

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

**July 12, 2022**

A special meeting of the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission (SEEC) convened in Seattle Municipal Tower Conference Room 4080 and remotely. Chair Hardeep Singh Rekhi called the meeting to order at 4:02 p.m. The Chair and Commissioner Richard Shordt were in attendance with Commissioners Kristin Hawes and Susan Taylor attending remotely.

Commissioners Chalia Stallings-Ala'ilima, Zach Pekelis, and Jeff Winmill were absent.

Executive Director Wayne Barnett was present and joined by staff members Fedden Amar, Cliff Duggan, Randal Fu, and René LeBeau. Staff member Polly Grow, and Assistant City Attorneys Teresa Chen and Gary Smith joined remotely.

The Chair welcomed the Commissioners and staff and moved to the first order of business.

### **Final Action Items**

#### **1. Minutes for June 1, 2022, Commission Regular meeting**

The Chair received a motion to approve the June 1 Regular meeting minutes by Commissioner Shordt; Commissioner Hawes seconded the motion. The June 1 Commission Regular meeting minutes were approved as written.

### **Discussion Items**

- 2. Proposed rule authorizing candidates' official campaign websites to host Democracy Voucher Campaign Replacement Forms**
- 3. Proposed rule regulating the collection of Democracy Voucher Campaign Replacement Forms**

The Director stated that the two proposed rules go hand-in-hand. He is happy to introduce the proposed rules to the Commissioners for review and any questions. One of the things heard

throughout the last election cycle was how corrosive paid voucher gatherers were to the process; they undercut the very purpose of the Voucher Program. One proposed rule will bar the use of paid staffers or consultants from collecting Democracy Program Replacement Vouchers during the 2023 election cycle.

The other proposed rule would allow campaigns to continue posting the Democracy Program Replacement Voucher Form on their websites. This worked fine during the pandemic. King County Elections (KCE) does quite well with validating the signatures and is looking into using the same process for other signature gathering efforts. To explain the process, René LeBeau elaborated that the form is a pdf provided by SEEC which a candidate loads onto their website. The voucher user can access the form, type in the name of their candidate and then draw their signature (to match the KCE signature on file). The campaign gathers the forms, sends them to the SEEC to process. They are then forwarded to KCE for signature verification.

Commission Shordt wondered if there were still concerns with having the candidate's name being pre-filled on the form versus the voter filling in the candidate's name. Ms. LeBeau responded that the office has not heard any complaints regarding this issue.

In summary, the Director said one rule is about barring paid people from collecting voucher replacement forms and the other rule would allow replacement forms to be put on campaign websites. The Chair questioned if the proposed voucher collection rule would bar regular campaign-paid staff.

Assistant City Attorney Chen responded that the rule does bar paid staff people from gathering contributions (including Democracy Vouchers); the act of collecting contributions is subject to the City's position against bundling.

Commissioner Taylor asked if paid staff could collect vouchers on their own time as volunteers. The Commissioner voiced concern that it would be hard to put into process and track it.

Commissioner Hawes commented that she is glad to see the regulated gathering rule as she had questioned how the Democracy Voucher Program resources might be used by campaigns to fund voucher gatherers. Commissioner Shordt asked how the individual campaign staff are treated in collecting electronic signatures under this rule. The Director stated that the staff would be processing the vouchers; and Assistant City Attorney Chen said the rule bars in-person collection. The Director further explained the difference between collecting a replacement voucher (a deliberate transaction) versus a paid gatherer standing at a bus stop and encouraging people to quickly sign over their vouchers.

Commissioner Taylor mentioned that there were originally questions about possible fraud with replacement vouchers. The Commissioner assumes that with the recommendations presented now that it has not been a problem. The Commissioner was also curious if the staff had experienced the previously discussed issue of confusion by people providing replacement vouchers. The Director said that they have not seen anything in the way of fraud. During the last election cycle, there was some confusion when people went to use their vouchers only to find out that they had already been assigned. This was due in part to aggressive pushing by paid form gatherers. The proposed collection rule should help in this respect. If this turns out not to be the case, the Director said the issue will be addressed again before the next election cycle.

#### **4. Democracy Voucher Program Report**

René LeBeau, Program Director, stated that the process for 2023 candidates to qualify for the Democracy Voucher Program began on July 1. No candidates have applied yet. Updated training has been posted on the website.

The Democracy Voucher Program Outreach Fund RFP went out July 11. Proposals are due by September 16. Of the \$225,000 budgeted, \$150,000 is dedicated to organizations focusing on lawful permanent resident enrollment and education. Staff is working with the Department of Neighborhoods Community Outreach and Engagement liaisons to increase community awareness of the RFP.

## **5. Executive Director's Report**

Director Barnett reminded the Commission that he will be attending the **2022 Public Finance Administrator's Gathering** in Albuquerque July 14-16. The Director hopes to gather information from the various states, counties, and cities participating in the program as well as share what has been happening in Seattle.

From July 18-23, the Director will travel to Berlin for a **Cities Fortifying Democracy Forum** hosted by the German Marshall Fund of the U.S. The Cities Fortifying Democracy project is a transatlantic multi-city cohort to explore and advance city efforts to strengthen democracy.

The Director shared that the Oakland City Council passed a measure earlier in the day to have a "democracy dollars" program measure on their November 8 ballot.

Historically, the Commission has taken off either the July or the August meeting during the summer. After further Commission discussion, the Chair cancelled the August 3 Regular meeting. The Chair stated that if there are any issues that come up in the meantime, the Commission will address them.

The Chair wished Director Barnett safe travels and thanked everyone for joining the meeting. There being no further business, the Chair adjourned the SEEC Commission Special meeting of July 12, 2022, at 4:25 p.m.