

**ETHICS BOARD MEETING
MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC SESSION**

The Ethics Board (“Board”) met on Wednesday, February 14, 2024, at 2:34 pm by conference call via Microsoft Teams.

Call to Order & Statement Concerning the Recording of the Public Session: Chair Stephan Fogleman called the Board meeting to order with four Board members, a quorum, present.

Chair Fogleman read the following statement:

All participants in the Public Session of the Board meeting acknowledge and consent to the video and audio recording of the Public Session and the publication of the recording on the Board’s website and social media accounts.

Statement Concerning the Administrative Session of the January Board Meeting: Chair Fogleman read the following statement:

Per the Open Meetings Act, the Board discloses that it adjourned its virtual open meeting on January 10, 2024 to enter the Administrative Session at approximately 3:05 PM. Four Board members were present. Members discussed administrative matters including complaints.

The Board may need to close some or all of this meeting to preserve the confidentiality mandated by the Ethics Code or as otherwise authorized by the State Open Meetings Act. Likewise, upon adjournment of the Open Session, the Board may reconvene for an Administrative Session to discuss non-public, administrative functions of the Board.

Approval of Written Minutes for the Public Session of the January 10, 2024 Board Meeting: With a vote of 4-0, the minutes were approved.

Charitable/Governmental Gift Solicitation Waiver Application – BMORE Beautiful-Environmental Control Board: Executive Director Brittany Vendryes shared that the Environmental Control Board is home to the adjudication process for environmental citations and BMORE Beautiful. BMORE Beautiful provides resources to communities and organizations that want to beautify their neighborhoods. Director Vendryes explained that grants are provided through a few programs, including the CARE-A-LOT program. CARE-A-LOT is funded by the City and donations would go toward equipment. CARE-A-LOT provides neighborhoods with to take care of vacant City-owned lots. Director Vendryes explained that lots are visited up to 11 times throughout the growing season and that it is much cheaper for the City than sending DPW for maintenance. Director Vendryes clarified for the Board that the plan is to have a donation link on the Baltimore Civic Fund website and QR codes so people could donate to the CARE-A-LOT.

Board member Sampson questioned if there was a lending program (for equipment). In response, Director Vendryes explained that the ECB has a tool bank; however, equipment has been loaned

and sometimes lost or never returned. Board member Newman inquired how long the program has been in existence. Director Vendryes responded that CARE-A-LOT has been with the Environmental Control Board since 2017-2018 under former Mayor Pugh but did exist before, maybe under DPW and before this with DOP. Director Vendryes continued to explain that the program is also used for a diversion program where people who violate certain provisions of the City Code may abate their first citation. Board member Newman asked if there was a process to follow grantees' progress. Director Vendryes responded that grantees provide progress pictures every time they visit a lot and by reports. Board member McCauley commended Director Vendryes on the waiver's application. The Board approved the waiver application with a vote of 4-0.

Charitable/Governmental Gift Solicitation Waiver Application – Youth Summer Collaborative: Summer Field Trips- Councilman Zeke Cohen’s Office: Ms. Master explained that this was a repeat request from last year. Ms. Master informed the Board that last April, at an education and youth Committee hearing, the school system announced 4-day weeks in the summer for student learning (Monday through Thursday). Philanthropic, civic, and cultural institutional partners and Council member Cohen's office stepped in to make up for the lack of Friday programming. Last year, the Open Society Foundation provided about 73 unique field trips and \$30,000 in microgrants. Several hundred in-kind tickets were donated by cultural institutions around the City (inc. the Aquarium, Port Discovery, the Zoo, and the Museum of Science and Industry). Board member Newman asked who applied for grants. Ms. Master explained that last year, you had to be a member of the youth summer collaborative, a Consortium of youth-serving nonprofits. These local nonprofits register with Baltimore's Promise, which runs the youth summer collaborative. Ms. Master shared feedback from institutions that were given grants for field trips last year. Board member McCauley expressed concern about how a controlled donor may feel they better contribute to stay in Councilman Cohen's good graces. Chair Fogleman interceded and explained that the Board has considered many gift solicitation waivers and confirmed that it does help when an elected official is associated with a cause. Chair Fogleman questioned if there would be optics of impropriety specific to this waiver. Ms. Master explained that Council member Cohen exclusively made asks last year due to the timing being so close to summer. Discussion with the Director of MOCFS was held to determine how the program would not be associated with Council member Cohen in the long term. The Board discussed the waiver further. With a vote of 4-0, the Board approved the waiver.

Request for Guidance – CIAA Tournament Suite and Tickets Donation – Mayor’s Office – Mayor’s Office – Decision: Director Amberger provided the Board with a summary of the request for guidance, which first had been brought to the Board’s attention during its January meeting. Director Amberger pointed out that Ethics Opinion 22-002, passed in April of 2022, where the Board determined that sports events are separate from cultural events if the elected official will

not be performing a function connected with constituent services. In that Advisory Opinion, the Board outlined that free tickets or admission to a sporting event are likely offered solely by virtue of the official's Prestige of Office. Acceptance of the free ticket or admission therefore would be prohibited by § 6-36a of the City Ethics Law. The Board discussed the matter further. With a vote of 4-0, the Board denied the request.

Staff Update: Director Amberger provided the following metrics for December on the February staff's recent work:

- **Help Desk**

- 42 help desk requests were received and resolved by Board staff in December.
 - 1 help desk requests were from lobbyists.
 - 2 help desk requests were concerning gift solicitation waivers.
 - 26 help desk requests were concerning financial disclosure statements.
 - 1 help desk requests were ethics inquiries.
 - 8 help desk requests were concerning the Ethics Training.
 - 2 help desk requests were administrative (question about deadlines, forms, etc).
 - 2 help desk requests were not within the Board's jurisdiction and were referred elsewhere.
- 74 help desk requests were received and resolved by Board staff in January.
 - 37 help desk requests were from lobbyists.
 - 0 help desk requests were concerning gift solicitation waivers.
 - 19 help desk requests were concerning financial disclosure statements.
 - 13 help desk requests were ethics inquiries.
 - 2 help desk requests were concerning the Ethics Training.
 - 2 help desk requests were administrative (question about deadlines, forms, etc).
 - 1 help desk requests were not within the Board's jurisdiction and were referred elsewhere.

- **Ethics Training**

- 56 people completed the Ethics Training in December.
- 19 people completed the Ethics Training in January
- FY24 attendees: 222

- **Complaints**

- FY24 Complaints: 14
 - Open:
 - Dismissed: 14

- o 1 new complaint.

- **Secondary Employment Waivers**
 - o Waiver Requests: 1
 - o FY24 Granted Waivers: 0

- **Gift Solicitation Waivers**
 - o 2 gift solicitation waiver applications were submitted to the Board for the February 14, 2024 Board meeting.
 - o 0 gift solicitation waivers expired since the last Board meeting.
 - o FY24 Active Waivers: 14
 - o FY24 Expired/Rescinded Waivers: 15

- **Financial Disclosure Statements**
 - o DHR assisted Ethics Board staff with supplemental lists from several agencies.
 - o Ethics Board staff will be sending agency/board contacts an email notifying them of the April 30th Financial Disclosure filing deadline.

- **Lobbying**
 - o 72 Registered lobbyists so far this year. Tomorrow is the deadline for new registrations due to website issues.

The Public Session adjourned at 3:21 pm.