

## **Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission Regular Meeting**

**June 4, 2025**

The June 4, 2025, Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission (SEEC) Regular Meeting convened in Seattle Municipal Tower Conference Room 4096 and remotely. Vice-Chair Jonathan Schirmer was present. Chair Zach Pekelis and Commissioners Bobby Forch, Kristin Hawes, and Vivian Vassall participated via Webex. Commissioner Richard Shordt was absent. Executive Director Wayne Barnett and staff member Cliff Duggan were present. Staff Chrissy Courtney and Polly Grow participated via Webex as well as Assistant City Attorney Gary Smith.

The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:01 p.m.

### **Final Action Items**

#### **1. Democracy Voucher Program Modification – Ray Rogers/Council Position 8**

Mr. Ray Rogers, candidate for Seattle Council Position 8, submitted a request to the Commission for consideration regarding the final qualifying pledge that was submitted to the Democracy Voucher Program after the deadline had passed. Mr. Rogers' campaign manager, Mr. David Toledo, spoke on the candidate's behalf.

Mr. Toledo apologized that he and Mr. Rogers were unaware of the deadline [to apply to the Democracy Voucher Program]. Obtaining the 400 qualifying signatures was daunting to Mr. Rogers. However, during the week of May 13, Mr. Rogers was advised to apply for the Democracy Voucher Program.

Mr. Toledo said the campaign staff up until now has been just Bishop (Rogers) and himself. They did do the training and have been in communication with the Public Disclosure Commission and the Ethics and Elections Commission. The process has been so overwhelming

for them but their hearts were in the right place with no malice intended. Mr. Toledo believes the Democracy Voucher Program was created for people like Bishop Rogers, a community leader who is not a professional politician and does not have the staff to really go through all these sorts of things and know every single rule. It is Mr. Toledo's hope that because the campaign did start the process, did do the training, and all that was missing was one signature, the Commission will give them a little grace on this as they move forward. Mr. Toledo thanked the Commissioners for their time.

The Chair asked the Executive Direction for any information, context, or response on the issue. The Director understands Mr. Roger's concern. Unfortunately, there is no mechanism in the law for giving an exemption from the Program qualifying deadline. The Director said that the Commission denied a similar relief request from Jon Lisbin, a candidate for Council District 6, in June 2023.

The Chair referred to Seattle Municipal Code 4.06.630.B – [DVP] Candidate qualification. "...the candidate shall file with the Commission...within two weeks after filing a declaration of candidacy...." [The King County Elections candidacy declaration filing deadline was 5:00 p.m. on Friday, May 9, 2025.] The Chair found no allowance in the Code for any discretion by the Commission to provide relief from the stated deadline, even for good cause.

Commissioner Hawes agreed with the Chair and Executive Director that the analysis done for candidate Jon Lisbin, 2023 City Council District 6 candidate, applies to this situation. The Commissioner hoped that this would not discourage Mr. Rogers from participating potentially as a candidate in a future election. Commissioner Vassall agreed with the other Commissioners that there is no "good cause" exception written in the Municipal Code. The Commissioner suggested to have the deadline's time of day communicated to potential candidates in the future.

The Chair polled the Commissioners on a vote to grant or deny the modification request made by Mr. Rogers. Chair Pekelis, Vice-Chair Schirmer, and Commissioners Forch, Hawes, and Vassall voted to deny the request. Mr. Rogers' modification request was denied.

### **Public Comment Period**

The Chair opened the floor for Public Comment in regard to the May 7 SEEC Commission Regular Meeting draft minutes.

Dr. Howard Gale stated the issue with the meeting minutes concerned the listed item Public Comment Period. The item simply listed the public comment period but did not memorialize what was said or the fact there was an unusual number of people opposing the change in the ethics laws. Dr. Gale believes this is incredibly important because of the confusion over the issue by denying and excluding the public from the legislation. The Commission is leaving the public with no way to comment or participate until it is a done deal, which is exactly what happened in May. Dr. Gale requested some process whereby the public can partake in these discussions.

The Chair thanked Dr. Gale and agreed that it would be helpful to identify the names of those who offered public comment on May 7. The Chair requested staff to revise the May 7 draft minutes. To obtain more details about what Commissioners discussed or what members of the public discussed, the Chair advised that there is a permanent record of Commission meetings on the Seattle Channel [<https://seattlechannel.org/> under "City Department Videos"].

Valerie Schloredt commented that the change in the ethics legislation regarding council members recusing themselves is not dead, it is merely shelved for the moment. And, it is going to come back as the zombie legislation that Council is not going to let die. This is a very pertinent comment because in the situation that this legislation was introduced shows historic levels of

inequality in Seattle. It is hoped that the Commission will include the public in a broader discussion when the legislation comes up again.

Elizabeth Stanton had been respectful of what the Elections Commission does and how it managed the elections. However, she was startled and questioned what problem the Commission thought it was solving. Ms. Stanton noted that the public had turned out *en masse* to protest the legislation. There is so much corruption and interference in elections across the country that people really have to stand up for integrity and ethics and how things are done.

The Chair thanked everyone for their public comments.

## **2. Adoption of May 7, 2025, SEEC Regular Meeting minutes**

Adoption of the May 7, 2025, SEEC Regular Meeting minutes is deferred until the next Commission meeting.

### **Discussion Items**

#### **1. Democracy Voucher Program report**

The Director volunteered to answer any questions in Ms. LeBeau's absence regarding the Program report emailed to the Commissioners. The Director pointed out that currently 80 percent of all the candidates are in the Democracy Voucher Program, with 100 percent of the Mayor, City Attorney, and Council District 2 candidates participating.

#### **2. Executive Director's report**

Mr. Kai Smith, candidate for the City Council-selected Commissioner, may go before the Council Governance, Accountability & Economic Development Committee meeting June 12. It is the Director's hope that the Council President will also have their Commissioner nominee before the same meeting.

The Chair inquired about having the July 2 Commission meeting based on the current agenda. The Director will poll the Commissioners for availability if the July meeting is to be cancelled or rescheduled.

Hearing no further comments for the good of the order, the June 4, 2025, SEEC Commission Regular Meeting was adjourned at 5:02 p.m.

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