

**Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission Regular Meeting
September 2, 2026**

The September 2, 2026, Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission (SEEC) Regular Meeting convened in Seattle Municipal Tower Conference Room 4080 and remotely. Commissioner Evan Smith was present. Chair Jonathan Schirmer [Chair], Vice-Chair Vivian Vassall [Vice-Chair] and Commissioners Bobby Forch, Andrea Lino and Kai Smith participated via Webex. Commissioner Anita Khandelwal was absent. Six Commissioners present constituted a quorum. Executive Director Wayne Barnett [Director] and staff members Fedden Amar, Cliff Duggan, René LeBeau, and Diane Panagiotopoulos were present as well as Assistant City Attorney Aaron Valla. Assistant City Attorney Gary Smith and staff members Chrissy Courtney, Amanda Francke, Polly Grow, and Jennifer Martinez participated via Webex.

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

Call to Order

Discussion of Written Public Comment (if applicable)

Final Action Items

1. Confirmation of New Staff Member

The Director provided background on new staff member Diane Panagiotopoulos. Ms. Panagiotopoulos is the IT Professional replacing Bob DeWeese who recently retired. Under the enabling ordinance [SMC 3.70.100.G], staff appointed by the Executive Director needs to be confirmed by the Commission.

The Chair stated for the record that Vice-Chair Vassall and Commissioner Forch had joined the meeting.

The Vice-Chair made the motion to confirm Diane Panagiotopoulos as a staff member, and it was duly seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

2. Adoption of May 6, 2026, SEEC Regular Meeting minutes

Commissioner Evan Smith noted on Page 4 a minor typo in the second paragraph and also recommended deleting the break between paragraphs 3 and 4 which inadvertently implied the Commission was taking a stand on what is rational basis versus a continuation of what Paul Chapman was stating.

Hearing no other comments, the Chair called for a motion. Commissioner Evan Smith made the motion to adopt the May 6, 2026 meeting minutes as amended. It was duly seconded. The motion passed with five ayes; the Chair abstained as he was not present for the May meeting.

3. Adoption of June 3, 2026, SEEC Regular Meeting minutes

The Chair inquired where the referenced Supplementary Opinion for Case No. 25-1106-1 was published on the SEEC website. Cliff Duggan will locate the document and share its location with the Commission before the October meeting.

Hearing no other comments, the Chair called for a motion. Commissioner Evan Smith made the motion to adopt the May 6, 2026 meeting minutes. It was duly seconded. The motion passed with five ayes; Commissioner Forch abstained as he was not present for the June meeting.

Discussion Items

1. DVP Levy Workgroup

The Director reported that the workgroup continues to meet and Uncommon Bridges continues to do the work. Uncommon Bridges is interviewing people and preparing the first draft

of their report. Upon completion of the report, it will be decided if the workgroup will present it directly to the Commission or go to the City Council.

The Director said the draft is an amalgamation of comments from interviews of people in the campaign field sharing their ideas for making improvements to the Program. The Director said the completion of the report is imminent.

2. Democracy Voucher Program report

René LeBeau presented the Democracy Voucher Program Update report.

Three of the four Primary Election candidates for Seattle City Council D5 qualified to receive funding. As of September 2, just under 6,000 vouchers have been received. New voters continue to obtain vouchers as they become registered in the monthly voter registration updates. Requests for replacements from the public are being filled.

The report listed outreach activities that staff, primarily Fedden Amar and Jennifer Martinez, have attended in addition to putting up posters and visiting community businesses. During this specific Election cycle, staff looked at different types of outreach opportunities. A pilot was done trying to reach out to communities that serve confidentiality participants at that point of intake.

Mid-year reporting of Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) was provided in June. The outreach activities will be wrapped up at the end of October. Depending on the final consultant reports, RFPs for the 2027 outreach activities will soon be posted. Three employees (all D5 residents) from the Department of Neighborhoods Community Liaison program worked with DVP outreach.

The Chair was curious about the sort of questions people were asking at community events. Ms. Amar replied that the public has been asking the same sort of questions year after year; i.e.,

What are these? and How do I use them? The Chair asked Ms. LeBeau what the outreach budget was this year for consultants used through the RFP process. Ms. LeBeau stated that \$100,000 was approved by the Commissioner for the D5 Special Election outreach. In the past, regular Citywide Election Cycles have been approved for \$300,000.

3. Executive Director's report

The Director mentioned he is out of the office the week of September 7.

The Director announced that at the end of August Mamadou Jawo, Ethics and Whistleblower Advisor, and spouse welcomed a baby daughter.

4. Public Records Act training (*for Commissioners*)

The Chair turned the meeting over to Aaron Valla to provide Public Records training to the Commissioners. Mr. Valla is a City Attorney with the Legal Affairs section and regularly advises City commissions and departments on the Public Records Act (PRA) as well as Privacy and other issues.

Mr. Valla referred to the [Freedom of Information Act](#) and Washington State's Public Records Act [RCW 42.56](#). RCW 42.56 applies to all local and state governments, including boards and commissions. The records that Commissioners create and use are public records. This can include records that are on personal devices and personal email accounts.

The primary SEEC Public Disclosure Officer (PDO) is Polly Grow, Campaign Finance Law, Education and Compliance Advisor. Chrissy Courtney, Lobbying Law, Education and Compliance Advisor, is the secondary contact. The PDO acknowledges public disclosure requests within five business days and communicates with the requestor to clarify the request. In performing or arranging for a search of relevant locations on City systems, Ms. Grow may need to reach out to Commissioners to help identify, locate, and produce responsive records.

If Commissioners perform a search on non-City devices or accounts used for Commission business, they will need to provide an affidavit verifying that a search was performed. Common exemptions are Attorney Client Privilege/Work Product, Deliberative Process, RCW 42.56.240(1)(2), and the Local Government Whistleblower Protection Act (RCW 42.41). This does not cover personnel actions.

Under the PRA, a SEEC Commissioner is not going to be held personally liable for non-compliance. The Commission as a whole might be held up for a violation. However, for litigation, if there was a Public Records Act request and you were responding with some records that we were then processing, you might be asked for any testimony or declarations as to your involvement. Where SEEC is found to have denied and violated the PRA either by denying requests for an opportunity to inspect a record or not making a reasonable estimate of how long it will take to provide records, a court can assess a penalty of up to \$100 per day per record.

If the courts find a violation, the agency is responsible for the requester's attorney's fees and costs. Those are often times much larger than the actual penalty assessed against the agency. Non-compliance can also result in unfavorable media attention, a breakdown of trust with the public being served by the agency and could tie up the agency resources in a way that takes away from the primary mission that the Commission performs.

The overall takeaways are to be aware that the records that are prepared or used as a Commission and to forward any perceived public disclosure request to the PDO. are public records subject to disclosure. Once a request has been received, preserve your records.

Hearing no further comments for the good of the order, the September 2, 2026, SEEC Commission Regular Meeting was adjourned at 4:45 p.m.