

OF COUNSEL

William J. Priest

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📍 Ontario



William J. “Jim” Priest represents public agencies as of counsel in the Municipal Law practice group of Best Best & Krieger LLP. Operating out of the firm’s Ontario office, he provides both general and special counsel services to many cities, counties, special districts and other clients. Jim’s particular areas of practice includes local elections, public finance, land use and ethics law.

Election Law

Jim is well versed in local election laws, running the gamut from initiative, referendum, vacancy and recall procedures, to political reform/campaign finance, to election recounts and contests. He devotes much of his time to helping clients comply with the California Voting Rights Act and the California Voter Participation Rights Act (Senate Bill 415) – laws that often require public agencies to change the timing and means by which they elect representatives (from at-large to by-district elections). He is also one of the firm’s go-to legal advisors for clients that elect officers by-district and must, therefore, go through the “redistricting” process triggered by the 2020 U.S. Census.

He has worked with dozens of public agencies throughout the State on other local election issues – ranging from charter amendments to tax measures to land use elections. He is also experienced in many types of local tax, assessment and fee/rate setting procedures under Propositions 13, 62, 218 and 26 (which often require an election or similar approval process). He regularly assists clients in finding solutions to their particular financial challenges, whether through local tax measures, property assessments, utility rates or other revenue sources.

Municipal Planning

Jim has extensive experience in land use and development law. He is general counsel to the Palm Springs Planning Commission, recently assisting the City in drafting proposed golf course redevelopment rules as well as a comprehensive update to its historic preservation ordinance.

During his 12 years of service for the City of Covina, he served as general counsel to its Planning Commission and assisted the City with a variety of high-profile downtown development projects, including the Heritage Plaza Park, the Metrolink and Civic Center Parking Structures, City Ventures’ “Covina 2” and “Covina 3” projects, and the Olson Company’s “Vintage Walk” and “Citrus Walk” mixed-use developments.

CORE PRACTICES

Business Licensing & Franchising
California Public Records Act
Election Law
Fees, Taxes & Assessments
Open Government & Ethics
Municipal Law
Public Infrastructure

EDUCATION & ADMISSIONS

Education

Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, J.D.

University of California, Los Angeles, B.A., social psychology, cum laude

Bar Admissions

California
Illinois

He also assisted the City of Azusa in developing public parking facilities for its Metro Gold Line train stations as well as forming a dedicated joint powers authority, which will long-term manage more than 200 acres of undeveloped hillside property overlooking the City for conservation purposes.

As part of his municipal practice, Jim frequently advises clients on issues regarding the State Planning and Zoning Law, Subdivision Map Act, Brown Act, Public Records Act and similar laws.

Notable Experience

Jim returned to BBK after spending several years with Oliver, Sandifer and Murphy in Los Angeles, where he served as assistant city attorney for the cities of Gardena and Downey. During his prior tenure with BBK, he served many public agencies, including the cities of Fontana and Ontario, as well as the March Joint Powers Authority.

Professional & Community Involvement

- Cal Poly Pomona Foundation Board of Directors
- California Political Attorney's Association
- Open Doors Now Board of Directors

Thought Leadership

Publications

- "Reducing Cyber Vulnerability and Keeping Online Voter Registration Data Safe," *BBKknowledge*, Oct. 6, 2016
- "Local Campaign Finance Reform: Can Local Agencies Wean the Baby From 'Mother's Milk'? Part 1," *PublicCEO*, Sept. 28, 2016
- "Engaging California Voters," co-author, *PublicCEO*, Aug. 17, 2016
- "The Basics: Municipal Election Laws," co-author, *PublicCEO*, April 24, 2016
- "Engaging California Voters," *BBKknowledge*, Aug. 17, 2016
- "The Basics: Municipal Election Laws," *BBKknowledge*, April 25, 2016
- "A Guide to New Laws Impacting Public Agencies," *BBKknowledge*, Jan. 5, 2016
- "What does 'One Person, One Vote' Mean?," *BBKknowledge*, Dec. 10, 2015
- "U.S. Supreme Court Affirms That Content-Based Sign Codes Violate The First Amendment," *BBKknowledge*, Sept. 9, 2015
- "U.S. Supreme Court Affirms That Content-Based Sign Codes Violate The First Amendment," co-author, *PublicCEO*, Sept. 3, 2015
- "A Taxing Problem: How to Regulate Online Vacation Rental Marketplaces," co-author, *PublicCEO*, Oct. 24, 2014
- "Cities Grappling With Challenges of How to Tax, Regulate Short-Term Rentals," *Bloomberg BNA*, Oct. 20, 2014
- "State Constitution Now Requires Local Agencies to Follow Brown and Public Records Acts - Whether or Not State Reimburses Compliance Costs," *BBK Legal Alert*, June 10, 2014
- "New Laws Affecting Public Agencies in California," *BBK Legal Alert*, Nov. 25, 2013

- “FPPC to Establish Electronic Filing and Public Disclosure System for Statements of Economic Interests,” *BBK Legal Alert*, Oct. 14, 2013

Presentations

- “Municipal Elections (aka 'The Circus Comes Back to Town'),” League of California Cities City Clerks New Law and Elections Seminar, Dec. 13, 2024
- “Municipal Elections - The Circus Comes Back to Town,” California Lawyers Association Public Law 101 Conference, Nov. 15, 2023
- “Palm Springs Preservation Program Update,” 2019 California Preservation Conference, California Preservation Foundation, May 10, 2019
- “‘Walking the Line’ - Public Agencies', Officials' and Employees' Roles in Local Elections,” BBK Webinar, Aug. 15, 2018
- “Election Law Primer,” BBK Webinar, March 10, 2016
- “New Kids on the Block: Regulatory Concerns in Online Vacation Rental Marketplaces,” International Municipal Lawyers Association Webinar, March 4, 2015