

Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission Regular Meeting

February 2, 2022

A regular meeting of the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission (SEEC) convened remotely. Commission Chair Richard Shordt called the meeting to order at 4:02 p.m. Vice Chair Hardeep Rekhi and Commissioners Kristin Hawes, Zachary Pekelis, Susan Taylor, and Jeff Winmill were present. Executive Director Wayne Barnett was present and joined by staff members Chrissy Courtney, Cliff Duggan, Randal Fu, Polly Grow, René LeBeau, and Neelam Shah, along with Assistant City Attorneys Gary Smith and Teresa Chen.

Action Items

1. Minutes for December 9, 2021, special meeting

The Chair moved to the first order of business, the minutes from the December 9, 2021, special meeting. The Chair asked Commissioners for any comments. Hearing none, the Chair made the motion to approve the minutes, and Commissioner Pekelis seconded the motion. The Commissioners voted unanimously to adopt the December 9, 2021, special meeting minutes.

2. Election of officers

The Chair announced he felt it appropriate to step away from the Chair position as his term expired December 31, 2021. The Chair expressed a desire to continue working on the Commission and is waiting to hear from the City Council on reappointment.

The Chair stated that Vice Chair Rekhi would be moving up to the Chair position leaving an opening for Vice Chair. The Vice Chair expressed his enthusiasm about serving as Chair.

The Chair made a motion to elect Vice Chair Rekhi as the Chair of the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission. Commissioner Taylor seconded the motion. The Commissioners voted unanimously for Chair Rekhi.

To address the Vice Chair vacancy, the new Chair will talk with the Commissioners and the Director in the next few weeks to determine an appropriate Vice Chair candidate. The candidate will be voted on at the next Commission meeting.

3. Commission appointment

The Chair announced that Commissioner Taylor would be stepping off the Commission as her term of service expired in December 2021. Commissioner Taylor said it had been a fantastic experience. The Chair thanked Commissioner Taylor for her work and everything she had brought to the Commission.

As this position is voted on by the six appointed Commissioners, the Chair asked the Director to outline the steps taken to select the seventh Commissioner. The Director will circulate a draft notice of the opening to all the Commissioners for review. Then the notice is circulated to the Northwest Ethics Network and the Washington State Minority Bar Associations. The Director asked the Commissioners to put the word out and forward any interested parties to the Director. After resumes are obtained, the Commission may interview 2-3 candidates during April open session.

After the selection has been made, the Director will forward the name to the City Council. The candidate would then have to be confirmed by the Council.

The Director reminded those present that Commissioners are allowed to serve past their term expiration until a replacement has been appointed or selected.

Discussion Items

4. Rule establishing contribution limits

The Chair requested the Director to give some background regarding the Commission's requirement to establish contribution limits. The Director explained that every two years the

Commission sets a new contribution limit taking into account inflation between 2015 and the end of last year. The adjusted actual limit for the 2023 Election Cycle is \$587.51 for the non-Democracy Voucher limit. It is proposed to round that figure up to \$600.00. The proposal is not an action at this meeting as it has to be posted for public comment. There will be a public hearing at the March 2 Commission meeting. The proposed rule will bring a balanced ratio of 2:1 for participating candidates (\$300) and non-candidates (\$600).

Commissioner Pekelis asked if the Commission's authority is limited to adjust for inflation alone and asked where the authority was for this. The Director responded that the Commission's authority is to adjust for inflation alone. Rounding up usually occurs in \$50 increments. The Director proposes rounding up to \$600 as "most convenient for public understanding." Authority comes from Seattle Municipal Code 2.04.370.H "Mandatory limitations on contributions to candidates".

Recalling the complexity of setting the contribution limit for the last election cycle, the Chair asked the Director to provide a memo or some guidance ahead the next meeting so Commissioners could think through it and have some coherent questions to raise if necessary.

5. Case No. 21-1-1923-2

The December 2, 2021, SEEC response regarding Case No. 21-1-0923-1 was presented for the record. The appeal period of 21 days passed with no appeals received. The Commission expressed appreciation for the Director's judgement and phrasing. The Director stated that over the years, it has been reiterated that the Commission is not a law maker but that it does enforce the law; it doesn't substitute its judgment for the City's judgment.

6. Democracy Voucher Program

Ms. LeBeau presented a brief overview of the Democracy Voucher Program. The internal Biennial Report for 2021, a summary of the administrative aspects of the Program, is being reviewed and will be shared later with the Commission.

Ms. LeBeau is in discussions with Human Resources to make the Management Systems Analyst position permanent. Ms. LeBeau reported that the budget program has requested \$100k to make improvements to the entire Program around people opting into Democracy Vouchers who are not registered voters.

The next project will be working with BERK Consulting on the 2021 Election Program Evaluation. The Chair thanked Ms. LeBeau for her work and acknowledged that the BERK report is a huge undertaking. The Chair inquired about the Commissioners providing thoughts, ideas, and input during the next meeting. Ms. LeBeau responded that she will prepare information regarding possible report topics to the Commission and share any preliminary work on the report. The Chair said it is important to give enough time as most of the Commissioners are relatively new and have not gone through this process.

7. Executive Director's report

The Director took a moment to say Annie Tran, Public Relations Specialist, left the City in January to work with the Port of Seattle as the Economic Development Program Manager. Annie had been with SEEC since the launch of the Democracy Voucher Program. A search is in place to find the next Public Relations Specialist.

The terms for Commissioners Shordt and Tobin expired December 31, 2021. The Director has forwarded their names to their respective appointing authorities to request renewal

of their terms (2022-2024). The Director is working to make sure that the staff and the Commission are both at full strength.

When asked about staff returning to the office, the Director stated it remains to be seen if employees return to the office in March or in April. The Chair noted that it has been two years since the Commission had a face-to-face meeting. The Director said it has not been an ideal meeting format but thanked the Commissioners for their participation.

The Chair thanked the Commissioners and staff for their time.

The regular Commission meeting of February 2, 2022, adjourned at 4:28 p.m.