CITY OF OAKLAND
PUBLIC ETHICS COMMISSION
Regular Commission Meeting
One Frank Ogawa Plaza (City Hall)
Hearing Room 2
Wednesday, January 21, 2026
6:30 p.m.

Commissioners:
Francis Upton IV (Chair) | Tanya Bayeva (Vice-Chair) | Alea Gage | Ryan Mick | Vincent Steele | Karun Tilak

Commission Staff in attendance:
Suzanne Doran, Executive Director | Tovah Ackerman, Enforcement Chief | 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 6:37 p.m.

Members present: Chair Upton, Vice Chair Bayeva, Gage, Micik, Steele, and Tilak.

Members absent: None.

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

Legal Counsel: Oliver Luby, Deputy City Attorney.

2. Staff and Commission Announcements.

Chair Upton announced that Lawrence Brandon has been selected by the Mayor to fill the mayor-appointed Commission seat. His term will begin Thursday, January 22, 2026. Chair Upton also announced that tonight's meeting was the end of Commissioners Gage and Steele's terms and thanked them for their work.

Public Comment: None.

3. Open Forum.

Public Comment: Gene Hazzard; Ralph Kanz.

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ACTION ITEMS

4. Approval of Commission Meeting Draft Minutes.

a. November 19, 2025, Special Meeting Minutes

Micik moved, and Tilak seconded, to adopt the November 19, 2025, special meeting minutes.

Public Comment: Gene Hazzard.

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

Noes: None.

Abstentions: Gage (not present at the November 19, 2025 meeting).

Vote: 5-0, 1 abstention.

Motion passed.

b. December 10, 2025, Special Meeting Minutes

Tilak moved, and Upton seconded, to adopt the December 10, 2025, special meeting minutes.

Public Comment: Hazzard.

Ayes: Gage, Micik, Tilak, Upton.

Noes: None.

Abstentions: Bayeva (not present at the December 10, 2025 meeting), Steele (not present at the December 10, 2025 meeting).

Vote: 4-0, 2 abstentions.

Motion passed.

5. Election of Officers (Chair and Vice-Chair) of the Commission.

Chair Upton provided an overview of the process for election of the Chair and Vice Chair and opened nominations for Chair and Vice Chair for 2026.

Commissioner Micik nominated Commissioner Tilak for Chair. Commissioner Tilak declined the nomination.

Chair Upton nominated himself for Chair.

Commissioner Tilak nominated himself for Vice Chair.

Public Comment: None.

Upton moved, and Bayeva seconded, to approve the election of Commissioner Upton as Chair for 2026.

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

Noes: None.

Abstentions: None.

Vote: 6-0.

Motion passed.

Gage moved, and Steele seconded, to approve the election of Commissioner Tilak as Vice Chair for 2026.

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

Noes: None.

Abstentions: None.

Vote: 6-0.

Motion passed.

6. New Commissioner Selection.

The Commission invited Commissioner applicant finalists to appear before the full Commission for a public interview. Applicants Luke Apfeld, Angela Fisher, David Lew, and Andy McCoy each introduced themselves and answered the following questions:

- Why do you want to serve on the Public Ethics Commission?
- What skills and experience do you bring?
- What issues, projects, or goals would you like to pursue as a Commissioner?
- What else would you like the Commission to know?

Chair Upton opened the floor for members of the public to ask the candidates questions.

Public Comment: Gene Hazzard; Ralph Kanz.

Applicants responded to the questions.

Chair Upton asked if there was additional public comment.

Public Comment: None.

The Commission discussed and individually ranked their choices for the two Commissioner appointments. Angela Fisher and Luke Apfeld were selected as the top two candidates.

Bayeva moved, and Gage seconded, to appoint Angela Fisher and Luke Apfeld to fill the two open Commission seats for the January 22, 2026 – January 21, 2029 term.

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

Noes: None.

Abstentions: None.

Vote: 6-0.

Motion passed.

Upton moved, and Tilak seconded, to add applicants David Lew and Andy McCoy to the list of applicants who were not appointed to the Commission but that the Commission considers to be well-qualified for appointment for future Commission vacancies per Article XII Section (C) of the Commission's Operations Policy.

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

Noes: None.

Abstentions: None.

Vote: 6-0.

Motion passed.

Executive Director Doran requested the order of the agenda be modified by moving Item 8 - Guest Presentation – Democracy Dollars Outreach Strategy Report to Item 7 as a courtesy to guest speakers.

Chair Upton announced a meeting break at 8:20 p.m.

The meeting resumed at 8:28 p.m.

7. Guest Presentation – Democracy Dollars Outreach Strategy Report

Guests Laura Woods, Peter Zahn, and Anna Corning of Local Policy Lab (LPL), presented a summary of their report with recommendations for the outreach strategy for a successful Democracy Dollars program rollout in 2028. The Commissioners thanked LPL for their work and praised the comprehensiveness of the report.

Public Comment: Gene Hazzard; Ralph Kanz.

8. Case Closure Plan.

PEC staff are working to close older cases that meet specific criteria according to a seven-point rubric to address a severe complaint backlog. Enforcement Chief Tovah Ackerman presented staff's recommendation to close the following case under the backlog plan:

- In the Matter of Moore for Oakland City Council At-Large 2016 (PEC #19-12). Staff recommends that the Commission close PEC Case No. 19-12 with no further action.

Tilak moved, and Bayeva seconded, to adopt staff's recommendation.

Public Comment: None.

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

Noes: None.

Abstentions: None.

Vote: 6-0.

Motion passed.

INFORMATION/DISCUSSION ITEMS

9. Enforcement Report.

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

Public Comment: Gene Hazzard.

10. Executive Director Report.

Executive Director Suzanne Doran announced Mr. Killings' appointment as Ethics Analyst III. She also provided an update on overall priorities and PEC activities for the upcoming year.

Public Comment: Gene Hazzard.

11. Reports on Subcommittees and Commissioner Assignments.

The two Subcommittees, Democracy Dollars Engagement Ad Hoc Subcommittee and Commissioner Recruitment and Selection of Finalists for Interviews Ad Hoc Subcommittee, have concluded their business and submitted their Termination Reports.

Chair Upton initiated a discussion of Commissioner interest in potential ad hoc subcommittees in 2026 including: 1) an ad hoc subcommittee to consider transparency-focused process and policy improvements, which could include the Sunshine Act, the PEC's public records request mediation program, and meetings with guest speakers for input; and 2) an ad hoc subcommittee to consider recommendations for Charter reform in areas of PEC-jurisdiction in anticipation opportunities to provide input on a potential ballot measure in 2026.

Executive Director Doran provided an overview of the PEC's operating policies and public meeting requirements relating to Ad Hoc Subcommittees. Deputy City Attorney Luby answered Commissioner questions and clarified that the PEC's operation policies with respect to ad hoc subcommittees do not conflict with Brown Act requirements for public meetings.

Public Comment: None.

12. Future Meeting Business.

None.

Public Comment: None.

The meeting adjourned at 10:12 pm.