

Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission Regular Meeting

January 7, 2026 [Revised]

The January 7, 2026, Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission (SEEC) Regular Meeting convened in Seattle Municipal Tower Conference Room 4080 and remotely. Commissioner Vivian Vassall was present; Chair Jonathan Schirmer [Chair] and Commissioners Zach Pekelis and Kai Smith participated via Webex. Commissioners Bobby Forch and Kristin Hawes were absent. Four Commissioners present constituted a quorum. Executive Director Wayne Barnett [Director] and staff members Fedden Amar, Cliff Duggan, Randal Fu, René LeBeau, and Jennifer Martinez were present. Staff member Polly Grow as well as Assistant City Attorneys Joe Levan and Gary Smith participated via Webex.

The Chair called the meeting to order at 4:04 p.m.

Discussion of Written Public Comment (if applicable)

No Written Public Comment was received for the Commission.

Final Action Items

1. Election of 2026 Commission Vice-Chair

Commissioner Pekelis made the motion to elect Commissioner Vassall as the 2026 SEEC Vice-Chair, and the motion was duly seconded. The motion was approved by Chair Schirmer and Commissioners Pekelis and Smith with Commissioner Vassall abstaining.

2. Adoption of December 3, 2025, SEEC Regular Meeting minutes

Commissioner Smith made the motion to approve the December 3, 2025, SEEC Regular Meeting minutes, and it was duly seconded. The motion passed with four ayes.

3. SEEC Staff Confirmation (A Francke, J Martinez)

Seattle Municipal Code 3.70.100.G gives the Commission authorization to confirm staff appointed by the Director. Temporary employees Amada Francke and Jennifer Martinez have accepted regular SEEC positions with terms ending December 31, 2027.

Amanda Francke, Administrative Staff Assistant, worked with the Democracy Voucher Program in 2025 and will continue to support Ms. LeBeau and Mr. Fu with voucher processing, qualifying, and related administrative processes. Jennifer Martinez, Public Relations Specialist, will continue in her role for the Democracy Voucher Program.

Vice-Chair Vassall made the motion to confirm permanent staff members Amanda Francke and Jennifer Martinez, and it was duly seconded. The motion passed with four ayes.

Discussion Items

1. *Wilson for Seattle* Committee Penalty Letter

The Director issued a penalty letter on December 17, 2025, to the *Wilson for Seattle* committee in response to a KUOW report on a parental gift of \$10,000 to Katie Wilson for childcare during their campaign. The Mayor-elect made it clear her parents' support was due to her running for office. It was determined that the expenditure was an in-kind contribution which was not reported in a timely manner.

Commissioner Pekelis asked if a friend had offered to babysit, would that be treated as an in-kind contribution. The Director responded no. When asked what the difference was, the Director said if someone offered to babysit, the Commission would not be discussing the issue. The Commissioner then asked about the situation of a babysitter offering to babysit every day of the week for the duration of the campaign. The Director said they would have to review the situation.

The Chair noted that the \$250 penalty was considered a nominal amount and questioned if the amount was similar to other situations. The Director responded yes. The Chair asked if candidate training included information on penalties. The Director will consider sharing the penalty letter with future candidates.

Commissioner Smith agreed that in practice this issue would not come up often. The Commissioner understands how it can be an unintuitive point and would like to see a clear way of introducing this issue in the candidate training. The Director agreed to address the Commissioner's request.

Commissioner Pekelis said that based on his reading of the statute, he doesn't think he would have reached the same conclusion as the Director reached.

2. City Ordinance 127379 – Ethics Code requirements for Political Consultants

Former Council President Sara Nelson asked the Commission on November 18, 2025, to review proposed legislation modifying the Ethics Code at the Commission's December 3 meeting. The Council President requested a letter of support to present at the December 4 City Council's Governance, Accountability, and Economic Development Committee meeting. Chair Pekelis, Vice-Chair Schirmer, and the Director noted the time constraints and offered to review the legislation the following month. The CP succeeded in getting the legislation passed by the Governance Committee. The City Council passed the Ordinance at a Special Council Meeting on December 16.

The Ordinance imposes on the SEEC the requirement to prescribe forms for registration and reporting, determine the method for filing, conducting appropriate inquiry and review of reports or statements for completeness and accuracy, and establishing fees for late filing or non-filing in addition to posting the information on the SEEC website.

3. Democracy Voucher Program report

Ms. LeBeau reported that four Community-Based Organizations were selected for the 2026 District 5 (D5) Special Election: Literacy Source, Lake City Collective, Korean American Coalition, and WashingtonCAN. The 2026 D5 Democracy Voucher Outreach Fund is \$100,000.

D5 covers the following neighborhoods: Bitter Lake, Broadview, Cedar Park, Greenwood (D5 & D6), Haller Lake, Lake City, Licton Springs, Little Brook, Maple Leaf (D4 & D5), Matthews Beach, Meadowbrook, North Park, Northgate, Olympic Hills, Pinehurst, Victory Heights, and Wedgwood (D4 & D5).

4. Executive Director's report

The Director announced the upcoming retirement of Marc Mayo, Ethics and Whistleblower Advisor, Trainer and Investigator. Mr. Mayo has worked in SEEC for ten years. The Director has communicated with Human Resources to get a hiring process underway.

With the passage of the DVP Levy Proposition No. 1 in August 2025, the Executive, the City Council, and the SEEC are requested to convene a workgroup in early 2026 to recommend improvements to the Democracy Voucher campaign public finance program. The stakeholder process should include input from candidates, campaign staff, professional election consultants, two government advocates, and the Director and members of the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission.

The Chair stated the Commission will take the request seriously and suggested the topic be put on the February meeting agenda. The Chair asked the Director and Staff to take the lead on reaching out to people regarding the workgroup. The Director agreed.

The Chair requested a brief update on filling the open Mayor-appointed and Council-appointed Commissioner positions. The Director will contact the new Council President in the

following week. The Director has contacted the Mayor's Chief of Staff regarding the Mayor's appointment.

Hearing no further comments for the good of the order, the January 7, 2026, SEEC Commission Regular Meeting was adjourned at 4:38 p.m.

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