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## Ethics complaints could get a clearer path

City Council Member Mike Martinez is working on a resolution that could change how the city deals with ethics complaints against those who serve on its boards and commissions.

The changes come after Martinez's Zero Waste Advisory Commission appointee, Daniela Ochoa Gonzalez (<http://www.austinmonitor.com/stories/2014/07/former-commissioner-seeks-change-city-policies-ethics-cases/>), was accused of violating the city's conflict-of-interest policy by an anonymous person through the Auditor's office.

Gonzalez resigned from the commission and, later, lost her job over the allegations. Subsequently, Zero Waste Advisory Commissioners expressed their unanimous support for Gonzalez through a resolution that disputed the Auditor's report and asked the city to change its reporting, investigatory and ruling process for commissioners.

When the Ethics Review Commission last heard the case in July, many of Gonzalez's supporters noted that the current system, which allows for anonymous complaints against commissioners, leaves volunteer boards and commission members vulnerable and with little recourse to dispute allegations.

During Gonzalez's hearings at the Ethics Review Commission, her supporters expressed frustration that there was no clear appeals process for an allegation through the Auditor's office. Hammering home this point, the commission was unable to rule on the allegations because they did not come through their commission.

Though still in draft form, as currently written the resolution asks the city manager's office to convene meetings of a joint city auditor and Ethics Review Commission working group in order to "create a clear process for conflict-of-interest allegations which the City Auditor receives against Boards and Commission members."

The resolution also thanks Gonzalez for her service and apologizes to her, ZWAC members and the community "for not providing a public forum for our Boards and Commission members to address conflict-of-interest allegations investigated by the City Auditor, and for the anguish and potential damage to reputations this has caused."

The resolution is scheduled to go before City Council at its Oct. 16 meeting.

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#### KEY PLAYERS & TOPICS IN THIS ARTICLE

**City of Austin Ethics Review Commission (<http://www.austinmonitor.com/stories/tag/city-of-austin-ethics-review-commission/>):** The Ethics Review Commission is charged with review of, among other issues, ethics complaints leveled against City of Austin boards and commission members. They meet quarterly.

**City of Austin Zero Waste Advisory Commission (<http://www.austinmonitor.com/stories/tag/city-of-austin-zero-waste-advisory-commission/>):** An Austin City Council advisory commission. Its members are charged to "[r]eview and analyze the policies and resources relating to solid waste management in the city and advise council on solid waste management policies and resources." Formerly the Solid Waste Advisory Commission.

**Office of the City Auditor (<http://www.austinmonitor.com/stories/tag/office-city-auditor/>):** This city department is created by the city's charter in order to establish and ensure "accountability transparency, and a culture of continuous improvement in city operations."

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