

Minutes of the Municipal Officials and Officers Ethics Commission Meeting

April 7, 2025, 3:00 p.m.

City Hall, Council Committee Room, 10th Floor

Present:

Bill Geary, Chair  
Earnest Rouse  
Carlos Estes  
Ramona Farris  
Bob Bjerg

Staff:

Katie Chandler, Senior Associate City Attorney  
Howard Rice, City Clerk's Office  
LaKeshia Sanders, Ethics Compliance Officer

- I. **Approval of Minutes** – February 24: Minutes approved unanimously
- II. Approval of Opinions
  - a. Councilperson employment
  - b. Supervisor rental property
- III. **Report of the Ethics Compliance Officer**
- IV. The Director of Communications for the City of Kansas City, Missouri, is scheduled to speak at an upcoming conference in Las Vegas. An informal opinion issued by the Ethics Commission concluded that if the engagement is paid, it must be disclosed by the city ethics guidelines. However, if the engagement is unpaid, there is likely no conflict of interest and no disclosure is required.
- V. A separate matter arose involving a city employee in the Communications Office who owns a private recording studio and offered to provide services the city needs at no cost. The Ethics Commission informally advised that accepting the offer would constitute a conflict of interest. If the city wishes to use the employee's business, it must pay the same rate any member of the public would be charged. Additionally, if the employee is to receive any compensation, they are required to appear before the Ethics Commission to provide further relevant details before any agreement is made.
  - i. Cherae Honeycutt, City Spokesperson for Kansas City, requested an advisory opinion from the Ethics Commission regarding a proposal she introduced to install Safe Haven Baby Boxes at fire departments throughout the Kansas City area. She sought the Commission's guidance before delivering public testimony on the matter at an upcoming Neighborhood Planning & Development Committee meeting.

Honeycutt has the backing of several councilmembers for her initiative, which is considered part of a special assignment delegated through the City Manager's Office. A motion was made and approved to allow her public testimony, as there is no indication of a conflict of interest in her involvement.

- ii. Summary of hotline calls: **Case 2025-3639** involves a Housing Department employee who may have offered preferential treatment related to a grant program. The investigator has reached out for further information but has not received a response yet.
- iii. **Case 2025-3641** also relates to the Housing Department. A former city employee involved in the selection process is now a manager at one of the shelters that was ultimately selected. Although the individual is no longer employed by the city, the investigator has requested additional information to assess any conflict or impropriety.
- iv. There were additional hotline calls received, but the investigator has requested to withhold those details until they can be presented with full context.
- v. **Case 2025-4664** concerns a serious allegation involving the City Council. A caller reported that a councilmember may have requested a quid pro quo on behalf of the Local 42 Fire Union in connection to the upcoming Public Safety Sales Tax vote. The investigator has contacted the reporter for more details and plans to reach out to the councilmember in question.
- vi. **Case 2025-4663** involves the Health Department and includes allegations of nepotism, embezzlement, employee silencing, and favoritism in hiring. This case remains under active investigation.
- vii. **Case 2025-3658** originates from the Aviation Department and concerns an employee (Worker A) who loaned \$1,400 to another employee (Worker B). As both are mutual colleagues with no subordinate relationship, it does not appear to raise ethical concerns.
- viii. **Case 2025-3655** is based on information and belief that an elected official failed to report gifts. The individual who submitted the tip has been contacted and informed that the case is currently in progress. Notably, there is a lawsuit pending against the city, in which the petitioner alleges the Ethics Commission was previously informed but took no action. The investigation continues.
- ix. A separate matter involving workplace violence in the Finance Department has been forwarded to Human Resources for resolution.

- x. **Case 2025-3645** involves an employee who is scheduling workers' compensation therapy sessions during paid work hours, taking a fire truck out of service while doing so, and allegedly threatening retaliation against anyone who reports it. This case has also been referred to Human Resources, as it does not appear to rise to the level of an ethics violation.
- xi. Follow-ups from prior meetings: There was a request for representation from Mayors Corp at the current Ethics Commission meeting. However, the organization declined to attend, citing insufficient meeting notice. Instead, they requested a separate meeting with either the ethics investigator or the commission's attorney for clarification before the next public session.

The attorney representing Mayors Corp expressed interest in better understanding the concerns raised. In response, the ethics investigator will present at the next meeting a report detailing how the city's ethics code and state statutes regarding the reporting of gifts apply to the allegations that surfaced both in the press and through hotline tips.

The Commission emphasized that it is not concerned with how Mayors Corp operates internally, but rather with the lack of reported gifts from the nonprofit to public officials. The central issue is why these gifts were not disclosed, and how that omission should be addressed under city ethics rules.

The Chair of the Ethics Commission proposed that at the next meeting, the Commission should vote on whether to open an official investigation into the matter. Before making this determination, the Commission stated that it needs basic clarifying information.

Historically, Mayors Corp has been used to fund investigations, hearings, and programs that support city initiatives outside the scope of the city's in-house expertise. However, it is now reportedly being used to purchase Super Bowl tickets, raising new concerns about potential misuse and lack of transparency.

The city charter grants the ethics investigator subpoena power, though the Commission has chosen, as a courtesy, to first request a voluntary meeting with Mayors Corp. At this point, only legal counsel for Mayors Corp will speak on the organization's behalf, and the Ethics Commission will

determine at a future meeting whether further investigation is warranted.

xii.

- b. **Ethics Training Update:** The ethics investigator has received an updated report on employee completion of required ethics training. As of now, the completion rate stands at 63%, an increase from the previously reported 57%, though the numbers remain somewhat skewed due to the inclusion of past employees no longer with the city. The deadline for training completion was March 23, 2025, marking 60 days from the initial notification. Human Resources has been contacted regarding how to proceed with employees who failed to comply. The Ethics Commission Chair has requested a department-level breakdown showing individual completion rates and the actions taken by department directors to enforce compliance with the ethics code. Despite being on leave, the investigator continued working to support training completion, including placing digital flyers in city elevators and sending multiple reminders. At the next meeting, the investigator will report on what measures are being taken to address noncompliant department leadership, and will forward the updated list of completions to the commissioners for review.

c. Additional Updates

VI. **City Auditor Update:** No update presented

VII. **Old Business:** No Old Business

VIII. **New Business:** Some Ethics Commissioners have reported difficulty accessing their official email accounts, specifically due to challenges with the two-step authentication process. A suggestion has been made to remove two-factor authentication to simplify access; however, it remains unclear if this is feasible. Cybersecurity protocols are standardized citywide, and exceptions for a single department may compromise the integrity of the city's security framework. The matter is under review to determine whether a secure yet more accessible alternative can be implemented without undermining established cybersecurity requirements.

IX. **Next Meeting – April 28, 2025**

**The meeting was adjourned.**