

Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission Regular Meeting

October 7, 2020

A regular meeting of the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission (SEEC) convened remotely. Commission Chair Nick Brown called the meeting to order at 4:03 p.m. Vice Chair Richard Shordt, and Commissioners Bruce Carter, Susan Taylor, and Judy Tobin were present online. Commissioner Brendan Donckers was present by phone call, but unable to participate due to technical difficulties. Commissioner Hardeep Singh Rekhi was absent. Executive Director Wayne Barnett was joined by Assistant City Attorneys Gary Smith and Teresa Chen, along with staff members Chrissy Courtney, Bob DeWeese, Polly Grow, René LeBeau, Neelam Shah and Annie Tran.

Action Items

1) Minutes for September 9, 2020 special meeting

The Chair began the meeting with the first action item regarding the meeting minutes from the September 9th special meeting. Commissioner Carter moved to approve the minutes, the motion was seconded by the Vice Chair and passed unanimously.

2) Confirmation of new staff member

The Director presented Neelam Shah, the new application developer, who has a master's degree in Computer Science from the National University of Computer and Emerging Sciences in Karachi, Pakistan and was recently with the Office of Information Technology Services with the State of New York. The Director noted that the office was very happy to have the services of Ms. Shah, since Bob DeWeese has been the sole developer for the office during the last nine months because of the budget cuts required by Covid-19 and the hiring freeze. The Director stated that as the enabling ordinance that governs the commission requires the commission's

confirmation of all hires, he hoped that the commission would confirm Ms. Shah's hiring as routine. The Chair thanked the Director and said he was excited that Ms. Shah was joining the commission and asked if she had any questions for the Director or the commissioners and Ms. Shah said no questions, and mentioned that she had spoken with the Director previously. Commissioner Carter said she would be a very positive addition to staff. The Vice Chair moved to approve the hiring of Neelam Shah, and Commissioner Taylor seconded the motion. The motion was approved unanimously. The Vice Chair thanked the Director for continuing to staff during the pandemic and making great staffing choices.

3) Rule 16 amendments

The Chair asked the Director to introduce this topic. The Director said this was the culmination of an effort which began a few months ago to look at Rule 16 to try to improve the rules around the release process, as well as the spending limits, and cleaning up references, which was discussed at the last meeting, but which was in process before the last meeting. There is also one small amendment the Director wanted to propose in section F, where there was an incorrect reference to SMC 2.04.658.E instead of to SMC 2.04.630.D, but with that change, the rules should be accurate, and the Director encouraged the commission to adopt the amendments. Commissioner Tobin noted the completeness of the rule changes was good and made a motion to approve the adoption of the Rule 16 changes, which was seconded by Commissioner Carter. The Chair asked if there were any further questions or amendments, there were none, and the motion passed unanimously with the modification to the reference clarified by the Director.

4) Rule setting maximum campaign valuations

The Chair moved to the next item and asked the Director to provide the specifics. The Director said that the maximum campaign valuations (MCV) rule reflects the 25% increases in

the contribution limits. There was a scrivener's error where the city attorney position to match the at large city council position, was not included in the originally drafted rule. There was a public comment recommending that we raise the limits by 33% which would provide numbers that would be easier for the public to digest. The Director said that he would encourage mindfulness about the fact that there are limited dollars, and he was uncertain there was sufficient evidence to support an additional outlay.

The Vice Chair asked if the commission would be permitted to raise the limit for city attorney if the rule had not been put out for public notice. The Director answered yes, a different amount could be adopted than was published. Assistant Attorney Smith said that the substance of the rule change was provided and so the commission had adequately provided notice.

The Chair said that the changes to reflect the rounder number made sense to him in some ways, but he didn't know that there would be confusion with numbers that are not as round, and he did believe in the substantive discussion from the previous meeting. The Vice Chair said that he didn't think the MCV needed to be raised by 33% because there are real dollars and the conversation that was had about keeping it at 25% made the most sense to him. Commissioner Taylor concurred, and Commissioner Tobin said that whatever was the most useful would be good. Commissioner Carter said he agreed and thought the commission should go ahead with their original proposal. The Chair said he agreed, the 25% increase made sense, but said that the commission should be mindful if that creates a challenge to the campaigns.

