ahsha (I)*	D11	\$81,238	N/A	\$81,238
<b>Total</b>		<b>\$538,308</b>	<b>\$562,775</b>	<b>\$1,101,084</b>

(I) Denotes incumbent candidate

\* Denotes candidate elected

**Chart 6 - Third-Party Spending in November 2020 Election by Candidate**



(I) Denotes incumbent candidate

\* Denotes candidate elected

#### IV. Conclusion

The purpose of this report is to provide background for benchmarking program components across election cycles to help increase understanding and participation in the program and maximize its effectiveness in City campaigns. Prior reports have been produced for each election in which the program has been utilized. This reporting history creates a consistent, high-level record of the program's use throughout its existence. By producing and publishing this information, the Ethics Commission seeks to ensure that the public and City officials have transparency into the use of public funds and access to the most current information about the program – both of which are vital to supporting both its availability and effectiveness in future City elections. The report also assists with ongoing efforts to study and improve the program, which, as discussed in section II above, was done most recently in 2018-19.

This report is primarily descriptive, and a more comprehensive analysis of the recent changes to the program will be performed in the future through a separate review process. However, there are certain noteworthy observations that can be made from the data provided in the report and Appendix 1, which provides select data for each election since 2002 in which a Supervisorial election occurred.

**Highest rate of participation in a regular election since program inception.** First, the 2020 election represented the highest rate of participation in the program during any regular Supervisorial election since the program's creation. Sixteen of 26 candidates who appeared on the ballot received public financing. That represents a participation rate of 62 percent. No other regular election has had a participation rate above 50 percent; the previous high was 48 percent in 2010.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> In 2015, a special election was held for District 3. Two of the three candidates who appeared on the ballot received public financing. This is the only year in which the participation rate (67%) was higher than in 2020.

**Public funds were a higher proportion of total candidate spending.** Additionally, public financing represented a higher proportion of total candidate spending in 2020 than in any prior Supervisorial election. Combining all candidates who ran for supervisor in 2020, candidates spent a collective \$5,428,682 during the 2020 election. The program distributed \$3,455,177 to 16 of those candidates. This means that public funds distributed through the program were equal to approximately 64 percent of total candidate spending. The previous high was 41 percent, observed in both the 2010 and 2012 elections.

**Third-party spending was low, but may not signal a trend.** Although not necessarily related to the public financing program, the amount of independent (“IE”) spending in the 2020 election was low when compared to previous elections. Third party committees spent \$1,101,084 to influence the outcome of the supervisorial contests. This results in an average of \$202,217 of independent spending for each of the five contested districts. With the exception of 2014 (in which only \$24,152 of IE spending occurred on average in each of the four Board seats up for election), this was the lowest average IE spending per district since 2006. Again with the exception of 2014 (in which only \$96,610 was spent in total IEs), this is the lowest overall IE spending in a regular supervisorial election year since 2006.

**Campaigning in the time of COVID.** Finally, candidates were able to participate in the program and access public financing despite obstacles presented by running election campaigns during the COVID-19 pandemic. How candidates adapted to new techniques of engaging with voters during a period of limited in-person and public gatherings and what impact, if any, this may have for future election campaigns remain to be seen. Implementing the administrative processes necessary to ensure program continuity and funding distribution during the COVID shutdown of the City’s physical offices was a priority for the Commission. That work provided unique insights into sustaining the efficient and effective administration of the public financing program going forward.

Ethics Commission Staff will continue to evaluate these trends to determine the effects of the changes made to the program during the recent review project and to assess the possible need for any future changes. Data from the 2022 election will be necessary in order to provide a broader set of data and to correct for any unique effects caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

For more information about the public financing program, please visit the Ethics Commission’s website.<sup>14</sup> Data regarding campaign finance in the 2020 election, including the data used to compile this report, is available through the Commission’s Data Dashboards<sup>15</sup>, by viewing public disclosures filed by campaign committees<sup>16</sup>, or as open-source data derived from these public filings.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> Information available at <https://sfethics.org/compliance/campaigns/candidates/public-financing-program>.

<sup>15</sup> Available at <https://sfethics.org/disclosures/campaign-finance-disclosure/campaign-finance-disclosure-november-3-2015-election-dashboards>.

<sup>16</sup> Available at <https://public.netfile.com/pub2/?aid=sfo>.

<sup>17</sup> Available at <https://sfethics.org/disclosures/campaign-finance-disclosure/campaign-finance-disclosure-data>.



# ATTACHMENT 1

## APPENDIX 1: Overview of Data for the Public Financing Program

The table below provides summary data of prior supervisorial elections since the creation of the public financing program.

Election Year	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2015	2016	2018*	2019	2020
Amount of Public Funds Disbursed	\$281,989	\$757,678	\$216,784	\$1,315,470	\$1,477,713	\$1,228,097	\$194,710	\$307,500	\$1,522,296	\$1,513,465	\$307,500	<b>\$3,455,177</b>
Average Amount of Public Funds Disbursed	\$31,332	\$32,943	\$36,131	\$69,235	\$67,169	\$102,341	\$97,355	\$153,750	\$126,858	\$137,588	\$153,750	<b>\$215,948</b>
Number of Candidates who Qualified for the Ballot	28	65	26	42	46	26	17	3	28	25	4	<b>26</b>
Number of Participating Candidates	9	23	6	19	22	12	2	2	12	11	2	<b>16</b>
Participating Candidates as % of All Candidates on Ballot	32%	35%	23%	45%	48%	46%	12%	67%	43%	44%	50%	<b>62%</b>
Number of Seats up for Election	5	7	5	7	5	6	5	1	6	6	1	<b>6</b>
Number of Contested Seats	4	7	5	7	4	4	4	1	6	6	1	<b>5</b>

Election Year	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012	2014	2015	2016	2018	2019	2020
Contested Seats as % of All Seats up for Election	80%	100%	100%	100%	80%	67%	80%	100%	100%	100%	100%	83%
Percentage of Elected Candidates who were Publicly Financed	60%	43%	20%	71%	60%	50%	0%	100%	67%	83%	100%	83%
Percentage of Incumbents Re-Elected	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	80%	100%	0%	100%	67%	0%	100%
Total Amount of Candidate Spending	\$2,213,316	\$3,654,616	\$1,781,148	\$3,875,551	\$3,581,175	\$2,987,290	\$1,542,741	\$1,075,617	\$3,916,575	\$5,374,143	\$935,675	\$5,428,682
Public Financing Distributed as % of Total Candidate Spending	12.7%	20.7%	12.2%	33.9%	41.3%	41.1%	12.6%	28.6%	38.9%	28.2%	32.9%	63.6%
Amount of Third-Party Spending	\$261,906	\$251,201	\$543,063	\$1,324,241	\$1,305,460	\$1,507,057	\$96,610	\$1,037,259	\$2,130,147	\$2,272,744	\$363,126	\$1,101,084

\*Data for both the June 2018 special election and November 2018 midterm election are combined. District Six appeared on both the June and November ballots in 2018.