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**APPROVED MINUTES OF
ETHICS COMMISSION OF THE UNIFIED GOVERNMENT
Division 18, Wyandotte County Courthouse
710 N. 7th Street, Kansas City, KS 66101**

January 18, 2024

Regular Meeting:

Roll Call:

- X Member Ricky Bragg
- X Member Ian Tomasic
- X Member Joseph Wittman
- X Member Adrienne Ford
- X Ruth Benien, Administrator

X (Present) E (Excused) U (Unexcused)

Call to Order:

Chairperson Bragg called the Meeting to order at 4:08 p.m. in the Wyandotte County Courthouse, Law Library, 9th Floor of the Wyandotte County Courthouse. Commissioners Tomasic, Wittman and Ford were present. Administrator Benien was present.

Public Comment: No members of the general public were present.

Old Business:

a). Approval of Minutes:

The Minutes of the December 14, 2023 meeting were reviewed and approved. Commissioner Ford moved for approval with a second by Commissioner Wittman. The Motion passed unanimously.

b). Monthly Administrator's Report:

Administrator Benien provided the Monthly report for the time period from December 1, 2023 through December 31, 2023 which outlined the training provided in the months and scheduled and the nature of the ethics opinions rendered and complaints received.

Continuing Ethics training presentations by video have and are being provided by the Human Resources department for the police and fire department and are also used for a section of the sheriff's department and water treatment plant due to the shifts in each department. Continuing Ethics training is being transitioned back to in person for all others.

A special training session is to be scheduled for Mayor and staff and any remaining UG Ethics Commissioners still needing training.. Ethics training will also be scheduled for the newly created citizen's committees created by the Mayor. A liaison for the Mayor is working on scheduling the same. A Basic Ethics Training session was held on December 12, 2023 for the newly elected UG Commissioners and one other who had not yet received such training. A Basic Ethics Training session was held on December 21, 2023 at Memorial Hall and was attended by UG Ethics Commissioner Wittman. All UG Ethics Commissioners have now participated in and received the required Ethics Training. A Continuing Ethics Training, in-person, is scheduled for January 8, 2024. A Basic Ethics Training is scheduled for January 26, 2024 at the Police Academy for the new cadet class.

A request from the UG Legal Department was received to provide UG Ethics training for the Advisory Council on Aging. The same was coordinated and materials provided in advance for review. The training is still awaiting rescheduling as the legal liaison has left the legal department.

In the coming year a rewrite and update are planned for the UG Ethic's training materials and video once the amendments are approved.

Fifteen new complaints were received from December 1, 2023 through December 31, 2023. Eight email complaints were received. Five hotline complaints and two written complaints were received. Fifty six complaints are pending awaiting additional information, referral or review. The two ongoing, recurring complaints from this point are simply going to be opened and closed if a new complaint is received. Six complaints were resolved and closed due to lack of jurisdiction and referred. Two new advisory opinions were verbally requested at a training session from December 1, 2023 to December 31, 2023. Two verbal opinions were provided, no formal opinion requested. Twenty two requests for advisory opinion are pending. No new requests for information were received or information provided.

A request to have bold face used on the "closed" status when a matter is closed in the Monthly Reports has been added.

c). Status of Ethics Code Revisions and Amendments and Schedule for Review:

History: Per instruction from the August, 2023 meeting, Administrator Benien contacted the Mayor's Chief of Staff and requested that a date be provided for placement of the Ethics Amendments of the UG Commission Agenda. Administrator Benien on,

September 21, 2023 she was advised by Irene Caudillo, Chief of Staff, that her request had been received and that the Mayor wanted to meet with Administrator Benien. It was agreed that Administrator Benien would schedule such a meeting as soon as possible and Chairperson Bragg agreed to attend. A meeting was scheduled and held between the Ethics Administrator, Ethics Commission Chairperson Bragg, the Mayor, and two liaisons, John D. Rios and Lavert Murray on October 3, 2023. The Mayor subsequently agreed and did appear at the November 12, 2023 Ethics Commission meeting to make a presentation and a specific request for additional additions, if any, he would like to see added.

Current Status: Subsequent to the November 12, 2023 the Mayor's Office though his Chief of Staff provided an email with various points he wanted to see considered. No written language or proposals were provided. Prior to the December Ethics Commission meeting the Ethics Administrator communicated with the Chief of Staff to obtain more information and clarification and subsequently received notice that one of the requests relating to certain disclosures was withdrawn for now. The remaining topics were discussed by the UG Ethics Commissioners and the issues addressed. It was agreed to take the same under advisement and specifically to review the sections of the UG Ethics Code with respect to disclosures and disqualification and the proposed amendments already made in light of the requests. The intent was to take a final vote on the amendments, with or without inclusion of the additional topics, at the January UG Ethics Meeting. The review took longer than expected and where no specific language had been provided by the Mayor's Office for the requested amendments, the Commission decided to consider and review the proposals until the February, 2024 meeting. In meantime Commissioners Tomasic and Ford will attempt to put together some specific language and proposals for the disclosure and conflict of interest sections of the UG Ethics Code.

d). Ethics Training and Schedule:

Basic Ethics Training has been held and/or scheduled as outlined above. The intent is to return the majority of Continuing Ethics training sessions to in-person and the first is currently set for January 8, 2024. It was cancelled due to lack of sign-up. The 2024 Ethics Training sessions will be scheduled during the month of January, 2024. Generally there is one Basic Ethics Training held each quarter and one Continuing Ethics.

New Business:

The Ethics Administrator advised that Tom Wiss, the current Legislative Auditor resigned effective December 20, 2023. He has been replaced in that position by Reed Partridge from the Legislative Auditor's Office. As a result of Mr. Partridge's appointment to that position, his wife, UG Ethics Commissioner Kimberly Partridge resigned her position effective December 14, 2023. The normal process for selection of a new UG Ethics Commissioner has been commenced and the application deadline is February 2, 2024. Legislative Auditor Wiss and UG Ethics Commissioner Partridge were recognized and thanked for their service.

As always, Ethics Administrator Benien tries at each meeting to cover a limited provision of the UG Ethics Code to better help the UG Ethics Commissioners understand its provisions or answer questions they may have. No particular provision was covered this month due to the continued consideration and review of the proposed Ethics Amendments.

An updated copy of the Political Memorandum was prepared and forwarded to UG Legal and the UG Court Clerk for distribution dated October 10, 2023 for the upcoming general election. A copy is provided to all employees and officials and posted on the UG Ethics website.

Arrangements have been made and instructions provided for the new commissioners to obtain badges allowing for entry into the Court House and City Hall through other exits.

The next monthly meeting will be on February 8, 2024, in person, at the Wyandotte County Courthouse in the Law Library. Masks may be required for courthouse entry for future entry.

Executive Session:

No Executive Session was held.

Adjournment:

Motion for adjournment by Commissioner Tomasic

Seconded by Commissioner Ford

Motion passed unanimously.

Meeting Adjourned at 5:46 p.m.

Next Meeting is February 8, 2024 at 4:00 p.m. in person.

Respectfully Submitted,

s/Ruth M. Benien

Ruth M. Benien, UG Ethics Administrator