

This month we celebrate our nation's Declaration of Independence, which asserts that "governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." We give that consent through elections – choosing representatives to govern us, and holding them accountable for their performance.

This is an election year in Maplewood, and soon after Independence Day we'll see who officially throws their hats into the electoral ring. The office of mayor as well as two city council seats, currently held by Erik Hjelle and Kathleen Juenemann, are up for election.

Filing for Office

From July 7th to 21st, residents can file Affidavits of Candidacy to officially enter the races for mayor or council. Councilmembers are elected "at large" by and for the entire city. A candidate must be a resident of Maplewood and an eligible voter. In other words, if you don't meet the legal requirements to vote in Maplewood (citizenship, for example), you're not able to run for these offices.

Fundraising

It costs thousands of dollars to run an effective campaign today – to print signs and literature, buy postage, and so forth. Some people think candidates should pay for it entirely from their own pockets. I strongly disagree; we shouldn't limit our elected officials to those of a particular social class or income level who can afford to self-finance, but should give all citizens the opportunity to fully participate in the political process.

State law limits contributions and requires reports on campaign receipts and expenditures. The reports are filed with the city clerk, and are public documents; you can find them posted on the city website (<http://www.ci.maplewood.mn.us/index.aspx?nid=93>).

Identifying Likely Voters

City elections attract far fewer voters than statewide and federal races. Maplewood has an official population of 36,717 today. In

2007, there were 22,584 registered voters, but only 6,456 ballots were actually cast in the general election. This was an 18% increase over 2005's turnout, but still less than one third of the city's potential voters.

Campaigns can obtain lists of registered voters from the Secretary of State. If you've voted in recent city elections, it's likely that campaigns and their volunteers will contact you. They figure you're likely to vote in city elections again, and they'd like you to support their candidate.

If you're just starting to get interested in city elections, you may find that you need to be more proactive to learn about the candidates. Call them for information, visit their websites, and attend candidate forums sponsored by local civic groups.

Voter Registration

If you're not currently registered, it's easy to do so in advance of the elections – you can do it in person at City Hall. If you miss the registration deadlines (August 25 for the primary, October 13 for the general election), you can still register at the polls on election day. For all the details, visit the Ramsey County Elections web page (<http://www.co.ramsey.mn.us/elections/register tovote.htm>).

Election Days


There will probably be a primary, held on September 15th. A primary is required if five or more candidates file for the two council seats, or if three or more candidates file for mayor. You're allowed to vote for one mayoral candidate, and up to two city council candidates. The two mayoral candidates and four council candidates who get the most votes in the primary advance to the general election on November 3rd. The three November winners will have four-year terms that begin on January 4, 2010.

Participate!

A strong democracy depends on the participation of citizens. When more than two thirds of registered voters aren't making it to the polls for local elections, it's clear that Maplewood can do much better. Many generations before us struggled for our right to self-governance. Honor their sacrifices by becoming informed and turning out to vote in our city's elections this year!

Editorial Disclaimer: *The views expressed are those of the author and may not necessarily represent or reflect the views and opinions of the City of Maplewood.*

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