

Craig STEELE

Shareholder

CENTRAL COAST

T 805.439.3515

E csteele@rwglaw.com



Craig A. Steele is a shareholder in the Public Law Department at Richards, Watson & Gershon and serves on the Firm's Management Committee. Craig has over 30 years of experience practicing local government law and has worked in government and politics for over 35 years. Craig serves as the City Attorney for the City of Monrovia, General Counsel to the Nipomo Community Services District, Mendocino Coast Health Care District, and Senior Counsel to the Los Angeles County Children and Families First Proposition 10 Commission ("First 5 LA").

A former political campaign manager, Craig is an expert in elections, voting rights, and government ethics laws and has frequently been asked to speak and teach about those subjects by the League of California Cities, Institute for Local Government (ILG), California Special Districts Association, and other organizations.

Craig concentrates on the representation of public agency clients in a wide range of government law areas and has spoken and written extensively on open government issues including Public Entity Ballot Measures, Lobbying, Public Records, Open Meeting Laws, and Conflicts of Interest Law. His article "The Rules on Lobbying: What Every Local Official Should Know" was published in the January, 2010 issue of Western City Magazine. He is a past member of the FPPC Committee of the League of California Cities' City Attorneys Department and also served on a task force of the Institute for Local Government drafting a resources book on open space acquisition by cities.

Craig is a past President of the Board of Directors of the Community Center of La Cañada Flintridge, former Vice President and a member of the Board of Directors of the Spartan Boosters, and served for several years as Chair of the La Cañada Unified School District's Bond Oversight Committee. He was also an adjunct professor in the USC Price School of Public Policy in 2011 and 2012. He is

PRACTICE AREAS

Municipal & Public Agency
Law

FOCUS AREAS

Elections, Voting & Campaign
Finance

EDUCATION

J.D., University of Southern
California Gould School of Law

B.A., University of Southern
California

a frequent speaker to classes at the USC Gould School of Law where his wife, Susan Wright, is Professor of Lawyering Skills and Director of Academic Success.

WORK FOR CLIENTS

As a public law attorney, Craig has broad experience with the legal issues that are important to public agencies of all types, structures, geography, and characteristics. He has served as a city attorney in charter cities and general law cities; in full-service cities and contract cities. Craig works with cities that provide police and fire services, utilities, and independent libraries, as well as cities that contract for such services. He has served in coastal communities, a foothill community with a wilderness preserve, and both built out and rural communities.

He has served as an independent investigator on campaign finance law issues for Ventura County, and has advised candidates for local, state, and federal offices and other private interests on a variety of election and political law matters. Craig is advising numerous public entities regarding voting rights, district election issues, and redistricting.

In the land use area, Craig has worked on a range of projects ranging from large (5,000+ planned units) residential subdivisions to small mixed use projects in historic downtowns. He has authored unique ordinances on such subjects as picketing in residential areas and food truck regulation. Craig also is the author of dozens of local ballot measures, including open space preservation, local taxes and bond measures, fireworks regulation, and transportation issues. Public agencies consult with him at all stages of the process of ballot measure process, from polling and strategic decisions, to drafting the measure, to advising about processes and permissible public agency involvement in ballot measure activities. Many entities with "in-house" City Attorneys and General Counsel have consulted with Craig on elections and voting issues, including the Cities of Compton, Redondo Beach, Hawthorne, Pasadena, Fremont, Livermore, San Luis Obispo, and the San Diego Association of Governments. In recent election cycles, Craig advised clients on issues as significant and diverse as the Los Angeles County and San Diego County sales tax proposals to fund transportation projects, marijuana taxes and regulations throughout the State, local land use measures on the Central Coast, and districting measures in Imperial, San Bernardino, and Riverside Counties.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Prior to joining Richards, Watson & Gershon out of law school in 1992, Craig was a political campaign consultant and public affairs professional at Cerrell Associates, Inc., one of the nation's most prominent public affairs firms. He worked on campaigns for state, local, and federal offices, including two presidential campaigns. He worked as advance staff for political figures such as U.S. Senators Albert Gore, Jr., Alan Simpson, and Lloyd Bentsen, Assembly Speaker Willie Brown, Los Angeles Mayor Tom Bradley, and Honolulu Mayor Frank Fasi. He also worked as advance staff in connection with events such as the 1984 Olympics and the Los Angeles visits of Pope John Paul II in 1987, and His Holiness Vazken I of the Armenian Apostolic Church in 1988.

