

Ethics and Elections Commission

Wayne Barnett, Executive Director

(206) 684-8500

<http://www.seattle.gov/ethics/>

Department Overview

The Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission (SEEC) helps foster public confidence in the integrity of Seattle city government by providing education, training, and enforcement of the City's Ethics Code, Whistleblower Code, and lobbying regulations. It also promotes informed elections through education, training, and enforcement of the City's Elections Code. The Commission also administers and funds the Democracy Voucher Program.

The Commission's work on behalf of the City of Seattle centers around five main lines of business:

Ethics Code: The Commission conducts ethics training for all City of Seattle employees upon request and through the City's New Employee and New Supervisor Orientation programs. It also provides ethics training information for City employees via the City's intranet site. The Commission issues advisory opinions regarding interpretations of the Code of Ethics and also investigates and rules upon alleged violations of the Code.

Whistleblower Code: The Commission helps to protect an employee's right to report improper governmental action and to be free from retaliation as a result of such reporting. The Commission either investigates allegations of improper governmental actions itself or refers allegations to the appropriate agency.

Elections Code: The Commission fulfills the public's mandate of full campaign disclosure by:

- training organizations required to report campaign contributions and expenditures in proper reporting procedures;
- auditing campaign reports;
- working with organizations to correct errors; and
- making all campaign finance information available to the public.

Since 1993, the Commission has made summary reports of campaign financing information available to the public, and since 1995, the Commission has published campaign financing information on its website. The Commission also produces a video voters' guide with King County and the Seattle Channel.

Lobbying Regulations: The Commission is charged with administering the City's lobbying regulations. The Commission collects and posts information so that residents know who is lobbying and how much is being spent on lobbying activities. The Commission also enforces compliance with the lobbying regulations.

Democracy Voucher Program: The Commission administers the Democracy Voucher Program which was approved with the passage of I-122 in November 2015 and renewed with the passage of Seattle Proposition 1 in August 2025. The program provides vouchers to eligible Seattle residents so that they can contribute to candidates for City office who qualify to participate in the program.

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Budget Snapshot

	2024 Actuals	2025 Adopted	2026 Endorsed	2026 Proposed
Department Support				
General Fund Support	1,483,195	1,469,527	1,544,691	1,533,091
Other Funding - Operating	2,168,891	10,262,810	3,097,544	3,091,560
Total Operations	3,652,086	11,732,337	4,642,235	4,624,652
Total Appropriations	3,652,086	11,732,337	4,642,235	4,624,652
Full-Time Equivalents Total*	9.40	9.40	9.40	9.40

** FTE totals are provided for informational purposes only. Changes in FTEs resulting from City Council or Human Resources Director actions outside of the budget process may not be detailed here*

Budget Overview

The 2026 Proposed Budget for the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission maintains investments at current service levels. The appropriations from the Election Voucher Fund vary with the election cycle and are therefore lower in 2026 because no Citywide elections are scheduled.

The 2026 Proposed Budget also includes revenues associated with Seattle Proposition 1 which was approved by voters in August 2025. Proposition 1 renews the Democracy Voucher program for ten years.

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Incremental Budget Changes

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	2026 Budget	FTE
Total 2026 Endorsed Budget	4,642,235	9.40
Baseline		
Citywide Adjustments for Standard Cost Changes	4,595	-
Proposed Technical		
Election Voucher Fund Revenue	-	-
Bargained Annual Wage Adjustment to Base Budget	(21,270)	-
SCERS Retirement Contribution Rate Reduction	(908)	-
Contribution to/Use of Fund Balance	-	-
Total Incremental Changes	\$(17,583)	-
Total 2026 Proposed Budget	\$4,624,652	9.40

Description of Incremental Budget Changes

Baseline

Citywide Adjustments for Standard Cost Changes

Expenditures \$4,595

Citywide technical adjustments made in the baseline phase reflect changes to internal services costs, including rates from the Department of Finance & Administrative Services, Seattle Information Technology Department, Seattle Department of Human Resources, and for healthcare and other central cost factors. These adjustments reflect initial assumptions about these costs and inflators early in the budget process.

Proposed Technical

Election Voucher Fund Revenue

Revenues \$4,441,500

This ongoing item increases revenues in the Election Voucher Fund. In the August 2025 election, voters approved City of Seattle Proposition 1. This measure renews the Democracy Voucher program for 10 years. This technical item adds the revenue associated with this measure to the 2026 Proposed Budget. Revenues accrue over multiple years and are primarily spent during election years. The next significant election year is 2027.

