City of Seattle

Ethics and Elections Commission

June 14, 2012

BY E-MAIL

Council President Sally J. Clark
Councilmember Mike O'Brien
Councilmember Tim Burgess
City Hall
Seattle, WA 98104

Re: Request to Evaluate Local Campaign Finance Reform Measures

Dear Councilmembers:

On April 25, the three of you wrote to the Commission asking that it evaluate two potential campaign finance reforms. The Commission discussed your request very briefly at its May 2 meeting, and then discussed the issue at length at its June 6 meeting.

At the close of the discussion on June 6, the Commission unanimously voted to endorse limiting the time in which candidates can solicit or receive campaign contributions to twelve months before the primary election, and limiting transfers of campaign funds to a future campaign to a minimal amount. The Commission was persuaded that these two measures would serve the three goals you articulated in your memorandum: (1) Protecting individual First Amendment rights by ensuring that donor intent is honored with respect to contributions being made for a specific election and campaign; (2) minimizing the actual and perceived influence of campaign donations on public officials; and (3) reducing the potential for actual and perceived corruption as a result of off-year campaign contributions.

You will note that the Commission's endorsement differs in two respects from the proposals in your memorandum. First, the Commission was of the opinion that permitting fundraising to begin one year before the primary was preferable to permitting it to begin on January 1 of the election year. And second, the Commission did not believe it had enough information to determine whether $5,000 was the appropriate level at which to cap rollovers between campaign committees. Instead, the Commission opted to endorse "minimal" transfers, leaving it to the Council and the Mayor to determine the appropriate level at which to cap such transfers should it wish to do so. For additional details on the Commission's reasoning, I would encourage you to view the Commission meeting on the Seattle Channel. I am reluctant to attempt to characterize here the various views of the seven commissioners.

700 Fifth Avenue, Suite 4010, PO Box 94729, Seattle, WA 98124-4729
Tel: (206) 684-8500, Fax: (206) 684-8590, E-Mail: ethicsandelections@seattle.gov, Web: http://www.seattle.gov/ethics
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If the Commission can be of further service to you, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Very truly yours,

Wayne Barnett
Executive Director

cc: All other Councilmembers
Mayor Mike McGinn
City Attorney Peter Holmes