

# How to Run for Mayor and Council in Orange Beach

900 words

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## **How to Run for Mayor and Council in Orange Beach**

Getting elected Mayor or to the City Council in 2020 is simple.

Campaign on a platform to eliminate the 4-mil property tax, giving residents a real return for putting up with the traffic, and propose we pay for the tax cut with sin taxes on tobacco products, alcohol, and sugary drinks, offsetting the money lost on the tax cut. This oversimplification sounds easy, but it's not.

Orange Beach has competent council members, being skilled politicians, representing their community on an at-large basis, not districts. Jeff Silvers and Joni Blalock have served the longest since 2004; Jerry Johnson and Jeff Boyd have served since 2012; Annette Mitchell was appointed to serve out the term of the late Al Bradley, being elected to her first term in 2016.

Mayor Tony Kennon started out as a Councilman, being first elected on August 24, 2004, but resigned on June 7, 2005. Three years later, on August 26, 2008 he was elected Mayor, presently serving his third consecutive term, ending in 2020.

To qualify for the ballot you have to meet a few minimum requirements. The candidate "must be 18 years old; must be a resident of the city for 90 days prior to the election [rent or own]; must be a US citizen for one day; and must be a registered voter," according to a report on the Alabama Secretary of State's website (<https://www.sos.alabama.gov/alabama-votes/candidates/qualifications-public-office>).

Planning your run for the 2020 election cycle takes time and hard work, beginning in 2019. Start building up a war chest of donor lists, appropriate technology and talented volunteers.

How do you go about getting elected to public office? Here are a few pointers.

Know your electorate: talk with people across the entire economic spectrum, finding out what matters to them; connect with bellwethers, getting the right people backing you; kick off fundraising by contacting past candidates; build your team, knowing volunteers will do the bulk of the work; design campaign material, concentrating on poster and yard sign design, newsletters, and social media. Raise candidate's profile, reaching out to voters through common acquaintances. Create a campaign plan for messaging and build a dedicated voter database, tracking communication through websites, social media and telephone calls, according to a report on CallHub, a political website (<https://callhub.io/run-local-political-campaign/>).

Offending one person with your campaign style in a small town may mean offending their entire voting family. Note that council members are sometimes elected with as little as 400 votes. In 2008 Tony Kennon had around 1200 votes, being elected mayor in a town of 5000 people.

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The margin for offending is large, but the margin for winning is small, adding to that, the responsibility for winning is enormous, putting you on-call 24/7 for a low-paying job.

"I know when my Dad [Councilman Jerry Davidson] was on council [2000-2004] he spent an enormous amount time in many many more meetings [council planning] than the public meetings held and people took any and all opportunities anytime he was anywhere to discuss their thoughts," said Kristy Doggett a twenty-year resident in an email.

Some people cannot be bothered with public service, saying it is too much trouble, putting up with all the politics for a beggar's wage: \$13,401.18 per year for each council member; \$16,557.36 per year for the Mayor Pro-Tem (vice-mayor); and \$42,000.00 per year for Mayor.

Then there is the question of getting along with Mayor Kennon (if re-elected), having a very unique style of coordinating policy. Potential candidates muse about the fringe benefit of being embarrassed and humiliated in the Council Chambers for disagreeing with him.

Baldwin County District Representative Daniel Catlin, who was standing in for Congressman Bradley Byrne at his congressional town hall, watched as Mayor Kennon attempted to demean, disgrace and shame Congressman Byrne's supporters in the Council Chambers.

"They [residents] are ignorant by choice," said Mayor Kennon, as evidenced in this video report from Cliff McCollum of Gulf Coast News Today (<http://www.gulfcoastnewstoday.com/stories/they-are-ignorant-by-choice,47084>).

The video speaks volumes.

We need a hefty selection of good candidates in 2020, offering a salary commensurate with the job's responsibilities, specifically large enough to compensate professionals for managing a \$40 million budget. I suggest \$160,000 per year for Mayor, and \$50,000 per year for each of the five council members, as outlined in my previous article (<http://altoday.com/archives/25186-rauf-bolden-call-for-a-better-paid-mayor-and-council-in-orange-beach>).

People in Orange Beach can do better than having their Mayor and City Council stand unopposed for municipal elections because of the low pay. Let's improve the compensation package for our elected officials, simultaneously attracting a large pool of candidates, showing the world democracy, and competitive elections have a strong tradition in Orange Beach.

ENDS.