Bargained Annual Wage Adjustment to Base Budget

Expenditures \$(21,270)

This centrally administered change adjusts base budget appropriations to reflect the proper Annual Wage Increase (AWI) increment for 2026, as outlined in the agreements between the City and the Coalition of City Unions for personnel costs. AWI increments are determined based on the average change in the local Consumer Price Index

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(CPI). This change represents a true-up between the forecasted CPI assumption included in the Endorsed Budget and the actual CPI data.

SCERS Retirement Contribution Rate Reduction

Expenditures	\$(908)
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The City's employee retirement system, the Seattle City Employees Retirement System (SCERS) is a defined benefit pension program funded by a combination of salary-based employer (i.e., the City) and employee contributions, and investment earnings. Based on the updated actuarial valuation for 2025, this item reduces the employer contribution rate from the endorsed rate of 15.17% to the SCERS minimum actuarial required rate of 15.06%.

Contribution to/Use of Fund Balance

Revenues	\$(1,349,940)
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This is a technical item to balance the revenues and expenditures for the Election Vouchers Fund.

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Expenditure Overview

	2024 Actuals	2025 Adopted	2026 Endorsed	2026 Proposed
Appropriations				
ETH - BO-ET-V1T00 - Ethics and Elections				
00100 - General Fund	1,483,195	1,469,527	1,544,691	1,533,091
Total for BSL: BO-ET-V1T00	1,483,195	1,469,527	1,544,691	1,533,091
ETH - BO-ET-VT123 - Election Vouchers				
12300 - Election Vouchers Fund	2,168,891	10,262,810	3,097,544	3,091,560
Total for BSL: BO-ET-VT123	2,168,891	10,262,810	3,097,544	3,091,560
Department Total	3,652,086	11,732,337	4,642,235	4,624,652
Department Full-Time Equivalents Total*	9.40	9.40	9.40	9.40

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Budget Summary by Fund Ethics and Elections Commission

	2024 Actuals	2025 Adopted	2026 Endorsed	2026 Proposed
00100 - General Fund	1,483,195	1,469,527	1,544,691	1,533,091
12300 - Election Vouchers Fund	2,168,891	10,262,810	3,097,544	3,091,560
Budget Totals for ETH	3,652,086	11,732,337	4,642,235	4,624,652

Revenue Overview

2026 Estimated Revenues

Account Code	Account Name	2024 Actuals	2025 Adopted	2026 Endorsed	2026 Proposed
311010	Real & Personal Property Taxes	2,940,520	3,000,000	-	4,441,500
Total Revenues for: 12300 - Election Vouchers Fund		2,940,520	3,000,000	-	4,441,500
400000	Use of/Contribution to Fund Balance	-	7,262,810	3,097,544	(1,349,940)
Total Resources for: 12300 - Election Vouchers Fund		2,940,520	10,262,810	3,097,544	3,091,560
Total ETH Resources		2,940,520	10,262,810	3,097,544	3,091,560

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Appropriations by Budget Summary Level and Program

ETH - BO-ET-V1T00 - Ethics and Elections

The purpose of the Ethics and Elections Budget Summary Level is to: 1) audit, investigate, and conduct hearings regarding non-compliance with, or violations of, Commission-administered ordinances; 2) advise all City officials and employees of their obligations under Commission-administered ordinances; and 3) publish and broadly distribute information about the City's ethical standards, City election campaigns, campaign financial disclosure statements, and lobbyist disclosure statements.

Program Expenditures	2024 Actuals	2025 Adopted	2026 Endorsed	2026 Proposed
Ethics and Elections	1,483,195	1,469,527	1,544,691	1,533,091
Total	1,483,195	1,469,527	1,544,691	1,533,091
Full-time Equivalents Total*	5.90	5.90	5.90	5.90

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ETH - BO-ET-VT123 - Election Vouchers

The purpose of the Election Voucher Budget Summary Level is to pay costs associated with implementing, maintaining and funding a program for providing vouchers to eligible Seattle residents that they can use to contribute to candidates for City office who qualify to participate in the Election Voucher program.

Program Expenditures	2024 Actuals	2025 Adopted	2026 Endorsed	2026 Proposed
Election Vouchers	2,168,891	10,262,810	3,097,544	3,091,560
Total	2,168,891	10,262,810	3,097,544	3,091,560
Full-time Equivalents Total*	3.50	3.50	3.50	3.50

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