

Memo

To: Commissioners
From: Wayne Barnett and Rene LeBeau
Date: October 4, 2023
Re: Potential special election

SMC 2.04.690.I provides: “If any special election is called, the Commission shall set aside Program Funds for such election in an amount it deems appropriate. The Commission may set, implement, or modify standards, procedures, limits, and deadlines similar to those in this Subchapter VIII as the Commission deems proper and necessary for such special election, taking care to not unduly prejudice accumulation of Program funds.”

This memo lays out some of the key decisions that the Commission will need to make should there be a special election to fill a vacancy for a Citywide position in 2024. Unfortunately, we cannot wait for the results of the election to begin planning. Preparations for the 2023 elections began in the summer of 2022, meaning that we are months behind where we would ideally be.

1. Action: Move the initial mailing date to March 12, 2024.

The Presidential Primary Election date is March 12, 2024. This year, we mailed Vouchers to residents as soon as voting ended on a school district levy. The goal was to avoid confusion. We recommend waiting until the Presidential primary is complete, and then mailing.

2. Action: Set candidate funding amount.

The maximum campaign valuation for City Council at-large positions is \$375,000. We are on the cusp of evaluating that limit before the 2025 elections and recommend against making a hasty change now. To fully fund six candidates entirely with Democracy Vouchers, the candidate fund would need to be set at \$1,425,000.

3. Action: Determine budget for the Democracy Voucher Outreach Fund.

The Democracy Voucher Outreach Fund was established in 2018. It was one of the recommendations made by BERK and has been crucial to reaching Seattle’s historically underserved communities in the last three cycles. The fund for this year was \$225,000.

There is insufficient time to conduct a thorough RFP process before next year. We recommend setting a budget, and extending the awards to those community-based organizations who were most successful this year.

4. Action: Determine the amount of Democracy Vouchers per resident.

Below are the best-case outcomes with six candidates, fully utilizing voucher funding, and each resident giving all of their \$25 vouchers to a candidate eligible to receive funding. This also assumes a candidate fund of \$1,425,000.

- If residents receive four vouchers with a grand total of \$100 per resident, 14,250 residents could have vouchers count.
- If residents receive three vouchers worth a grand total of \$75 per resident, 19,000 residents could have vouchers count.
- If residents receive two vouchers worth a grand total of \$50 per resident, 28,500 residents could have vouchers count.
- If each resident receives a single voucher valued at \$25 per resident, 57,000 residents could have vouchers count.

We recommend providing residents with \$50 in vouchers total for any special election in 2024. It would double the number of individuals who could successfully use their vouchers.

Here is a chart showing the number of candidates, funds available and used, the number of residents who returned Democracy Vouchers, and the number of residents whose vouchers were redeemed.

Year	# of Candidates	# of DVP Candidates	Funds Available	Funds Used	Voucher Users	Voucher Users with Redeemed Vouchers
2017	17	13	\$3,000,000	\$1,140,525	19,074	13,167
2019	45	35	\$4,200,00	\$2,454,475	38,092	27,154
2021	36	21	\$6,800,000	\$3,397,050	48,071	38,419

5. Action: Adjust individual contribution limits.

With inflation running hot for the last two years, an adjustment to the contribution limit is in order. We will provide the Commission with a draft rule for consideration at its November meeting, but our preliminary conclusion is that an inflation adjustment would take the contribution limit to \$650.

The chart below illustrates the individual contribution limits for candidates at the recommended value of vouchers per resident. Please note that the maximum available to participating candidates is exactly one half of what is available to participating candidates.

City Council Candidate	# of \$25 Vouchers	Current Limit	Proposed 2024 Limit
Non-DVP	0	\$600	\$650
DVP	2	$\$300 + \$100 = \$400$	$\$325 + \$50 = \$375$

Conclusion

These decisions will allow staff to begin moving forward with planning for 2024. Staff will almost certainly have additional questions as we proceed.