

To: Mayor, Town Council and Media

From: Kevin Wolff, Candidate for Mayor

Date: May 14, 2008

Subject: Proposed Public Campaign Financing Program for Chapel Hill

Summary: I oppose the proposed Public Campaign Financing Program because, as presently presented, it primarily favors the incumbents, allocates higher amounts for the mayor, requires candidates to accept donations from others (similar to accepting donations from special interest groups), and discourage citizens from running who are not backed by one of the political parties.

I note that last month I offered my services to the Mayor and Town Council to help shape a more fair and acceptable public campaign financing program, but was not subsequently ask to participate. As such, I must oppose and offer the following input in the hopes of creating a public campaign financing campaign that is fair and untarnished by self-interest.

Detailed Discussion:

I oppose the proposed public campaign financing program, which should be more correctly named the "Incumbent Re-election Assurance Program," for numerous reasons, including that the only people certain to qualify and benefit from the public financing are the incumbents, the presently seated Mayor and Town Council members or members of one of the organized political parties (Democrats and Republicans). This proposal is the most blatantly abusive, conniving, and self-interested proposals I have ever seen from a local government. The following points need to be addressed to create a viable and fair public financing program.

- 1.) Public Tax Dollar Funded Campaign Financing Program Must Be Approved by Voters on General Election Ballot Before Being Implemented.
  - a. Any public tax dollar funded campaign financing program must be approved by the voters. Without such a vote, the implementation is self interested and is no different than the Mayor and Town Council Members approving a 100% raise for themselves for ever other or every fourth year. Given the town's present shortage of money and the Town Manager's recent recommendation for an 11% tax increase, implementing a public tax dollar funded campaign finance program is simply irresponsible.
  
- 2.) The Methods Proposed for Showing Public Support (i.e., Qualifying for) to Receive Public Financing are Prejudicial and Unnecessary :

- a. Generally, there should be no additional requirements, beyond those required by the State Board of Elections, for receiving public campaign financing. As such, no matter who decides to run for political office, they will be provided at least nominal financial support for their campaign and getting their message to the public. This allows all citizens, regardless of their financial status, social status, political ties, or political experience, to receive public financing for their campaign. Any other method of qualifying for public financing will be discriminatory.
- b. Setting qualifying requirements related to accepting a certain number and dollar amount of donations unfairly prejudices the public campaign financing toward the incumbents and makes it next to impossible for a non-incumbent or average citizen to qualify for the public campaign financing, unless the candidate is backed by one of the political parties, a special interest group, or both. However, the municipal elections are supposed to be non-partisan.
  - i. I propose that if additional qualifications are desired, that a requirement be that to receive public campaign financing a candidate may not take any contributions from any other source, so that it truly is public owned elections.
  - ii. I propose that public support or candidate viability may be proven by any number of equally sufficient criteria. For example:
    - 1. A set number of signatures of Chapel Hill citizens.
    - 2. Prior elect results showing that the candidate previously received more than 10% of the vote.
    - 3. Raising more than a nominal amount of donations (if donations are allowed).
    - 4. Having been previously elected in Chapel Hill or a political position representing Chapel Hill at the county, state or federal level.
    - 5. A number of signatures of Chapel Hill citizens as an equal % of population based on a candidates political party affiliation (Democrat, Republican, Unaffiliated)

### 3.) Public Tax Dollar Campaign Financing Amounts Should Be The Same Regardless of Position of Mayor or Town Council

- a. As a prior candidate for mayor, I can see no justification for making the amount of public financing for the Mayor's position any more than the amount for Town Council positions. The campaigns are no more or less expensive. Each requires the same media access, etc. Therefore,

I propose the lower amounts for the mayor position public campaign financing.

- b. The present proposed maximum amounts for public financing of the mayor election campaigns are surprisingly similar to the amount spent by Mayor Foy during the election for his first term. This seems extreme and is obviously intended to enable Mayor Foy to remain in office indefinitely. (This is particularly true given the Mayor and Town Council two years ago eliminated the 4 term limit for the Mayor position without proper adjudication of the issue of it being "Unconstitutional.")

4.) Public Tax Dollar Campaign Financing Should Be Reduced or Eliminated for Incumbents.

- a. At least the presently seated Mayor and Town Council Members should not be able to qualify for the public tax dollar campaign financing unless the program is voted on by the public.
- b. The present Mayor and Town Council Members should recuse themselves (send it to a public vote) or render themselves (and possibly future incumbents) ineligible for the public tax dollar campaign financing. This would help to eliminate the self-interested aspects of instituting the proposed public tax dollar campaign financing the Mayor and Town Council Members should recuse themselves from voting in this provision.
- c. Future incumbents should receive a less amount of public tax dollar campaign financing than challengers. Jim Ward's campaign last year for town council proved that an incumbent that is well liked can be elected spending as little as \$500.00 without taking any contributions from anyone. And Bill Strom's campaign last year for town council proved that a well connected incumbent can raise as much as \$10,000 from individual contributions. Therefore, it is inappropriate and unfair for any incumbent to receive as much as a non-incumbent, if anything at all, from a public tax dollar campaign financing program.

5.) Our Town Budget Cannot Afford Another Discretionary \$50,000 in Expenses

- a. Just last this week there was an article stating the our town manager, Roger Stancil, has proposed an 11 percent increase in property tax. Given such a significant tax increase, it seems financially irresponsible to introduce \$50,000 or more to the town budget to fund a program that has run so well on personal financing and contributions in the past. Isn't that how the present Mayor and Town Council got elected? I think it is your civic duty to continue the traditional campaign

financing methods that have served our community well over the many years since inception of Chapel Hill, and ensure our towns continued financial viability and independent campaign financing.

6.) Public Tax Funding of Political Campaigns Should Be Based On Need

- a. Any use of public tax dollar funding for political campaigns be based on financial need, like so many other public funding programs. I can support a public funding program based on a showing of financial need that would enable underprivileged and underrepresented portions of our citizens to run a successful political campaign for the town council or mayor positions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Wolff", written in a cursive style.

Kevin Wolff