

ETHICS SAN MATEO

DEDICATED TO TRUTH, TRANSPARENCY AND ETHICAL CONDUCT IN CITY GOVERNMENT

March 30, 2023

Statement of Position

Regarding City Council's Refusal to Study a Proposed Ethics Committee While Approving a Study to Give Themselves a Raise

On February 11, 2023, the San Mateo City Council held a public study session to consider and discuss goals. The meeting's intended purpose is published on the city's website: *"Every year the San Mateo City Council holds its annual goal setting meeting (a.k.a. "Blue Sky" meeting) to establish its priorities and strategic initiatives for the City of San Mateo."*

The meeting was held at the College of San Mateo, open to the public but with limited space and was not streamed or recorded by the city. Video streaming or recordings may have been done by audience members, as announced by the council. There is no video record of the meeting in the city's publicly accessible archives and the meeting minutes do not contain any detail of the public comments or council and staff discussions.

Public comment was limited to one minute per speaker, however a speaker from the local chapter of the Silicon Valley Bicycle Coalition (SVBC), was allowed to make a lengthy slide presentation. Ethics San Mateo notes that, as reported in their 2020 Form 990, SVBC had annual revenue of over \$1.8m, assets of \$1.375m, and had paid salaries of over \$800k.

Overall, Ethics San Mateo strongly objects to the marginalization of the comments by San Mateo residents that resulted from the one-minute time limit. It appears that well-funded advocacy groups continue to be given more time and attention.

Two items that were discussed by the City Council are of significant concern to Ethics San Mateo:

1. Councilmember Newsom presented his recommendation that the council study the establishment of what he called an Ethics Committee, considering recent events which have brought the matter of ethical conduct to the forefront. Newsom brought up specific matters which he felt indicated the need for some form of ethics oversight to become part of the city's governance. Only he and Councilmember Nash supported the item. The City Manager objected, and the City Attorney stated it was not necessary. Councilmember Hedges commented that he would rather handle ethical breaches "over a cup of coffee".

As a result of these discussions, the item (simply to **discuss** an ethics oversight function) was not placed on the "to-do" list.

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A video of this discussion is available.

2. An existing, but not yet accomplished item from a previous “Blue Sky” session, was a study to provide a raise for City Council members and commissioners. The item was given a priority without significant discussion or objection.

(Note this does not have any relationship to city employees (Civil Servants) and their wages.)

Ethics San Mateo finds that the prioritization of increased pay for council members and commissioners, and the rejection of ethics oversight, is not in the best interest of our city. Our city officials are expected to serve the residents of the city first. That should be their highest priority, while self-enrichment should be their lowest. ESM urges the City Council to revisit their priorities and reconsider establishing an ethics commission comprised of qualified residents with power derived from either rule established by council, ordinance, or charter provision to ensure truth, transparency and ethical conduct in our city government.