



Downtown Community Planning Council San Diego

Planning a Vibrant Downtown for All

Downtown Community Planning Council Meeting Minutes

February 25, 2026, 5:30 PM

12th Floor Committee Room, City Hall,

202 C Street, San Diego, CA, 92101

I. Call to Order & Roll Call

The Vice Chairperson called the special meeting to order at 5:40 PM. A brief delay occurred as several board members initially gathered in an adjacent conference room.

In Attendance: Helmer, E Schwarz, JP Schwarz, Link, Hewitt (Chair), Robles, Barr, Baham, Eddy, Werve (Secretary), Avita

Absent: Bargmann (Chair), Salas

II. Notice of Special Meeting

This special meeting was called pursuant to Section 6.4.10 of the DCPC Operating Procedures by the Vice Chairperson acting under Section 5.4.2. The agenda is limited to the items listed; no other business may be considered. The non-agenda public comment period is waived per Section 6.4.10.

Note: The Acting Chairperson informed the board that Chairperson Bargmann had not been in contact with the Vice Chair, the Elections Ad Hoc Committee members, or other board officers, and that efforts to reach him would continue.

III. Public Comment on Agenda Items

Gary Smith, speaking as a private citizen, expressed strong support for the community outreach plan, calling it impressive. He noted some remaining uncertainty about how online voting would function in practice but said the proposed election schedule appeared workable. He also confirmed that he would have representatives from his organization available to assist with in-person voting logistics on election day, pending confirmation of the final time.

Joyce Summers, online, suggested that the elections committee reach out to the Little Italy and East Village BIDs to publicize the vacant seats. She noted that Chris Gomez (Little Italy BID) and Dominic Lamondre (East Village BID) have historically been accommodating and have newsletters and board meetings that could help spread the word. She referenced past in-person polling at Cafe Italia as a successful prior model.

IV. Informational Items

A. Elections Ad Hoc Committee

The Acting Chairperson reported on the composition and scope of the Elections Ad Hoc Committee, established at the December 17, 2025 special meeting.

Committee Composition:

- JP Schwarz and Danny were designated as Co-Chairs of the Elections Committee.
- Greg Helmer offered to assist on all tasks outside of election day itself, as he will be out of town March 17–22.
- Greg Helmer was identified as the designated appeals officer for candidate eligibility disputes, given that both the Acting Chairperson and Secretart are themselves conflicted.
- Board members whose seats are up for election are recused from all eligibility determinations, ballot preparation, and vote-counting functions, regardless of whether they are themselves candidates.

Committee Responsibilities:

- Publicizing the election and recruiting candidates
- Receiving, reviewing, and verifying candidate applications via JotForm
- Managing candidate eligibility appeals
- Loading verified candidates and registered voters into the ElectionBuddy online voting platform
- Managing in-person voting on election day, including voter check-in
- Counting ballots and announcing results at the March 18, 2026 board meeting
- Preserving all ballots and voting records through the close of the second regular meeting after results are certified

JotForm Platform:

Gabrielle Werve reported that a candidate application form has been built in JotForm, which requires uploading proof of identification and, where applicable, business documentation. A separate voter registration form will be created as a duplicate of the candidate form. Werve will share JotForm login credentials with the Elections Committee so they can monitor applications and access the submission dashboard.

Business/LLC Documentation:

A board member raised the question of how businesses held through LLCs or other corporate entities would demonstrate ownership. It was noted that a

Statement of Information filed with the California Secretary of State is typically sufficient, and that a letter on company letterhead appointing a representative is the standard approach where the business owner is not appearing in their own name. The elections committee was directed to apply a straightforward standard and avoid excessive paperwork barriers that might deter candidates.

Voter ID Sensitivity:

A board member noted that some voters may be reluctant to upload a government-issued ID to an online platform given the current political environment around voter ID requirements. It was agreed that in-person voting would remain available as an alternative, and that the JotForm platform's security disclosures could include a privacy disclaimer. JP Schwarz suggested offering a document drop-off option at City Hall for candidates who prefer not to submit electronically.

