

Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission Special Meeting

July 31, 2024

The July 31, 2024, Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission (SEEC) Special Meeting convened in Seattle Municipal Tower Conference Room 4080 and remotely. Chair Kristin Hawes and Commissioners Jonathan Schirmer and Richard Shordt were present. Vice-Chair Susan Taylor and Commissioners Bobby Forch and Chalia Stallings-Ala'ilima participated via Webex. Commissioner Zach Pekelis was absent. Executive Director Wayne Barnett and staff members Fedden Amar, Cliff Duggan, Randal Fu, Polly Grow, and Renée LeBeau were present. Staff Chrissy Courtney participated via Webex as well as Assistant City Attorney Gary Smith.

The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

Introduction of New SEEC Commissioners

The Chair announced Commissioners Hardeep Singh Rekhi and David Perez had rotated off the Commission and thanked them for their service. The Chair welcomed new Commissioners Bobby Forch and Jonathan Schirmer.

Discussion of Written Public Comment

A letter from community leaders, organizations, and members of the People Powered Election Washington coalition to the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission dated June 4, 2024, was distributed to Commissioners on June 4.

Final Action Items

1. Adoption of June 5, 2024, Commission Regular Meeting minutes

Hearing no comments, questions, or revisions regarding the previous minutes, the Chair requested a motion to approve. Commissioner Shordt made the motion and the Chair seconded. The vote was unanimous to approve the June 5, 2024, SEEC Commission Meeting minutes.

2. Approval of Revised Elections Code Rule 16.J regulating the collection of Replacement Forms

The Chair noted that Vice-Chair Taylor and Commissioner Stallings-Ala'ilima had joined the meeting.

By way of background, the revised Elections Code Rule was a request that the Commission staff decided to put forward based on input of various groups and campaigns. After considerable public testimony and input from community members, the Commission determined it was appropriate to revise Elections Code Rule 16.J to allow some members of a campaign staff to be paid to collect Democracy Vouchers as part of their campaign employment.

The Chair asked for any comments or questions. Commissioner Schirmer asked about the required training to be provided. Ms. LeBeau said she and Ms. Grow will have face-to-face virtual or in-person sessions to walk campaigns through Elections Code Rule 16 (Democracy Voucher Program) in its entirety. Any questions and observations that come up during these sessions will be built into training for the 2025 Election Cycle.

Commissioner Shordt thanked the Director, Staff, and Assistant City Attorney Smith for their work on the revision considering the views of consultants and candidates to participate by updating the Rule to protect the spirit of the program.

The Chair requested a motion to approve revised Rule 16.J. Commissioner Shordt made the motion and Vice-Chair Taylor seconded. The vote was unanimous with six votes to approve revised Elections Code Rule 16.J regulating the collection of Voucher Replacement Forms.

Discussion Items

1. Democracy Voucher Program report

a. Democracy Voucher Program Update

Three of the four DVP candidates for City Council Position 8 have qualified; one has reached their Primary Maximum Campaign Valuation of \$225,000. A total of 19,264 returned vouchers represents 9,778 Seattle residents. Four outreach events were noted for July.

b. Democracy Voucher Outreach Fund

Ms. LeBeau discussed a recommendation from outreach advocates and an external program evaluation to increase the Democracy Voucher Outreach Fund. In 2025, City-wide races will include Mayor, City Attorney, and the two at-large Council positions. The original 2018 Outreach Fund was \$150,000 and then increased to \$225,000 in 2020.

The inflation rate from January 2020 to July 2024 was approximately 22 percent. The adjusted budget equals \$275,000. By increasing the budget to \$300,000, ten contracts could be provided allowing additional efforts to build institutional knowledge in the community and provide outreach. A request for RFPs will be posted within two weeks of this meeting.

Commissioner Forch asked how the program determines what events to participate in. The Director said that efforts were concentrated to areas where people had not previously used their vouchers. The goal is to get to the point where everybody feels they have an opportunity to participate. The Director welcomes feedback from Commissioners on any events they would like

to propose to Staff. None of the Commissioners objected to increasing the dollars awarded to CBOs to \$300,000 for 2025, with Commissioner Shordt noting it would be a big election year.

c. Democracy Voucher Program Budget Forecast

Ms. LeBeau shared with the Commission a budget forecast of DVP administrative costs and 10-year program budget forecasts for Fund Summaries with a \$4.5M renewal, a \$4.0M renewal, a \$3.0M renewal, and with no renewal. In addition to yearly administrative cost increases, the forecasts were adjusted for growth and inflation.

Ms. LeBeau noted that a \$4.0M or \$4.5M renewal would cover program costs at least through 2033. With a \$3M renewal, the program will get through one healthy election cycle but may be in trouble as soon as 2029. With no renewal, the program could go through 2025 with enough funds to pay only administrative costs in 2026.

When asked what role, if any, the Commission can play with respect to a program renewal, the Director mentioned making a recommendation to the City Council whether or not to redo the levy. Once the City decides to put it, or doesn't put it, on the ballot, the Commission's role ends. The Chair requested the consideration of a recommendation with respect to the Levy Renewal be set as a recurring discussion item.

2. Executive Director's report

a. September 4 Regular Meeting

The Director inquired about rescheduling the September 4 Commission Regular Meeting due to the Labor Day Holiday and various school openings. The Director will canvas the Commissioners for their availability.

At the completion of the Director's report, the Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting and looks forward to working with Commissioners Forch and Schirmer. The July 31, 2024, SEEC Commission Special Meeting was adjourned at 4:43 p.m.

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