

Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission Regular Meeting

September 7, 2022

A Regular 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 4:05 p.m. The Chair and Commissioner Susan Taylor were in attendance with Vice Chair Pekelis, and Commissioners Kristin Hawes, Richard Shordt, and Chalia Stallings-Ala'ilima attending remotely. Executive Director Wayne Barnett was present and joined by staff members Fedden Amar, Cliff Duggan, Randal Fu, Polly Grow, and René LeBeau. 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 July 12, 2022, Commission Special meeting

The Chair received a motion to approve the July 12 Special meeting minutes by Commissioner Taylor; Commissioner Hawes seconded the motion. The July 12 Commission Special meeting minutes were unanimously approved.

2. Expiration of Executive Director's term

The Chair stated that the Commission would be going into an Executive Session at 4:08 p.m. to discuss the performance of a public employee. The Chair called the Regular meeting back to order at 4:20 p.m. to consider the expiration of the Executive Director's current term. Commissioner Taylor made a motion to reappoint Wayne Barnett as the Executive Director of the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission for the next six years. The Chair seconded the motion.

The vote was unanimous to reappoint Wayne Barnett to serve for a term ending September 1, 2028. The Director expressed his gratitude to the Commission.

Discussion Items

3. Proposed Last-Minute Contributions Threshold Rule

Polly Grow, Campaign Finance Law, Education and Compliance Advisor, stated that this is primarily an issue where the Washington State Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) has adjusted their dollar threshold for reporting last-minute campaign contributions. The SEEC proposed rule amendment matches the PDC's threshold in order to minimize confusion. This will not have a significant impact on SEEC filers; the change will impact political committees, not candidate committees. In 2021, approximately 11 percent of the campaigns would report within a week rather than by the next business day.

Ms. Grow explained that during the final 21 days before the election, committees that contribute \$1,000 or more to a campaign must report the contribution by 4:30 p.m. the next day. At the State level, the new reporting threshold for candidates is now up to \$1,500. The SEEC maximum contribution limit for City candidates is \$600. Ms. Grow noted that a layer of confusion regarding thresholds may exist as City candidates who file with the State file with the SEEC as well.

The Director informed the Commission that this presentation was for discussion purposes. The Commission will vote on the proposed rule amendment as well as the two proposed Democracy Voucher Replacement Forms rules at the next SEEC Commission meeting.

4. Democracy Voucher Program report

René LeBeau, Program Director, discussed the "*Broadening Donor Participation in Local Elections: Results from the Seattle Democracy Voucher Program in 2021*" report by Jennifer Heerwig of Stony Brook University, and Brian McCabe of Georgetown University. The authors

have been following the Democracy Voucher Program since 2017. The report provides a more in-depth look at the people using Vouchers.

Ms. LeBeau highlighted two items in the report. In 2021, almost 50,000 people in Seattle used Democracy Vouchers. Over the course of the last three election cycles, 84,000 unique people used Vouchers. Most users have been older white residents. However, the program continues to see increased participation from people of color, lower-income, and younger Seattle residents.

Commissioner Stallings-Ala'ilima asked if the SEEC had contracted or partnered with the authors of the report. Ms. LeBeau responded that the authors contacted the SEEC. SEEC does not pay them or contract with them. We have asked them some questions such as who the users are and the program's impact on elections and civic engagement.

Commissioner Hawes inquired about the repeat Voucher use and the adoption trend of the program. The Commissioner wondered if there was any ability to track if a someone had used Vouchers early on and if they used them in another election cycle; i.e., if Voucher usage is becoming a consistent acquired behavior for some.

Ms. LeBeau said that very few people have used Vouchers in each of the three election cycles. The report shows approximately 5 percent of participants used Vouchers in all three cycles; in the future, we hope to see more participation.

Ms. LeBeau provided an update on the Democracy Voucher Outreach Fund RFP. Proposals are due on September 16. Interested people have been invited to information sessions to learn about the proposal and to ask questions. With the work of Department of Neighborhoods Community Liaisons, outreach has gone out to over a hundred people. SEEC funded a very small project for the Liaisons to canvas five different areas to reach under-represented citizens. RFP award notifications will be posted in October.

Ms. LeBeau concluded by acknowledging the outreach work done by Fedden Amar, Senior Public Relations Specialist, at community events helping to get the work out about the Program and sharing what is coming next year.

5. Executive Director's Report

The Director stated that Commissioner Jeff Winmill (appointed by City Council) has resigned from the Commission to accept a position with Seattle City Light as a Regulatory Affairs Advisor. The Director mentioned it has been difficult trying to recruit candidates for consideration. SEEC was fortunate enough to have welcomed Commissioner Stallings-Ala'ilima in May. The Director requested Commissioners to continue reaching out to their networks. When new Commissioners are appointed, SEEC will conduct an onboarding session which will include Commissioner Stallings-Ala'ilima as well as newer Commissioners. One goal is to increase Democracy Voucher Program familiarity as the program was introduced to the Commissioners at its start.

The Director took a moment to announce that City Assistant Attorney Teresa Chen will be leaving mid-September and returning to California. The Director expressed that SEEC has enjoyed having Ms. Chen as their attorney and thanked Ms. Chen for her work.

Director Barnett spoke on his July trips to Albuquerque and Berlin. The 2022 Public Finance Administrator's Gathering in Albuquerque included public financing program administrators from around the country. The main item of note was the Democracy Voucher Program. Participants in the Cities Fortifying Democracy Forum in Berlin included mayors, city managers, journalists, police chiefs, local activists, and others representing ten cities in Europe and the United States. Each talked about ways to strengthen democracy, what cities can do, and Democracy Vouchers.

As a result of the Berlin meeting, the Director was asked to join the Local Policy Lab's inaugural Democracy Cohort. The Cohort will support concrete policies and actions that spur healthier and more equitable democracies in U.S. cities.

The Chair asked if there were any additional items for the good of the order. Upon hearing none, the Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting and is looking forward to seeing them at the October meeting. The Chair adjourned the September 7, 2022, SEEC Commission Regular meeting at 4:43 p.m.