Website & Address Lookup Tool:

Gary Hewitt demonstrated an address lookup tool he developed for the DCPC website, allowing residents and business owners to enter their address and determine which neighborhood district they are in, who their current board representatives are, and which seats are open for election. This tool is live on the elections page. Werve noted that a URL folder label still reads '2025' and committed to updating it without disrupting the active forms.

V. Action Items

A. Recognition of Vice Chairperson as Acting Chairperson

Pursuant to Operating Procedures Section 5.4.2, the board considered formal recognition of the Vice Chairperson as Acting Chairperson based on the Chairperson's failure to perform the duties of the office, including not agendaizing the required election actions in a timely manner and non-responsiveness to board communications. The Acting Chairperson will exercise all duties of the Chairperson — including presiding over meetings, developing agendas, and serving as the official DCPC representative — until the Chairperson resumes duties or the board elects a new Chairperson.

Motion by a Helmer; seconded by Schwarz. Approved unanimously.

B. Approval of 2026 General Election Logistics

The board approved the four elements of the 2026 DCPC General Election logistics, as follows:

1. Candidate Nomination Deadline:

Extended to Monday, March 9, 2026 at 11:59 PM, pursuant to the board's authority under Operating Procedures Section 5.2.1 to set an alternate deadline. This provides adequate time for eligibility verification prior to March 18. The candidate application form is live immediately. It was noted that this timeline is compressed and that future election cycles should open candidacy in January and close nominations at the February meeting.

2. Election Date, Time, and Location:

- Election date: Wednesday, March 18, 2026 — the regular DCPC meeting date
- In-person voting: Minimum two (2) hours at the meeting location, consistent with Operating Procedures Section 5.2.11 and City Council Policy 600-24. Voting hours may be extended at the Elections Committee's discretion.
- Primary location: Downtown San Diego Partnership offices, if confirmed. Fallback: Civic Center, 12th Floor Room B. The Partnership location was favored for its street-level accessibility, eliminating the need for voters to pass through building security. JP Schwarz had reached out to the Partnership earlier in the week and was awaiting a response. Joyce Summers (online) offered to follow up with her Partnership contact.
- Additional in-person voting locations (e.g., neighborhood pop-up sites) may be scheduled at the Elections Committee's discretion, provided that at least two hours of voting occur at the primary meeting location.

3. 2026 Election Seat List:

The following 13 seats were approved. Seats marked with one-year remainder terms (expiring March 2027) reflect the board's earlier action to stagger business seat terms.

Two-Year Terms (Expiring March 2028):

- Cortez – Resident: Elisabeth Schwarz (incumbent)
- East Village North – Resident: Bob Link (incumbent)
- East Village South – Resident: Gary Hewitt (incumbent)
- Little Italy – Resident: Greg Barr (incumbent)
- Horton/Gaslamp/Core – Business: Damon Robles (incumbent) — eligible voters: Horton/Gaslamp/Core district only
- At Large – Community Organization: VACANT
- At Large – Community Organization: Christopher Eddy / Balboa Park Committee (incumbent)
- At Large – General: Gabrielle Werve (incumbent)
- Horton/Gaslamp/Core – Resident: VACANT
- Little Italy – Business: VACANT

One-Year Remainder Terms (Expiring March 2027):

- East Village North – Business: VACANT
- Marina – Resident: VACANT
- Marina – Business: VACANT

Note: A correction was identified during discussion — the Horton/Gaslamp/Core Business seat (Robles) should list only district residents and business owners as eligible voters, not all-downtown. The Acting Chairperson confirmed this would be corrected in the published materials.

