

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

**May 1, 2024**

The May 1, 2024, Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission (SEEC) Regular Meeting convened in Seattle Municipal Tower Conference Room 4080 and remotely. Vice Chair Susan Taylor was present. Chair Hawes and Commissioners David Perez, Richard Shordt, and Chalia Stallings-Ala'ilima participated via Webex. Commissioners Zach Pekelis and Hardeep Singh Rekhi were absent. Executive Director Wayne Barnett and staff members Fedden Amar, Cliff Duggan, Randal Fu, and Renée LeBeau were present. Staff Chrissy Courtney and Polly Grow participated via Webex as well as Assistant City Attorneys Joe Levan and Gary Smith.

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

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

No written public comment was received as of April 30, 2024.

### **Final Action Items**

#### **1. Adoption of April 11, 2024, Commission Special 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 Perez. The April 11, 2024, SEEC Commission Special Meeting minutes were adopted by unanimous vote.

### **Discussion Items**

#### **1. Input regarding limits on replacement voucher collection**

The Chair reported this discussion item was a carryover from the April 11 meeting where input was received from several community groups with respect to the impact and requests for

potential changes to the limits on replacement voucher collection. The Chair asked Ms. LeBeau to provide specific comments and input to the Commission.

Ms. LeBeau offered her thoughts to provide a broader context to what had previously been presented to the Commission. After each election cycle of the Primary and General, SEEC staff meet with candidates and campaign staff. They are invited to provide feedback on their Voucher Program experience and if they have any suggestions for improvement. For Election Cycle 2023, two changes occurred in terms of collecting campaign replacement forms. One was to allow candidates to permanently post the replacement form on their campaign website.

The second change was regarding the restriction of paying people to collect campaign replacement forms. The feedback was that it was challenging for candidates. There was 100 percent understanding across the board as to why the restriction was put in place. Ahead of each election cycle, the staff strongly recommends that new candidates attend training. People in the community are also alerted that staff is open for updated and refresher trainings.

The 2023 Election Cycle was a smaller-scale experience than will occur in 2025. In the previous election, it was easier to canvass an individual district neighborhood. The true impact of the restriction will be in the 2025 City-wide races for Mayor, City Attorney, and the two at-large Council positions. We expect nearly twice the amount of activity.

Ms. LeBeau addressed the impact on residents. People might have received vouchers in February's mail but do not have someone knocking on their door until June or July. SEEC created the replacement form almost immediately after the very first launch in February 2017. It was known that the campaign replacement form was needed to have some ability to connect people with their candidates. If in-person collection in a city of 600,000+ people is restricted to only the candidate, staff, and non-paid volunteers, it may be more of a challenge to the 2025

campaigns. Volunteers are valuable but may go out for only one Saturday of canvassing. When a candidate or their campaign manager knocks on the door, they are able to articulate their points and manage the collection of forms.

The Chair asked if there was an awareness of what percentage of vouchers are turned in as campaign replacement forms. Ms. LeBeau responded that it is potentially 30 percent. Campaign replacement forms tend to spike during time periods right before the Primary and the General Elections, and if there is a need to quickly raise funds.

The Chair asked Ms. LeBeau how the revised rule was explained during the current training. Ms. LeBeau said that the campaigns are aware the rule was revised due to events that occurred during the previous election cycle. The Chair stated that in 2021, third-party people were being employed exclusively to collect replacement vouchers for some candidates. Some collectors were doing so in ways that seemed disingenuous or otherwise problematic.

Ms. LeBeau said people believe the program is important, and the events of 2021 are well known in the community. Campaigns are wondering how the rule could be softened so there can be more people collecting a candidate's replacement forms.

Commissioner Shordt commented that he had voted to change the collection rule in 2022 to protect the Program and ensure that campaigns were adhering to the spirit of the law. However, the Commissioner said if there is enough current feedback and concern from candidates, the Commission should be comfortable in adapting the rule again especially going into the 2025 election cycle.

Commissioner Shordt would also like to see language that requires a certain attestation from the campaigns that the person collecting voucher replacement forms has not been hired

solely to voucher harvest. In addition, also some additional requirements or language with respect to having a certain number of paid staff participating in the voucher collection.

The Chair asked if Ms. LeBeau had a sense of how many staff the campaigns were looking for to collect replacement vouchers. Ms. LeBeau said it would be reasonable to look at the 2025 election cycle and propose two campaign staff. Ms. LeBeau suggested SEEC staff work with consultants and fundraisers familiar with the program to discuss some ground rules and see if two representatives would be sufficient given campaigns are also allowed to post the replacement form on their website.

The Chair said feedback and establishing parameters would be helpful if the Commissioners will be looking to revise the rule. The Chair requested Ms. LeBeau and SEEC staff to provide feedback and input to the Commissioners before the June 5 Regular Meeting.

## **2. Democracy Voucher Program report**

Ms. LeBeau reported there are currently four candidates for 2024 City Council Position No. 8. All four have signed up for the Democracy Voucher Program but have yet to qualify. Approximately 10,000 vouchers have been returned and processed. The majority have been paper vouchers with approximately 30 percent filed online.

Work continues with providing material to the Community-Based Organizations and setting up outreach events such as the Beacon Hill Arts Festival and participating in Literary Source's Democracy Voucher Student Leaders Workshop. A media bus campaign begins May 6.

King County Elections Candidate Filing Week is May 6-10. On May 14, the Primary candidate slate will be finalized. Candidates have until May 24 to enroll in the Democracy Voucher Program.

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

The Director shared that the annual Financial Interest Statement process was completed. Just under 2,000 employee forms were received for 100 percent submission two-and-a-half weeks earlier than last year.

The Director informed the Commissioners that the Chair's Commission term reappointment passed the Governance Committee. The City Council is expected to confirm the reappointment on May 7.

At the completion of the Director's report, the Chair thanked everyone for their time. The May 1 SEEC Commission Regular Meeting was adjourned at 4:29 p.m.

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