

CITY OF SEATTLE

ORDINANCE 127379

COUNCIL BILL 121130

AN ORDINANCE relating to the Ethics Code; establishing reporting and disclosure requirements for political consultants; prohibiting political consultants from providing political consulting services without reporting; adding a new Section 4.16.072 to the Seattle Municipal Code; and amending Section 4.16.030 of the Seattle Municipal Code.

WHEREAS, the integrity of city government depends on public confidence that decisions are made in the public interest without undue influence from private interests; and

WHEREAS, consultant arrangements that blur the lines between policy advice and political campaign strategy undermine democratic governance and create unfair electoral advantages; and

WHEREAS, taxpayer-funded consultants should not concurrently profit from private political work that may conflict with their government duties; NOW, THEREFORE,

BE IT ORDAINED BY THE CITY OF SEATTLE AS FOLLOWS:

Section 1. The City finds and declares:

A. The City of Seattle is committed to ethical, open, transparent, and accountable government.

B. In furtherance of that commitment, the City has a wide-ranging Ethics Code in Chapter 4.16 of the Seattle Municipal Code (SMC).

C. Chapter 4.16 SMC does not specifically address political consultants or businesses providing political consulting services, important categories of persons and entities that may influence public policy beyond the public's awareness or oversight.

D. City elected officials, specifically the Mayor, City Councilmembers, and the City Attorney, must uphold the public trust and confidence in government by being ethical and

transparent in policy decisions. Candidates for City elected offices, City elected officials, and campaigns for City ballot propositions engage political consultants as advisors.

E. In providing political consulting services, which include campaign management and political strategy services, a political consultant or consulting business has access to nonpublic information related to elected official clients.

F. Registered lobbyists must file reports pursuant to Chapter 2.06 SMC, which makes their relationships with elected officials more publicly transparent than the elected officials' unreported relationships with their political consultant(s). Given consultants' access and potential influence over the City's decision makers, it is important to expand transparency by establishing registration and reporting requirements for political consultants.

G. The new regulations in this ordinance build on similar regulations in Portland and San Francisco.

H. The new regulations do not regulate the content and viewpoint of the services provided to City elected officials.

Section 2. Section 4.16.030 of the Seattle Municipal Code, last amended by Ordinance 125589, is amended as follows:

4.16.030 Definitions

As used in this ~~((chapter, the following terms shall have the meanings indicated))~~ Chapter 4.16:

* * *

"Ballot proposition" has the same meaning as in Section 2.04.010.

~~((("Board of Ethics" or "Board" or "Commission" means the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission established by Section 3.70.010.))~~

"Candidate" has the same meaning as in Section 2.04.010.

1 “City” means The City of Seattle.

2 “City agency” means every department, office, board, commission, or committee of the
3 City, or any subdivision thereof, but excludes public corporations and ad hoc advisory
4 committees.

5 * * *

6 “City officer” means every individual elected or appointed to an office in any City
7 agency, whether such individual is paid or unpaid.

8 “City volunteer” means someone who volunteers services to the City.

9 “Commission” means the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission established by
10 Section 3.70.010.

11 * * *

12 (~~“City volunteer” means someone who volunteers services to the City.~~)

13 “Elected official” has the same meaning as in Section 2.04.010.

14 “Election campaign” means any campaign in support of or in opposition to a candidate
15 for election to public office of the City and any campaign in support of or in opposition to a City
16 ballot proposition.

17 “Employee member of an advisory committee” means a paid City officer or employee
18 who serves on an advisory committee by virtue of their paid position with the City.

19 “Executive Director” means the Executive Director of the Seattle Ethics and Elections
20 Commission or designee.

21 * * *

22 “Legislative matter” means any enacted or introduced (~~(council bill)~~) Council Bill,
23 ordinance, resolution, (~~((clerk file))~~) Clerk File, ballot (~~((measure))~~) proposition, or (~~((charter))~~)

1 Charter amendment. A legislative matter may include a possible future ~~((council bill))~~ Council
2 Bill, ordinance, resolution, ~~((clerk file))~~ Clerk File, ballot ~~((measure))~~ proposition, or ~~((charter))~~
3 Charter amendment, if the possible future matter has been discussed on the public record at an
4 open public meeting of the City Council or one of its committees.

5 * * *

6 “Person” means an individual, association, corporation, or other legal entity.

7 “Political consultant” means a person that provides compensated political consulting
8 services to: an elected official; a candidate for City office; or the authorized campaign committee
9 registered with the Washington Public Disclosure Commission for a City ballot proposition.
10 “Political consultant” does not include: a City employee; an accountant, attorney, pollster, or
11 professional fundraiser who provides only accounting, legal, polling, or fundraising services,
12 respectively; or a vendor or sub-vendor who supplies goods or services other than political
13 consulting services for an election campaign.