The Chair asked if there were any public comments. Abbot Taylor was in attendance and said he had no comment. The Chair said he appreciated Mr. Taylor's continued participation and asked if there were any further comments, and there were none. The Chair moved to approve the

25% increase for the MCV for the nine city council seats and the city attorney's race. The motion was seconded by Commissioner Carter and passed unanimously.

Discussion Items

5) Late-filing penalty – Tax Amazon committee (\$2, 500)

The Director stated that this late-filing penalty was for the Tax Amazon committee, since they did not do a good job fulfilling their obligations to timely disclose all of their contributions and expenditures. The Director continued that given the history of the campaign, there was a \$2,500 filing penalty levied, which was paid, and there was no appeal.

Commissioner Tobin asked what exactly this meant. The Director answered that this was a ballot measure proposed by Councilmember Sawant, and the committee did not timely report. The Chair clarified for Commissioner Tobin that there was no action for the commission in this case since there was no appeal.

6) Democracy Voucher Program report

René LeBeau, the Democracy Voucher Program Manager, gave an update on the program. Ms. LeBeau stated that the program was on track in preparation for the 2021 election cycle, artwork updates are with vendor for the February mailing, they have completed reviewing the proposals for the community organization outreach fund, and notifications will go out to applicants by the end of the week. The program received 16 very competitive applications.

Commissioner Tobin asked if there was one winner. Ms. LeBeau answered that there were awards made to multiple organizations, up to the full amount available, which was a maximum of 30,000 dollars for each proposal. Commissioner Tobin asked if the commissioners would be told the awardees, and Ms. LeBeau said absolutely. Commissioner Tobin asked what

kind of organizations and were they grassroots organizations. Ms. LeBeau answered that they were a variety of community based organizations, focused on Seattle residents.

Commissioner Carter asked whether they were expanding engagement in the program, particularly among lower income groups and people of color, and whether there were any numbers that would support that expansion, perhaps with census data. Ms. LeBeau said that there are some demographics available with the BERK report, but generally demographics are limited from that report. The academics who really do the deeper dive into the data have more demographic information. The sheer increase in the number of contributors and seeing that contributors come from all different parts of the city and looking at the current usage it is on the right track. The Chair asked what the next big ticket items would be in the next six months.

Ms. LeBeau answered that they would be getting info to the vendor, getting the portal updated, and going live. Notifying proposal winners and setting up onboarding are the next most important items, and then other background administrative activities. The Chair asked if there were any further questions for Ms. LeBeau. Commissioner Taylor asked if any of the applicants for the grant money focused particularly on youth. Ms. LeBeau answered yes, there were applications targeting youth participation. Commissioner Taylor said she remembered that was one of the areas lagging behind in the BERK report, so it would be good to have some snappy campaign that would appeal to the youth. The Chair thanked Ms. LeBeau for her good work.

7) Executive Director's report

The Director's report began with the notice that the Video Voters Guide will go live next Monday and will include proponents and opponents of the Seattle Transit Benefit District ballot measure, county ballot measures, and the county judicial races. The guide will be televised on the Seattle Channel and available electronically to be linked to other websites. The Director gave

a big thanks to Polly Grow for continuing that work in possibly the strangest year for the production of the voter guide.

The November commission meeting is currently scheduled for the day after election day, so the Director wanted to ask the commission if they would like to continue with that meeting day. The following Wednesday is a holiday, Veterans' Day, but the commission could choose some alternative date. The Chair said he thought moving it might be useful, given that there are no urgent matters for hearing, but wanted to open that to discussion. Commissioner Tobin said she thought it depended on how the election turned out. The Chair said he didn't think we would know by election day itself, and Commissioner Tobin agreed, but keeping to the routine was helpful. Commissioner Taylor said she could go either way. The Chair said that they would anticipate keeping the currently proposed meeting date, unless things changed. The Chair thanked everyone for continuing their good work, especially remotely, and concluded the meeting.

The Special Commission meeting of October 7, 2020 adjourned at 4:38 p.m.