



San Francisco Ethics Commission

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Date: March 9, 2026
To: Members of the Ethics Commission
From: Patrick Ford, Executive Director
Subject: **Agenda Item 4 – Executive Director’s Report**

Summary and Action Requested

This report provides various programmatic and operational highlights since the last report.

No action is required by the Commission, as this item is for informational purposes only.

Budget

The Commission submitted its FY27-FY28 budget proposal to the Mayor’s Budget Office on Monday, February 23rd. This submission is consistent with the proposal discussed at the Commission’s February 13th meeting. It includes the following proposed changes to the Commission’s baseline operating budget:

- Restoring an 1823 Senior Program Administrator position to the Engagement & Compliance Division, which was eliminated during last year’s budget cycle;
- Reallocating funding equivalent to one-half of an Auditor II from the general fund to the Commission’s Election and Campaign Fund;
- Cutting the Commission’s work-order with the Department of Human Resources in half to reflect ongoing service levels; and
- Small increases in software licenses as a result of annual adjustments.

Overall, the Commission’s proposal would result in a 1.08% cut in FY27 and a .24% cut in FY28. Discussions with the Mayor’s Budget Office are ongoing.

Permanent Civil Service Conversions

Starting last fall, Commission staff have worked with the Department of Human Resources and the Mayor’s Office to convert all eligible staff members from Permanent Exempt (PEX) to Permanent Civil Service (PCS). From November through January, staff successfully completed 10 conversions to PCS. Staff are on track to complete three more conversions in March 2026 and one final conversion in April 2026. At that point, all eligible staff will be Permanent Civil Service.

This work is essential for a number of reasons. First, it provides both staff and the Commission as a whole more long-term security and certainty. PEX positions are project-based and automatically expire after 36 months. By converting staff from PEX to PCS, the Commission retains the ability to develop and grow staff without having to worry that their employment with the City will end in the near future. This

work also provides staff with additional benefits, including reinstatement and transfer rights, as well as certain lay-off protections.

Policy Update: Potential Changes to Campaign Finance Laws

As noted last month, staff are studying certain elements of the City's campaign finance rules and identifying potential changes. This work is largely seeking address conduct in the 2024 election that made it clear that current laws are likely inadequate to address the interaction between non-candidate committees and candidate committees.

Specifically, the Policy Division is reviewing issues that arise from candidates controlling multiple committees and when third party spending in an election should be considered a contribution to the candidates who are benefiting from that spending. Staff are also exploring issues with City elective officers raising funds from third parties to pay penalties that arise from violations of ethics and campaign finance laws.

To gather perspectives, help guide further research, and identify possible improvements to the law, Staff have held two interested persons meetings, one on March 3rd and the other on March 6th. At these meetings, Staff heard from 12 participants, representing the regulated community and various good government groups. Additional updates and a report with recommendations will be presented to the Commission during future meetings.

Charter Reform Working Group

The Charter Reform Working group held its final meeting on March 4th. The Controller's Office has begun drafting a report that will summarize the options discussed across the four meetings, feedback received from the working group members, and potential next steps. The report will be published sometime during the month of March.

Additionally, [Mayor Daniel Lurie and Board of Supervisors President Rafael Mandelman proposed a series of three Charter amendments](#) on March 5th. They cover three of the four issue areas discussed by the Charter Reform Working Group: [Ballot Measure access](#), [Executive authority](#), and [City Administrator authority and procurement rules](#). The fourth topic, proposed limitations on budget baselines, was not included. The Ethics Commission is unaffected by the measure regarding City Administrator authority and procurement rules but would be subject to changes in the remaining measures.

In the Executive authority proposal, the existing Charter language regarding an appointing authority's ability to initiate removal of its appointees from certain commissions for official misconduct is preserved for appointees to the Ethics Commission, while most other commissioners would be subject to at-will removal from their appointing authority.

In the Ballot Measure access proposal, the ability for the Ethics Commission to submit measures to the voters is preserved but there is no language regarding changes to the process by which the Ethics Commission may place measures on the ballot for an election. This leaves the proposal of the Commission Streamlining Task Force as the main point of discussion, which would make the Ethics Commission's ballot measure authority subject to Board of Supervisors amendments and veto.

Supervisor Mandelman mentioned during the meeting that the Board of Supervisors will be discussing Charter Reform proposals during its full hearing on March 17th. The conversations will center on the [ordinance](#) and [charter amendment](#) that were [finalized by the Commission Streamlining Task Force](#) at its February 25th meeting, but will also take into account the narrative report of the Charter Reform Working Group published by the Controller's Office and the proposed measures from the Mayor and Supervisor Mandelman.

Commission staff will be monitoring the continued action of the Working Group, Commission Streamlining Task Force, and all accompanying Charter reform actions throughout March and will provide another update at the April Commission meeting.

Protocols for Form 700 Filings

Commission staff have finalized new protocols for navigating filing season for Statements of Economic Interests (Form 700). The new protocols are a result of cross-divisional collaboration to integrate pre-filing notifications to City employees, compliance efforts, and post-filing enforcement work. These protocols will ensure that filers receive extensive notice and instructions, non-filing is identified and addressed as appropriate, and the Commission speaks with one consistent and clear voice throughout the process.

The protocols include:

- Templates for filer communications that provide consistent and clear information on filing obligations and include transparency about the potential consequences for delinquent filers;
- Established timelines for pre-deadline compliance efforts and post-deadline enforcement review; and
- Integration with the Mayor's Office to increase touchpoints with Mayoral appointees.

User Research

As part of the Commission's ongoing effort to learn from and provide quality services to the individuals and groups that interact with the Commission, staff have prioritized expanding opportunities for user research. This work is currently occurring in two new ways. First, a survey is being sent to all active campaign treasurers, which will explore how campaigns interact with the Commission's compliance, training, and audit functions. Additionally, as part of the campaign finance dashboard redesign project, staff are conducting a series of observational user testing sessions with journalists who regularly report on campaign finance data in San Francisco. Staff will incorporate leanings from this additional user research in future improvements to Commission operations where possible.

Launch of New Lobbyist Training Video

Commission staff have launched the [updated version](#) of the required training that lobbyists must complete after they qualify and register with the Ethics Commission. The updated training improves the clarity and cohesion of the content while also enhancing the audio and visual user experience. The training page housing the training allows for lobbyists to complete the training and the required proof of training form in a self-guided format, but a link to the Commission's Support Portal is available on the site to facilitate any questions lobbyists have. This project is part of the Engagement and Compliance

Division's larger efforts to modernize and enhance all compliance resources to ensure that all regulated persons have ready access to clear and up to date resources about applicable laws.