14 “Political consulting services” means compensated actions in City campaign management
15 and political strategy services, including but not limited to: advocacy and strategy; political
16 polling; advising or assisting in voter contact strategies and services; advising in media strategy,
17 buying, and advertisement; providing candidate development, policy training, political image
18 consulting, and designing, implementing, and analyzing polls and surveys; performing issues
19 research and opposition research; developing and assisting in strategic communication such as
20 news releases, talking points, and speech writing; and advising on negative information handling
21 and political crisis management.

22 “Quarter” has the meaning as in Section 2.06.010.

Section 3. A new Section 4.16.072 is added to the Seattle Municipal Code as follows:

4.16.072 Political consultants

A. The purpose of this Section 4.16.072 is to prevent conflicts of interest and enhance transparency by prohibiting political consultants from engaging in certain activities and otherwise requiring political consultants to comply with registration and reporting requirements. This Section 4.16.072 does not regulate the content and viewpoint of services provided regarding an election campaign.

B. Within 15 days after providing any political consulting services, a political consultant shall register with the Executive Director. The registration shall include at least:

1. If the political consultant is an individual, the name and phone contact information of both the individual and any of the individual's associated entities that provide political consulting services on the matter prompting registration;

2. If the political consultant is an entity, the names and phone contact information of its principals, employees, and contractors that provide political consulting services on the matter prompting registration;

3. The name of the candidate or elected official to whom the political consultant provided political consulting services, or, if the political consultant services were provided to the principal campaign committee for a ballot proposition, the identity of the proposition; and

4. The date when services commenced.

If any information in the registration changes, the political consultant shall update that information within 15 days of the change.

C. When a political consultant who is required to register under this Section 4.16.072 later terminates all political consulting services provided regarding an election campaign, the

1 political consultant shall file a termination statement with the Executive Director within 15 days
2 of termination.

3 D. All information submitted in any statement or registration required by this Section
4 4.16.072 will be posted on the Commission's website within five days after receipt.

5 E. A person shall not submit false, fraudulent, or misleading information in any statement
6 or registration, including but not limited to misrepresenting the scope or nature of services
7 provided or the identity of clients to whom services are provided.

8 F. The Commission's rulemaking powers for this Section 4.16.072 include but are not
9 limited to prescribing forms for registration and reporting, determining the method for filing,
10 conducting appropriate inquiry and review of reports or statements for completeness and
11 accuracy, and establishing fees for late filing or non-filing.

12 G. A political consultant shall not perform political consulting services without reporting
13 as required by this Section 4.16.072.

14 H. An elected official shall not knowingly use a political consultant that is in violation of
15 this Section 4.16.072.

16 I. When accepting a City consulting contract, all consultants must declare in that contract
17 that they are not in violation of the provisions of this section 4.16.072. Within 15 days of
18 accepting a City consulting contract, a person that is performing work as a political consultant
19 for a City election campaign must disclose to the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission
20 (SEEC) that they have accepted a City consulting contract and disclose the City department for
21 which they are consulting.

22 J. In addition to other enforcement provisions in this Chapter 4.16 a contract with the
23 City that is in violation of this Section 4.16.072 is void. Upon determination by the Executive

1 Director that such a contract is void, the Executive Director is authorized to pursue collection of
2 payments made by the City related to the contract.

3 Section 4. The City Council commits that, if it again takes up amendments to the Code of
4 Ethics, then it will consult with the Seattle Ethics and Elections Commission (SEEC) on national
5 best practices to delegate rulemaking authority over ethics regulation to the SEEC and thereby
6 strengthen public trust and government accountability. This work should produce greater SEEC
7 rulemaking authority over ethics regulations applicable to elected officials and strengthen the
8 authority of the SEEC.

9 Section 5. The provisions of this ordinance are declared to be separate and severable. The
10 invalidity of any clause, sentence, paragraph, subdivision, section, or portion of this ordinance,
11 or the invalidity of its application to any person or circumstance, does not affect the validity of
12 the remainder of this ordinance or the validity of its application to other persons or
13 circumstances.

Section 6. This ordinance shall take effect as provided by Seattle Municipal Code
Sections 1.04.020 and 1.04.070.

Passed by the City Council the 16th day of December, 2025,
and signed by me in open session in authentication of its passage this 16th day of
December, 2025.



President _____ of the City Council

☐ Approved / ☒ returned unsigned / ☐ vetoed this 29th day of December, 2025.

Returned Unsigned by Mayor

Bruce A. Harrell, Mayor

Filed by me this 29th day of December, 2025.



Scheereen Dedman, City Clerk

(Seal)