

**OFFICIAL MEETING MINUTES  
OF THE  
PALM BEACH COUNTY COMMISSION ON ETHICS (COE)  
PALM BEACH COUNTY, FLORIDA  
JANUARY 9, 2025**

**THURSDAY  
1:30 P.M.**

**WEISMAN GOVERNMENTAL CENTER  
COMMISSION CHAMBERS**

**MEMBERS:**

Kristin A. Vara-Garcia, Chair  
Michael S. Kridel, Vice Chair  
Peter L. Cruise  
Michael H. Kugler  
Rodney G. Romano

**COMMISSION ON ETHICS STAFF PRESENT:**

Rhonda Giger, General Counsel  
Mark Higgs, COE Investigator II  
Abigail Irizarry, COE Investigator II  
Christie E. Kelley, COE Director III  
Gina A. Levesque, COE Intake and Compliance Manager  
S. Lizabeth Martin, COE Communication and Education Manager

**CLERK OF THE CIRCUIT COURT & COMPTROLLER'S OFFICE STAFF PRESENT:**

Chayanne Munet, Deputy Clerk

**I. Call to Order**

The chair called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m.

**II. Pledge of Allegiance**

The commissioners recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

**III. Roll Call**

Present: Chair Kristin A. Vara-Garcia, Vice Chair Michael S. Kridel,  
Commissioner Peter L. Cruise, and Commissioner Rodney G.  
Romano

Absent: Commissioner Michael H. Kugler

**IV. Introductory Remarks**

The Commissioners wished everyone a happy new year.

**V. Approval of Minutes from December 5, 2024**

**MOTION to approve the minutes. Motion by Commissioner Cruise, seconded by Commissioner Romano, and carried 4-0.**

(CLERK'S NOTE: Commissioner Kugler joined the meeting.)

**VI. 2024 Annual Report Overview Presentation**

Ms. Kelley provided a slideshow presentation of the 2024 Annual Report, that included a review of the strategic plan, customer satisfaction surveys, education and outreach events, achievements, and upcoming projects for 2025.

Commissioner Romano inquired about the possibility of certification for continued education.

Ms. Kelley stated that the possibility could be explored.

**VII. Processed Advisory Opinions (Consent Agenda)**

**a. RQO 25-001**

**MOTION to approve the consent agenda. Motion by Commissioner Cruise, seconded by Commissioner Romano, and carried 5-0.**

**VIII. Items Pulled from Consent Agenda**

No items were pulled from the consent agenda.

**IX. Executive Session C24-008**

**RECESS**

**At 1:43 p.m., the chair declared the meeting recessed for an executive session.**

**RECONVENE**

**At 2:47 p.m., the meeting reconvened with all members present.**

**Vice Chair Kridel read the public reports and final orders into the record:**

***In Re: Sara Baxter***

***C24-008***

Christie Kelly, Executive Director of the Palm Beach County Commission on Ethics, filed the above-captioned complaint against Sara Baxter (Respondent), alleging that Respondent, an elected official in Palm Beach County, accepted gift(s) with a value exceeding \$100 from a prohibited entity, to wit: a registered lobbyist in Palm Beach County in violation of Section 2-444(a)(1) of the Palm Beach County Code of Ethics.

Pursuant to Section 2-258(a)<sup>1</sup> of the Palm Beach County Commission on Ethics Ordinance, the Commission is empowered to enforce the Palm Beach County Code of Ethics.

On January 9, 2025, the Commission conducted a probable cause hearing and reviewed the Memorandum of inquiry, the Report of investigation, and the Probable Cause Recommendation submitted by the Advocate. The Advocate recommended a finding of probable cause, issuance of a letter of instruction, and a dismissal of the complaint. This reasoning behind this recommendation is that the violation appears to have been inadvertent or unintentional. After an oral statement by the Advocate and the Respondent's counsel, the Commission determined that probable cause existed and dismissed the case finding that the public interest would not be served by proceeding further, pursuant to Commission on Ethics Ordinance Section 2-60.3(a), Dismissal of complaints.

Therefore it is:

**ORDERED and ADJUDGED** that the complaint against Respondent, Sara Baxter, is hereby **DISMISSED**.

**DONE AND ORDERED** by the Palm Beach County Commission on Ethics in public session on this 9<sup>th</sup> day of January 2025.

#### **X. Executive Director Comments**

Ms. Kelley stated that staff had presented ethics training to the City of Riviera Beach in December 2024 and that they would be conducting additional trainings later in January 2025.

Ms. Kelley presented the Practical Guide to Ethics to the Commission, and thanked staff for their work on the project and printing.

#### **XI. Commission Comments**

Commissioner Cruise thanked the members of the public for their attendance at the Ethics Bowl.

Commissioner Cruise inquired about communications with the West Palm Beach Downtown Development Authority, and Ms. Kelley responded stating that staff had not heard back from the Authority at that time.

**XII. Public Comments**

There were no public comments.

**XIII. Adjournment**

**At 2:51 p.m., the chair declared the meeting adjourned.**

APPROVED:

  
Chair/Vice Chair