

CITY OF OAKLAND
PUBLIC ETHICS COMMISSION
One Frank Ogawa Plaza (City Hall)
Special Commission Meeting
City Council Chambers
Wednesday, November 19, 2025
6:30 p.m.



Commissioners: Francis Upton IV (Chair), Tanya Bayeva (Vice Chair), Alea Gage, Ryan Micik, Vincent Steele, and Karun Tilak.

Commission Staff in attendance: Suzanne Doran, Executive Director; Tovah Ackerman, Enforcement Chief; Alex Van Buskirk, Ethics Investigator; Jelani Killings, Ethics Analyst; Niels Thorsen, Ethics Analyst; Bhawna Chowdhary, Law Clerk.

Legal Counsel: Oliver Luby, Deputy City Attorney

PUBLIC ETHICS COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

PRELIMINARY ITEMS

1. Roll Call and Determination of Quorum.

The meeting was called to order at 6:31p.m.

Members present: Chair Upton, Vice Chair Bayeva, Micik, Steele, Tilak (arrived at 6:33p.m.).

Members absent: Gage.

Staff present: Suzanne Doran, Executive Director; Tovah Ackerman, Enforcement Chief; Alex Van Buskirk, Ethics Investigator; Jelani Killings, Ethics Analyst; Niels Thorsen, Ethics Analyst; Bhawna Chowdhary, Law Clerk.

Legal Counsel: Oliver Luby, Deputy City Attorney.

2. Staff and Commission Announcements.

Executive Director Doran welcomed Commissioner applicants that were in attendance.

Chair Upton made comments about recent actions of the federal government.

Public Comment: None.

3. Open Forum.

Chair Upton clarified the rules for public comment during PEC meetings.

Public Comment: Ralph Kanz; Gene Hazzard.

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ACTION ITEMS

4. Approval of Commission Meeting Draft Minutes.

a. September 17, 2025, Regular Meeting Minutes

Vice Chair Bayeva provided corrections to the minutes related to the Commissioner Recruitment Ad Hoc Subcommittee. Commissioner Micik was appointed, not Commissioner Steele.

Tilak moved, and Steele seconded, to adopt the September 17, 2025, regular meeting minutes as corrected.

Ayes: Bayeva, Micik, Steele, Tilak, Upton.

Noes: None.

Abstain: None.

Absent: Gage.

Vote: 5-0.

Motion passed.

Public Comment: None.

5. Public Ethics Commission Regular Meeting Schedule 2026.

Executive Director Doran presented, and Commissioners discussed, the proposed Public Ethics Commission Regular Meeting Schedule for 2026. Director Doran noted that because Commissioners had expressed interest in allowing remote participation via teleconference, staff recommends implementing public comment via Zoom for 2026 meetings. However, there are additional meeting requirements. Director Doran invited legal counsel to provide an update on state legal requirements regarding remote access and participation for public meetings. Legal Counsel explained legal requirements to allow remote Commissioner and public participation.

Bayeva moved, and Micik seconded, to approve the proposed schedule and allow public attendance and participation via Zoom.

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Commissioner Tilak requested staff provide more information prior to the Commission approving remote participation.

The motion was withdrawn by Vice Chair Bayeva.

Bayeva moved, and Steel seconded, to approve the proposed schedule as presented in the agenda.

Ayes: Bayeva, Micik, Steele, Tilak, Upton.

Noes: None.

Abstain: None.

Absent: Gage.

Vote: 5-0.

Motion passed.

Public Comment: Gene Hazzard; Ralph Kanz.

6. Proposed amendments to the Conflict-of-Interest Code.

Under the City Charter, any amendments to laws that the Commission has the power to enforce or administer must be submitted to the Commission for review and comment prior to passage by City Council.

The City Clerk, in collaboration with the City Attorney's Office, prepared amendments to the Conflict of Interest Code to ensure the designation of positions covered by the Code align with the current organizational structure of the City of Oakland. Executive Director Doran presented the item.

No action was taken on this item.

Public Comment: Gene Hazzard, Ralph Kanz.

7. 2025 Case Closure Plan.

PEC staff are working to close cases according to a seven-point rubric to address a

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severe complaint backlog. Enforcement Chief Tovah Ackerman presented, and the Commission discussed, staff recommendations to close the following cases:

- In the Matter of Sheilagh Polk a.k.a. Cat Brooks (PEC #16-10). Staff recommends that the Commission close PEC Case No. 16-10 with no further action.
- In the Matter of Desley Brooks (PEC #18-13). Staff recommends that the Commission close PEC Case No. 18-13 with no further action.
- In the Matter of Molly Maybrun (PEC #23-03). Staff recommends that the Commission close PEC case No. 23-03 with no further action.
- In the Matter of Townes Bouchard-Dean (PEC #23-04). Staff recommends that the Commission close PEC Case No. 23-04 with a warning letter.
- In the Matter of Jim Chanin (PEC #23-24). Staff recommends that the Commission close PEC Case No. 23-24 with no further action.

Upton moved, and Tilak seconded, to adopt staff's recommendations.

Ayes: Upton, Bayeva, Micik, Steele, Tilak.

Noes: None.

Absent: Gage.

Vote: 5-0.

Motion passed.

Public Comment: Gene Hazzard, Ralph Kanz.

Written Public Comment was received prior to the meeting from Brenda Harbin-Forte and is posted on the meeting webpage.

INFORMATION/DISCUSSION ITEMS

8. Enforcement Report

Enforcement Chief Tovah Ackerman reported on, and Commissioners discussed, a summary of the Commission's enforcement process, caseload, enforcement-related litigation, and case closures or dismissals.

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Public Comment: Gene Hazzard; Ralph Kanz.

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9. Executive Director Report

Executive Director Suzanne Doran provided updates, and the Commission discussed, overall priorities and PEC activities, such as budget, staffing, and PEC legislative and policy initiatives since the last Commission meeting.

Public Comment: Gene Hazzard; Ralph Kanz.

10. Reports on Subcommittees and Commissioner Assignments.

a. Revenue Options Ad Hoc Subcommittee

Commissioners discussed the work of this Subcommittee, the results of its discussions, and the decision to terminate the Subcommittee.

Public Comment: Gene Hazzard.

b. Democracy Dollars Engagement Ad Hoc Subcommittee

Vice Chair Bayeva reported on the work the Subcommittee has accomplished since last meeting. The Subcommittee is working with Local Policy Lab to complete an outreach strategy plan for presentation at the January regular meeting..

Public Comment: Gene Hazzard.

c. Commissioner Recruitment and Selection of Finalists for Interviews Ad Hoc Subcommittee

The Subcommittee reviewed applicants and selected semi-finalists for interviews. Finalists will be recommended to the full Commission for consideration at the January regular meeting.

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Public Comment: Gene Hazzard; Ralph Kanz.

INFORMATION ITEM

11. Future Meeting Business.

Commissioner Tilak and Vice Chair Bayeva asked requested staff provide further information on implementing Zoom Public Comment to provide clarity regarding the obligations and regulations for remote meetings.

Chair Upton requested staff provide Commissioners clarification on the rules for standing versus ad hoc subcommittees. Chair Upton and Commissioner Micik both requested clarification whether special meeting rules for City Council are within the PEC jurisdiction.

Deputy City Attorney, Oliver Luby, stated that Charter Section 208 is not within the jurisdiction of the PEC.

Commissioner Micik requested staff to look at questions raised about changes to the City Records Retention Policy during public comment and whether those changes should have been referred for PEC review prior to adoption.

Public Comment: Gene Hazzard; Ralph Kanz.

The meeting adjourned at 8:27pm.