

Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission Regular Meeting
February 7, 2024

The February 7, 2024, Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission (SEEC) Regular Meeting convened in Seattle Municipal Tower Conference Room 4080 and remotely. Chair Kristin Hawes and Commissioner Richard Shordt were present. Vice Chair Susan Taylor and Commissioners Zach Pekelis and David Perez participated via Webex. (Commissioner Perez joined the meeting at 4:09 p.m.) Commissioners Hardeep Singh Rekhi and Chalia Stallings-Ala'ilima were absent. Executive Director Wayne Barnett and staff members Cliff Duggan, Polly Grow, René LeBeau, and Assistant City Attorney Gary Smith, were present with Chrissey Courtney and Randal Fu, joined by Assistant City Attorneys Joe Levan and Aaron Valla via Webex.

The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:02 p.m.

Discussion of Written Public Comment

No written public comment was received as of February 5, 2024. The Director noted a February 5 memorandum from People Powered Elections Washington to the SEEC regarding reforms to Seattle's Democracy Voucher Program had been sent February 6 to the Commissioners and will be a discussion item at the March Regular Meeting.

Final Action Items

1. Adoption of January 10, 2024, Commission Special Meeting minutes

The Chair entertained a motion to adopt the minutes. Commissioner Shordt so moved, and Vice Chair Taylor seconded. The January 10, 2024, SEEC Commission Special Meeting minutes were adopted.

2. Draft 2025 Elections Code Rule Changes

a. Rule 17.B – Contribution Limits Applicable to Democracy Voucher Participants

The Director said the revised Rule 17.B is based purely on inflation. In December 2023, the Commission voted to increase the 2024 Special Election At-large City Councilmember contribution limit to \$350. As there has been no major change in the CPI-W data, the same contribution limit may apply to the 2025 At-large City Councilmember and the City Attorney races. The limit for the Mayoral race is raised to \$650. The vote was tabled until such time as additional Commissioners were present to make a quorum.

Maximum Campaign Valuations (Public Comment)

The Chair introduced the opportunity for members of the public to provide comments on the Maximum Campaign Valuation (MCV) limits for the 2025 Election Cycle. Each person was allotted five minutes to speak. At the conclusion of the comment period, the Chair thanked the speakers for the thoughtful commentary.

The Chair acknowledged that Commissioner Perez had remotely joined the meeting.

b. Rule 16.H – Maximum Campaign Valuations

In response to a comment from the January meeting about front-loading the Primary Election allocation, the Director shared three different scenarios for the 2025 Election Cycle.

- Scenario 1 (current 50/50) showed an estimated Ending Fund Balance of (\$1,122,211) and 65% of budgeted funds of \$2,027,789.
- Scenario 2 (60/40) showed an estimated Ending Fund Balance of (\$2,022,211) and 65% of budgeted funds of \$1,442,789.
- Scenario 3 (75/25) showed an estimated Ending Fund Balance of (\$3,372,211) and 65% of budgeted funds of \$565,289.

The Commission is required to budget for six candidates who do all their fundraising through the voucher program annually. This functions as a threshold.

The Chair voiced appreciation of the numbers. The Chair asked a question with respect to the historical utilization average of 65% of budgeted funds and what the actual utilization rate

was in the last election. Ms. Courtney responded that the utilization rate for the last cycle was 45%.

The Chair asked the Commissioners for comments or questions. Hearing none, the Chair asked if the Commissioners were ready to vote with respect to increasing the Maximum Campaign Valuations for the 2025 Election Cycle. The MCV limits for Mayoral candidates would be \$450,000 Primary and \$900,000 General/Total. The MCV for City Attorney and At-large City Councilmember candidates would be \$225,000 Primary and \$450,000 General/Total. It was also proposed to have the 2025 Election Cycle funds be maintained equally between the Primary and the General Elections.

Commissioner Pekelis made the motion with a second from Commissioner Shordt. The vote was unanimous in adopting the motion.

a. Rule 17.B – Contribution Limits Applicable to Democracy Voucher Participants (continuation)

With a quorum of Commissioners present, the Chair revisited the motion to approve the 2025 Election Cycle contribution limits applicable to Democracy Voucher participants of \$350 for City Attorney and At-large City Councilmember candidates and \$650 for the Mayoral candidates. Commissioner Shordt made the motion to adopt the revised limits and Commissioner Taylor seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion Items

3. Democracy Voucher Program report

Ms. LeBeau stated they are in the middle of ramping up for this year's election. Everything is on target to mail vouchers out on March 12. The Program Metro RapidRide bus ads (a recommendation by community partners) are approved and finalized. The ads will be visible beginning in March and run for a month with another campaign a few weeks later.

Ms. LeBeau commented that the decisions made by the Commissioners today and at the January meeting are very helpful to getting materials ready for the 2025 Election Cycle.

4. Executive Director's report

The Director has reached out to City Council President Nelson's office regarding Chair Hawes' Commission reappointment. On February 8, the Director will give the Governance, Accountability, and Economic Development (GAED) Committee a broad overview of the Democracy Voucher Program. (For 2024-2025, the Commission has been assigned to the GAED Committee chaired by Council President Nelson.)

The Chair called for a short break (4:50-4:55 p.m.) before resuming the meeting and the Commissioners' Open Public Meetings Act and the Public Records Act Training Session. The training was not recorded by the Seattle Channel.

5. Open Public Meetings Act and Public Records Act Training Session

Mr. Levan stated that the open training is structured as generic for various boards and commissions with no specific legal advice. If an executive session is needed to discuss issues requiring attorney-client privilege, it may be arranged for a later meeting.

Messrs. Levan and Smith presented a PowerPoint entitled "Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) Training" for Boards, Commissions, and Committees.

Mr. Valla presented a PowerPoint entitled "SEEC – Public Records Act Training/Refresher". The presentations were made available to the Commissioners.

At the conclusion of the training, the Chair asked the Commissioners if there were any other matters to take up before adjourning. Hearing none, the Chair adjourned the February 7, 2024, SEEC Commission Regular Meeting at 5:54 p.m.