

Measure D reforms move ahead

Council panel OKs strengthening of Ethics Commission

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SAN DIEGO — Nearly two years after San Diego voters broadly approved strengthening the city Ethics Commission, a key City Council committee has approved the municipal code changes needed to implement the reforms. The council's Rules Committee unanimously agreed to amend the city code to match changes to the city charter that more than 70% of voters endorsed in November 2024.

Council President Joe LaCava, who worked with former City Attorney Mara Elliott and former Ethics Committee Executive Director Sharon Spivak to place Measure D before voters, said the reforms will bolster good governance and improve accountability across City Hall.

"Advancing this item reflects the culmination of my support for Measure D and the need to implement the will of the voters," LaCava said in a statement. "These proposed reforms strengthen the Ethics Commission and ensure it has the independence guaranteed by the voters to provide oversight of city officials."

First created in 2001, the San Diego Ethics Commission enforces the city ethics ordinance and campaign rules and also provides compliance training to current and incoming city officials.

The seven-member board of commissioners is empowered to audit campaigns and candidates and to investigate potential violations.

They also can issue fines and non-monetary penalties to violators and regularly post their findings on the city of San Diego website.

After the oversight panel experienced serious delays in seating new members and other issues, voters agreed to award the commission more control over its own practices.

The charter amendment that resulted from Measure D authorized the commission to enact its own policies and regulations, rather than have them

crafted and approved by the City Council.

It also granted the commission authority to choose and appoint its own executive director and also awarded the executive the power to open investigations without securing advance approval from commissioners.

The Rules Committee action follows through with changes to the municipal code that shift the commission's subpoena authority from commissioners to the executive director, and requires the City Council to provide funding "sufficient" to support commission operations.

Bryn Kirvin, the former city prosecutor who succeeded Spivak as commission executive early last year, said she appreciates the committee's approval of the proposed ordinance.

The amendments "will allow our staff to work with the City Attorney's Office to make appropriate amendments to the municipal code based on the voters' passage of Measure D in 2024 as well as to make changes to reflect operational needs and best practices," Kirvin said. "These changes will further strengthen the independence of the Ethics Commission and modernize this action to reflect the day-to-day operations of the Ethics Commission."

A spokesperson for the council president said there is no date set for when the proposed municipal code changes will go before the full council.