



WATCHDOG

San Diego ethics panel loses one commissioner, reducing regulatory board to six members



San Diego City Hall. (John Gastaldo / The San Diego Union-Tribune)

Mayor Todd Gloria to select a nominee from pool of candidates put forward by City Council and City Attorney

BY JEFF MCDONALD

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Barely two months ago, the San Diego Ethics Commission reached its full complement of appointees for the first time in years.

Now the seven-member panel that reviews complaints and metes out discipline for candidates, elected officials and others who violate city campaign and lobbying rules is once again at less than full capacity.

Commissioner Thomas Hebrank announced his resignation from the city ethics commission last week, reducing the board membership to six. The notice of vacancy posted by the San Diego City Clerk's Office did not provide a reason for the departure.

The resignation, which was announced last Thursday, is not expected to affect the commission's ability to perform its duties. Earlier departures and lengthy delays in filling seats left the panel in July with just four members, meaning it could not legally issue any penalties.

But a trio of nominations put forward by Mayor Todd Gloria and approved by the City Council in the fall brought the commission to its full capacity for the first time since Kevin Faulconer served as mayor.

"Thanks to recent appointments, the commission now has six members, so the vacancy will not affect its ability to advance its work," Executive Director Sharon Spivak said.

Hebrank, a certified public accountant and principal with the E3 Advisors firm, was due to serve until June 2025.

Under city rules, appointments to the ethics panel are selected by the mayor from a pool of nominees made by the council and city attorney. Appointees must be confirmed by the council.

At least three of the seven commission members must be lawyers and members of the State Bar in good standing.

Two or more members must have been candidates for public office or held high-level positions in a campaign for elective office.

Also, no more than three members may be registered to vote with the same political party.

“We are grateful for Commissioner Hebrank’s dedicated service to the Ethics Commission,” Spivak said. “His resignation means that the panel has lost its only remaining Republican.”

Due to its complicated nomination formula, finding appropriate nominees is not always easy.

In September, Gloria nominated former Sheriff Bill Gore to the Ethics Commission. The nomination was broadly opposed, however, due to Gore’s record of deaths in San Diego County jails during the 13 years he served as the elected county sheriff.

Some 170 people died while they were in sheriff’s custody between 2009 and 2022, when Gore was in charge of the county jails.

The former sheriff withdrew from consideration for the job in the wake of complaints that he was not appropriate to serve on the commission.



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