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JOHN ST. CROIX
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Memorandum

To: Members, Ethics Commission

From: John St. Croix, Executive Director

Re: Policy Priorities

Date: May 4, 2011

Following are the policy priorities adopted by the Commission for last year.

1. Education and Communication with the General Public
2. Enforcement
3. Campaign Finance
4. Conflicts of Interest
5. Campaign Consultant Ordinance

While these areas are always in the Commission's focus, the current fiscal year presents three additional challenges that may affect the Commission's decisions on priorities. First, after a great deal of staff work and Commission consideration, a complete review of the Campaign Consultant Ordinance has been completed and the measure is pending before the Board of Supervisors and will appear on the ballot in November. Second, candidates are already very active for the 2011 Mayoral race, and staff is very busy administering the Mayoral Public Finance program. Due to non-participation in the last cycle, this is the first time staff is executing the Public Financing mode on such a large scale. Finally, there is one staff vacancy and one staff member on extended disability, and two long-term staffers are expected to leave in the foreseeable future.

With these observations in mind, my recommendations for Commission priorities this year are:

1. Mayoral Public Financing Program – staff has to be ready for an intensified season of what is already a very busy program that is highly technical and difficult to administer. Additional complications may well result pending the Supreme Court's McComish decision. This will perhaps entail swift and complicated changes to how the program is administered in mid-election.
2. Campaign Consultant Ordinance – once the Commission's proposal for the ballot is ratified, the Commission may no longer express any public opinion for

or against the ballot measure; the measure must speak for itself. If it passes, the Commission will then need to adopt regulations to govern the program and staff will have to implement the new procedures, including the development of software to integrate the new program into our current Online Filing System. Should the measure fail, the Commission may opt to “return to the drawing board.”

3. Staff building – in prior discussions, the Commission has acknowledged that unexpectedly high staff turnover made it necessary to allow time for staff-building. The long-term stability and capability of the staff requires that newer employees develop a deft understanding of the laws we oversee and a stable performance record that the Commission – and the public – can count on. It also requires that long-term staff feel supported and energized in their duties and that all staff reflect high morale and satisfaction in order to achieve maximum productivity.
4. Education and Outreach – the Commission has frequently restated its commitment to this area and conducted several discussions about it last year, essentially reaching the conclusion that work in this area is satisfactory but that it is an eternal priority.

The Commission never stops reviewing campaign finance laws and regulations, consistently performs research and outreach on conflict-of-interest issues, and is always mindful of the need for quality enforcement. It is a policy decision for the Commission to decide if any of these should be on the priority list for the coming year.