

Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission Regular Meeting

March 6, 2024

The March 6, 2024, Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission (SEEC) Regular Meeting convened in Seattle Municipal Tower Conference Room 4080 and remotely. Chair Kristin Hawes and Commissioners Zach Pekelis, David Perez, Richard Shordt, and Chalia Stallings-Ala'ilima participated via Webex. Vice Chair Susan Taylor and Commissioner Hardeep Singh Rekhi were absent. Executive Director Wayne Barnett and staff members Fedden Amar, Cliff Duggan, Randal Fu, Polly Grow, and René LeBeau were present. Chrissy Courtney and Assistant City Attorneys Joe Levan and Gary Smith joined 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 March 5, 2024.

Final Action Items

1. Adoption of February 7, 2024, Commission Regular Meeting minutes

The Chair asked if there were any comments, questions, or revisions regarding the minutes. Hearing none, a motion to adopt the minutes as written was made by Commissioner Shordt and seconded by Commissioner Pekelis. The February 7, 2024, SEEC Commission Regular Meeting minutes were adopted by unanimous vote.

2. Adoption of CY2023 Financial Interest Statements Rule (SMC 4.16.080.B)

The Director explained that the rule is an annual list of names and positions of employees and board/commission members who are identified by their department to fill out a financial

interest statement for the previous year (2023). SEEC collects those names from each department and provides the list to the Commission.

Hearing no comments or questions from the Commissioners, the Chair asked for a motion to approve the proposed rule SMC 4.16.080.B. The motion was made by Commissioner Pekelis and seconded by Commissioner Shordt. The vote was unanimous to approve the SMC 4.16.080.B Financial Interest Statements rule for calendar year 2023.

(Due to a prior commitment, Commissioner Shordt left the meeting at 4:07 p.m.)

Discussion Items

3. Proposed Democracy Voucher Program Reforms

The next order of business was discussion of the proposed democracy voucher program reforms addressed in a February 5, 2024, letter to the Commission from community agencies and individuals of the People Powered Elections Washington coalition.

The Chair opened the floor to public testimony.

Individuals spoke on the coalition's list of reforms to Seattle's Democracy Voucher Program which include increase the Maximum Campaign Valuation for publicly financed candidates to keep elections competitive; reevaluate the qualifications metrics required for candidates to participate in the Program; soften the prohibition of voucher collection by paid staff; and add a "memo" line for users to communicate their affiliation or reason for donating to a particular candidate.

At the end of public comment, the Chair opened the floor to questions from the Commissioners. The Chair appreciated the content of the February 5 letter and all of the comments provided.

Commissioner Pekelis said it may be challenging as a Commission as some of the proposed revisions are clearly statutory and in the City Council's bailiwick. The Chair concurred that there is a lot in play here to parse or determine exactly what needs to be done with respect to each of these proposals. The Chair mentioned some reluctance to undertake substantial modifications to the Program when a new levy is approaching and the notion of being able to assess the program based on consistent administration over time.

4. Democracy Voucher Program report

Ms. LeBeau stated that everything is on target to mail out Democracy Vouchers on March 12. Program ads are approved and finalized for selected Metro RapidRide buses (a recommendation by community partners). The ads will be visible beginning in March and run for a month with another ad campaign appearing a few weeks later.

Ms. LeBeau reviewed the 2023 Democracy Voucher Program Biennial Report. Ms. LeBeau concluded by saying decisions the Commissioners made today and at the January 10 meeting were helpful in getting materials ready for the 2025 Election Cycle.

5. Executive Director's report

The next scheduled Regular Meeting is on April 3. The Director has heard from two Commissioners who expressed a conflict with the date. The Director will send out an email to poll the Commissioners' availability during April to reschedule. The Director noted he will be out of the office April 8-12.

The Director reviewed the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission 2023 Election Report. One item the Director drew attention to was contributors to Seattle campaigns have become far more Seattle-based than before. The percentage of contributors outside of Seattle was 27.9 percent in 2015 compared to 4.7 percent in 2023.

The Director has met with the Council President regarding the Council-appointed Commissioner opening. The Chair asked where possible external candidates might share their interest in the position. The Director suggested contacting the Council President's office directly at (206) 684-8809 or Sara.Nelson@seattle.gov.

At the completion of the Director's report, the Chair asked the Commissioners if there were any other matters to take up before adjourning. Hearing none, the Chair adjourned the March 6, 2024, SEEC Commission Regular Meeting at 5:32 p.m.