CITY OF OAKLAND
PUBLIC ETHICS COMMISSION
Regular Commission Meeting
One Frank Ogawa Plaza (City Hall)
Hearing Room 2
Wednesday, March 18, 2026
6:30 p.m.

DRAFT

Commissioners:
Francis Upton IV (Chair) | Karun Tilak (Vice-Chair) | Luke Apfeld | Tanya Bayeva | L. Lawrence Brandon | Angi Fisher | Ryan Micik

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

Legal Counsel:
Oliver Luby, Deputy City Attorney

PUBLIC ETHICS COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES

PRELIMINARY ITEMS

1. Roll Call and Determination of Quorum.

The meeting was called to order at 6:33 p.m.

Members present: Chair Francis Upton IV, Vice-Chair Karun Tilak, Luke Apfeld, Tanya Bayeva, L. Lawrence Brandon, Angi Fisher, and Ryan Micik.

Members absent: None.

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

Legal Counsel: Oliver Luby, Deputy City Attorney.

2. Staff and Commission Announcements.

Chair Upton announced that members of the public can now participate in meetings remotely via Zoom.

Executive Director Suzanne Doran acknowledged Benjamin Mahrer as the new Ethics Investigator.

Public Comment: None.

3. Open Forum.

Chair Upton provided an overview of the rules for public comment during PEC meetings and how to participate via Zoom or phone.

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Public Comment: 2 speakers.

ACTION ITEMS

4. Approval of Commission Meeting Draft Minutes.

a. January 21, 2026, Regular Meeting Minutes.

Executive Director Doran stated that the draft minutes would be corrected to show that public comment was taken prior to actions taken by the Commission. Staff verified from the meeting recording that public comment was taken for each item; however, the minutes did not reflect the chronological order.

Public Comment: 2 speakers.

Tilak moved to adopt the January 21, 2026, regular meeting minutes.

The motion failed due to lack of a second. The minutes were held over pending a revised draft.

5. Oakland City Council Salary Adjustment.

Executive Director Doran presented staff's recommendation, and Commissioners discussed the requirement for setting the Oakland City Councilmember salary level in accordance with Oakland City Charter Section 202.

Micik moved, and Fisher seconded, to approve Resolution 26-01 authorizing a 5 percent increase in the Oakland City Councilmember salary in accordance with City Charter Section 202.

Public Comment: 3 speakers.

Ayes: Tilak, Apfeld, Bayeva, Brandon, Fisher, Micik, Upton.

Noes: None.

Abstentions: None.

Vote: 7-0.

Motion passed.

6. City Attorney and City Auditor Salary Adjustment Process.

Executive Director Doran provided a summary of the salary adjustment process for the City Attorney and City Auditor and requested Commissioner input.

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Public Comment: 1 speaker.

7. In the Matter of the Oakland Public Ethics Commission (PEC #25-27).

Enforcement Chief Tovah Ackerman presented PEC Cases No. 25-27 and No. 26-01 jointly for Commission consideration and stated that the complainant has been referred to a nearby jurisdiction in accordance with the PEC Mediation and Complaint Procedures (IV(A)(4)). Staff recommended that the Commission close PEC Case Nos. 25-27 and 26-01 without further action.

Chair Upton recommended taking items 7 and 8 as one vote.

Apfeld moved, and Bayeva seconded, to close PEC Cases 25-27 and 26-01 with no action.

Public Comment was taken for item 7 and then item 8, since the items were agendized separately.

Public Comment Item 7: None.

Public Comment Item 8: 2 speakers.

Tilak made a friendly amendment to include directing Staff to forward the complaints directly to the San Francisco Ethics Commission on behalf of the complainant and to request that the San Francisco Ethics Commission disclose its decision on the compliant publicly so that it could be reported to the Commission.

Apfeld and Bayeva accepted the amendment.

Ayes: Tilak, Apfeld, Bayeva, Brandon, Fisher, Micik, Upton.

Noes: None.

Abstentions: None.

Vote: 7-0.

Motion passed.

8. In the Matter of Tovah Ackerman, Enforcement Chief (PEC #26-01).

Combined with Item 7. See above for discussion and action.

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9. Case Closure Plan.

PEC staff are working to close cases according to a seven-point rubric to address a severe complaint backlog. Enforcement Chief Tovah Ackerman presented, and the Commission discussed, staff's recommendation to close the following cases:

- In the Matter of Asha Reed et al. (PEC # 22-20). Staff recommend that the Commission close PEC Case No. 22-20 with no further action.
- In the Matter of Unknown (PEC # 24-01). Staff recommend that the Commission close PEC Case No. 24-01 with no further action.

Upton moved, and Apfeld seconded, to adopt staff's recommendation.

Public Comment: 1 speaker.

Ayes: Tilak, Apfeld, Bayeva, Brandon, Fisher, Micik, Upton.

Noes: None.

Abstentions: None.

Vote: 7-0.

Motion passed.

INFORMATION/DISCUSSION ITEMS

10. 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.

Public Comment: 1 speaker.

11. Executive Director Report.

Executive Director Suzanne Doran reported on overall priorities and PEC activities, such as budget, staffing, and PEC legislative and policy initiatives, since the last Commission meeting, as well as specific programs updates included as attachments.

Public Comment: 1 speaker.

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12. Reports on Subcommittees and Commissioner Assignments.

Chair Upton surveyed Commissioners about their interests generally as well as in serving on three potential ad hoc subcommittees: 1) Transparency Ad-Hoc Subcommittee, 2) Charter Reform Recommendations Ad Hoc Subcommittee, and 3) Democracy Dollars Pilot Ad Hoc Subcommittee.

Fisher, Brandon, and Tilak expressed interest in forming an Ad Hoc Subcommittee to provide input into enforcement program policies and priorities.

Chair Upton established the Transparency Ad Hoc Subcommittee chaired by Upton and appointed Commissioners Apfeld and Fisher as members.

Public Comment: 2 speakers.

13. Future Meeting Business.

None.

Public Comment: There were no public speakers.

The meeting adjourned at 8:51 p.m.