

January 12, 2006 Thousand Oaks Acorn Editorial

Editorial: Another reason to be angry as a voter in Thousand Oaks

The voters of Thousand Oaks have another reason to be angry this week. It turns out that the council majority isn't even saving the city as much money as they thought on the special election that will never happen.

When council members Andy Fox, Dennis Gillette and Jacqui Irwin decided they knew better than the voters of Thousand Oaks who should replace former Councilmember Ed Masry, they thought they were saving the city between \$178,00 and \$250,000.

In their rush to name Masry's replacement, they held an emergency meeting two days after he resigned.

Despite being advised by the city attorney that they had 30 days to decide whether to appoint or have an election, the council went full steam ahead.

After Councilmember Claudia Bill-de la Peña suggested a special election, Irwin disagreed on grounds that the costs were excessive. (Despite \$70 million in reserves, we couldn't quite afford an election in Thousand Oaks.)

Council members Fox and Gillette remained mum and voted with Irwin, without comment, to appoint Masry's replacement. The procedure smacked of deceit. The whole ordeal looked like it might have been a "done deal" before the meeting even convened.

Having made one horrendously bad decision, the council majority compounded it by allowing only seven days for applications. Only 11 days after robbing the people of an election, the council majority chose the man who will serve for three years on a seat that was *given* to him.

The council has saved our impoverished city either \$150,000 (a special election in April) or \$70,000 (had the election been combined with the June primary).

A final thought: we don't question the abilities or dedication of Councilmember Tom Glancy, but he didn't earn his seat from the voters of Thousand Oaks. It was handed to him.

Voters, however, *will* be heard in 11 months. In November they can show how they feel about appointees serving on their city council—when Fox and Gillette face reelection.

011206 Acorn Special election costs provided to T.O. by county were too high

By Sophia Fischer sfischer@theacorn.com

A special election in Thousand Oaks would have cost significantly less than the figures the city council considered last month in deciding to appoint rather than elect a replacement for the seat vacated by Ed Masry. The updated information was provided to the city the week an appointment was made, according to city officials.

Instead of the \$178,000 the council was quoted and the \$250,000 figure city staff came up with, the actual cost of a special election would run between \$50,000 and \$70,000 if held in conjunction with the June or November elections, or \$150,000 if the city held its own, independent election.

Ventura County elections representatives provided some of the incorrect figures, according to Gene Browning, county assistant registrar of voters. Browning and the county's election cost estimator were both in Sacramento on business at the time Thousand Oaks asked about special election fees.

"Somebody else did the best they could handling something they don't usually handle," Browning said. "There was some question because the city misconstrued the situation as if they were going to hold a special election on their own."

One of the options the city had considered was holding an independent election in April using a private firm that staff estimated would cost \$250,000. The corrected figure, provided by an independent elections company, is \$150,000.

Under the updated fees, the city would hold its special election either with the June state primary at a cost of \$65,000 to \$70,000 or with the November general election at a cost of \$50,000. The original incorrect figure was given as \$178,000 if the election were held in June and \$142,000 if held in November.

The original report was made on Dec. 2, the same day the council voted to appoint rather than elect a replacement. A corrected report was issued by the county on Dec. 13, according to Browning. That night the council met and chose Planning Commission Chair Tom Glancy for the seat after interviewing 32 candidates. The city didn't receive the updated information until the following day, Dec. 14, according to Interim City Clerk Linda Lawrence. Glancy was sworn in on Dec. 15.

The city clerk's office provided the new figures to the city manager on Dec. 28, added Lawrence, and council members received the information after that. Mayor Dennis Gillette said he was given the new information last week.

Nancy Dillon, former city clerk who retired in December but who is temporarily working for the city on a part-time basis, said her office didn't disseminate the information right away. *an election*

"We were reconfirming the dollars after there was a question," Dillon said. "It just takes time to contact people and get the information back."

Gillette said having the correct costs may have made him reconsider holding a special election.

“Cost was a considerable issue for me even though there are those who tried to trivialize its significance,” Gillette said. “I don’t know if there would have been a change in my vote.”

He also pointed out that the council had 30 days from Masry’s Nov. 30 resignation to make a decision on whether to appoint or elect.

“I based my decision on the information I had before me at the time,” Gillette said.

Councilmember Jacqui Irwin said she was disappointed with the county’s error in providing incorrect information. But she still expressed concern with the city’s finances.

“Thousand Oaks is dealing with spiraling public safety costs and still trying to replenish the emergency fund that the council voted to draw from a couple of months ago. Whereas the city is not in a poor financial position, it does have considerable future financial obligations (the teen center expansion, employee pension and medical liabilities, etc.) and is required to keep a minimum reserve level,” Irwin said. “We always need to be thoughtful about expending money and this is especially true as we transition into maintenance mode.”

Councilmember Claudia Bilde la Peña was the only council member to vote in favor of a special election. Neither she nor Councilmember Andy Fox returned phone messages left by the *Thousand Oaks Acorn*.