HONORS & AWARDS

City of Monrovia Community Policing Award, 2013

La Cañada Unified School District Governing Board's Award for Service, 2007

PROFESSIONAL AND COMMUNITY AFFILIATIONS

Member, Los Angeles County Bar Association

Member, San Luis Obispo County Bar Association

EXPERIENCE

HIGHLIGHTED PROJECTS (PUBLIC LAW)

- ▶ **First 5 LA – Interim CEO Appointment (2012).** As longtime counsel to First 5 LA, a Los Angeles County public agency that invests tobacco tax dollars for the benefit of children aged 0-5 and their families, Craig advised the Board and agency through the departure of the agency's CEO. After the separation, the Board asked Craig to serve as Interim CEO while a new CEO was recruited. He served in that position, running an agency with over 100 employees and an annual budget in excess of \$170 million, for a year while also coordinating the search for a permanent CEO.
- ▶ **City of Highland – Change to City Council Districts.** In response to a claim of racially-polarized voting patterns under the California Voting Rights Act ("CVRA"), Craig advised the City throughout the process of creating a district-based election system. This work included drafting a ballot measure seeking voter approval of the district system, guiding the City through the public process to create districts, and advising the City Clerk and City Council throughout the first district-based elections.
- ▶ **City of Monrovia – Opening of Hillside Wilderness Preserve.** This nearly 20-year project created one of Southern California's largest publicly-owned and publicly-accessible wilderness preserves in the foothills of Monrovia. Craig's work on this started with drafting the initial ballot measure that created the General Plan designation and Specific Plans for the area, and then advising the City throughout the cooperative acquisition of the Preserve property from various private owners using a combination of grant funds and the proceeds of a City special tax. He helped to draft and implement a property management plan that survived a CEQA challenge and limited opposition from local residents. Craig then participated in the process of the City acquiring the final easements and accesses needed to facilitate public access and drafting public access and use rules. The Preserve opened to the public in 2017.

NEWS

"Taxpayer Protection Act" Will Not Appear on November Ballot
06.20.2024

Attorney General Declares That SB 1439 Campaign Contribution Rules Do Not Apply Retroactively
10.25.2023

California Supreme Court Provides Clarity on California Voting Rights Act Voter Dilution Requirement
08.28.2023

Campaign Contributions Can Create Conflicts of Interest for Local Elected Officials Under New Law
01.03.2023

Relaxed Brown Act Requirements Will Temporarily Remain in Effect After June 15
06.04.2021

County Pays \$1.35 Million Penalty for Public Funds Spent in Support of Ballot Measure
09.01.2020

"Open and Public" Meetings and the COVID-19 Virus Emergency
03.16.2020

Proposed Ballot Measure Increasing Vote Requirement for Local Tax Measures Will NOT be on November Ballot;
Local Soda Taxes Prohibited in Legislative Deal
06.29.2018

PRESENTATIONS

From Chaos to Calm: How to Avoid Disruptive Public Meetings and How to Handle Them if They Occur
CSDA Annual Conference and Expo, 08.27.2025

Keep Your Eye on the Money: Navigating California's New Campaign Contribution Prohibitions
CSDA Special District Leadership Academy, San Rafael, 11.04.2024

The 2024 Election: What Public Officials and Staff Need to Know About Local Ballot Measures and Candidate Elections
Institute for Local Government, 08.08.2024

Keep Your Eye on the Money: Navigating California's New Campaign Contribution Prohibitions
CSDA Special District Leadership Academy, San Diego, 04.15.2024

The Do's and Don'ts of Ballot Measure Activities and Public Resources
The League of California Cities, 12.07.2023

When the Gavel Strikes: Tips for Efficient and Effective Public Meetings
California Special Districts Association, 08.30.2023

Lunch and Learn: California's New Campaign Contribution Regulations, What Local Governments Need to Know (SB 1439)
Institute for Local Government, 07.13.2023

Local Ballot Measures: Issues for City Attorneys
BACA (Bay Area City Attorneys), 01.31.2020

Meeting Management: Tips for Efficient and Effective Public Meetings
USC Sol Price School of Public Policy Local Leader Academy, 10.2019

Meeting Management – Tips for Efficient & Effective Public Meetings
California Special Districts Association Annual Conference, September 25-28, 2019

Public Agency Advocacy: Rules Regarding Ballot Measures and Lobbying
California Special Districts Association Annual Conference, 2018

Candidate & Ballot Measure Elections: The Role of District Board Secretaries and Clerks
California Special Districts Association Board Secretary/Clerk Conference, 2018

The California Voting Rights Act and Imposed District Elections
The California Voting Rights Act and Imposed District Elections, 2016

Tips for Effective Lawyering
USC Gould School of Law First Year Class, 2015

Local Initiatives and Referenda: Key Considerations for City Attorneys
League of California Cities City Attorneys Department, 2015

Dealing with Disruptions at Public Meetings
CLE International Municipal Law Conference, 2010

PUBLICATIONS

New Campaign Finance Law Creates Potential Pitfalls for Local Officials
California Special Districts, Volume 18, Issue 5, Sept-Oct 2023

Local Ballot Measures: The Line Between Information and Campaigning
California Special Districts, Volume 17, Issue 3, May-June 2022

Local Public Agency Advocacy: The Line Between Information and Campaigning
California Special Districts, Volume 13, Issue 4, Jul-Aug 2018

The Rules on Lobbying: What Every Local Official Should Know
Western Cities Magazine, January 2010

Proposition 208 Implementation Guide (contributor)
League of California Cities, 2007