4. Voter Eligibility and Online Registration Cutoff:

- Eligible voter categories confirmed per Sections 5.1.1–5.1.4: downtown residents, business owners/operators with a downtown address, non-profit representatives with a downtown address, and non-resident property owners with downtown property.
- Online voter registration deadline: Tuesday, March 17, 2026, to allow the Elections Committee adequate time to vet registrants and load approved voters into ElectionBuddy before election day.
- Voters who miss the online deadline may still register and vote in person on March 18.
- The ElectionBuddy platform issues each approved voter a unique, single-use voting link. When voters appear in person at polling locations, election committee members will enter them into the system in real time, preventing duplicate voting across sites.

Motion by Christopher Eddy; seconded by Avita. Approved unanimously.

C. Amendment to Operating Procedures Section 5.2.12 — Online Voting

The board voted to amend Section 5.2.12 of the DCPC Operating Procedures to explicitly authorize online voting as a supplement to required in-person voting, consistent with City Council Policy 600-24. Online voting has been used in recent prior elections but was not formally authorized under current Operating Procedures language.

Current text: *"Mail-in ballot procedures may be requested and authorized only to accommodate individual disability that did not permit in person voting. Absentee ballots, proxy voting, and electronic voting are not permitted. Only in-person voting is permitted."*

Amended text: *"All elections shall include a minimum of two hours of in-person voting at the time and place of the DCPC meeting, consistent with City Council Policy 600-24. In addition to in-person voting, the Board may authorize online voting administered by the Elections Committee, provided that the platform ensures ballot secrecy and that each eligible voter may cast only one vote."*

Absentee ballots and proxy voting are not permitted. Mail-in ballots may be authorized only to accommodate an individual disability that prevents in-person or online participation."

A board member raised a minor drafting question about consistency between the agenda description and the governing authority citation regarding whether the City Council Policy 600-24 language reads 'include' or 'have.' The Acting Chairperson agreed to verify and reconcile the language in the final document.

Vote required: Two-thirds (2/3) of voting members present, per Operating Procedures Section 6.4.8.

Motion by Helmer member; seconded by Schwarz. Approved unanimously.

D. Approval of 2026 Election Procedures and Community Outreach Plan

Exhibit A — 2026 General Election Procedures:

The Acting Chairperson presented a draft election procedures document modeled on procedures used by the Uptown Community Planning Group, covering candidate eligibility, application process, voter registration, voting methods, ballot construction, poll management, vote-counting, and the seating of new members. Board members were encouraged to review and provide feedback; the document is intended to be refined over successive election cycles.

Exhibit B — 2026 Community Engagement and Outreach Plan:

The outreach plan includes a phased campaign timeline, social media strategy, a list of target stakeholder organizations, and ready-to-use sample collateral including social media posts, email templates, and newsletter blurbs. Gabrielle Werve confirmed that social media templates are ready and that a flyer with a QR code linking to the elections page will be produced following the meeting.

Technology Workflow:

- Candidate applications and voter registrations are collected via JotForm.
- The Elections Committee vets all submissions and loads approved candidates and voters into ElectionBuddy, the online voting platform used by Uptown.
- ElectionBuddy emails each approved voter a unique, single-use ballot link. In-person voting is conducted by committee members entering voters into the system at the polling location in real time.
- The Elections Committee was encouraged to reach out to Uptown's elections team to benefit from their experience with the platform.

Outreach Discussion:

- The County Supervisor's representative offered to explore sending outreach through the county's registered voter list for the downtown area, and to help manage email communications on behalf of the committee, pending confirmation that such assistance is permissible.
- Board members suggested reaching out to the Little Italy and East Village BIDs, building HOA groups (including an HOA network covering approximately 190 units in Cortez Hill), neighborhood social networks (Nextdoor, Facebook), the Downtown Partnership newsletter, and council members' constituent email lists.
- The board discussed the feasibility of a farmers market booth to drive candidate recruitment, along the lines of outreach conducted by North Park's community planning group.
- A request was made to add a visitor traffic counter to the election page to monitor the effectiveness of outreach efforts.
- Board members were reminded that personal outreach to encourage candidates is permissible as individuals, but that all formal communications from the Elections Committee should be broad, equitable, and directed back to the DCPC website.

No Action Taken

VI. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 6:45 PM