

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

**April 11, 2024**

The April 11, 2024, Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission (SEEC) Special Meeting convened in Seattle Municipal Tower Conference Room 4096 and remotely. Chair Kristin Hawes and Vice Chair Susan Taylor were present. Commissioners Zach Pekelis, Hardeep Singh Rekhi, Richard Shordt, and Chalia Stallings-Ala'ilima participated via Webex. Commissioner David Perez was absent. Staff members Fedden Amar, Cliff Duggan, and Randal Fu were present. Executive Director Wayne Barnett, Chrissy Courtney, Polly Grow, and René LeBeau participated via Webex as well as Assistant City Attorneys Joe Levan and Gary Smith.

The Chair called the meeting to order at 3:33 p.m.

### **Discussion of Written Public Comment**

No written public comment was received as of April 10, 2024.

### **Final Action Items**

#### **1. Adoption of March 6, 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 Vice Chair Taylor and seconded by Commissioner Pekelis. The March 6, 2024, SEEC Commission Regular Meeting minutes were adopted by unanimous vote.

The Chair proposed to call an Executive Session and table Items 2 and 3 until after the Executive Session concluded. The Session's two topics would be the performance of a public employee and to have a discussion with legal counsel representing the Commission litigation or potential litigation related to a proposed action or current practice. The Executive Session began

at 3:42 p.m. and concluded at 4:19 p.m. The Commissioners and legal counsel returned to the public meeting.

## **2. Democracy Voucher Program Recommended Changes**

The Chair noted that Commissioner Rekhi had joined for the Executive Session and the remainder of the meeting.

The Chair reported the Commission had an opportunity to review many of the Democracy Voucher Program recommended changes received on February 7 and discussed at the March 6 SEEC meeting. The Chair revisited some of the recommendations and the Commission's findings.

### **Reevaluate the qualification metrics required for candidates to participate in the Program.**

The Commission determined that revising the SEEC Rules in this way is not within the Commission's authority. This is an amendment or modification that would require City Council legislation.

### **Provide early funding to qualified, participating candidates.**

After review and research, the Commission determined that this would be an amendment or modification of the Program that would be beyond the SEEC's authority. It would also require legislation by the Council. The Commission Staff are working to address the request that funds be released sooner to eligible candidates. In the previous meeting, Ms. LeBeau had indicated myriad ways in which Staff are working to ensure that dollars are released promptly.

**Soften the prohibition of voucher collection by paid staff.**

The request is to amend SEEC Rule 16.J around paid collection of Democracy Voucher replacement forms to address some community concerns. This is an issue the Commission acted on in 2022. The current Commission would like to consult further with SEEC Staff on this point prior to consideration of any potential Rule change.

**Add a "memo" line for users to communicate their affiliation or reason for donating to a particular candidate**

After discussion, the Commission decided this would create a burden upon SEEC Staff with respect to communicating the information that might be provided on a voucher. There is no mechanism to do that at this point. In addition, it would benefit a candidate by virtue of employing or utilizing City resources to communicate this information, which is not permitted under SMC 2.04.300. It is suggested that this issue be addressed by the candidate's website.

**3. Annual Wage Adjustment (AWI) Pay Program**

The Commission discussed in Executive Session an annual wage adjustment for the Executive Director. The Chair made a motion that the Executive Director receive an annual wage adjustment consistent with recent legislative adjustments granted to represented and non-represented employees for 2023 and for 2024. Commissioner Shordt seconded the motion. Hearing no objections or abstentions, the Commission passed the motion.

**Discussion Items**

**4. Financial Interest Statements update**

Mr. Duggan reported the current total of City employees required to file Financial Interest Statements was 1,988. As of noon April 11, 1,639 employees (85.4 percent) have responded. The remaining 340 employees have until the April 15 filing deadline. Of the 14 identified boards and

commissions, only one has reached 100 percent submission. For those who do not respond by April 15, the Director will email the individuals and copy their director.

#### **5. Democracy Voucher Program report**

Ms. LeBeau reported that in the last few weeks, four candidates have signed up to use Democracy Vouchers. Approximately 7,500 vouchers have been received. Most came in by paper with approximately 25 percent online. Mailing out Vouchers on the heels of the Presidential Primary created some interesting questions from the public, i.e., Where do I get my pamphlet? Where can I get information about candidates? What political party is the candidate affiliated with? SEEC Staff are strongly encouraging candidates to submit their introductions to the office.

The Chair asked if there was a sense from the unique or unusual public questions whether people had previously engaged with Democracy Vouchers or if they were new to the program. Ms. LeBeau said they were most likely new as they were asking broad questions similar to larger level state races.

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

The Director shared that the Chair's reappointment will be on the Governance, Accountability, and Economic Development Committee's April 25 meeting agenda. The Director continues to work with the Council President to provide a replacement candidate for Commissioner Rekhi's position.

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 April 11, 2024, SEEC Commission Special Meeting at 4:45 p.m.