

City of Bainbridge Island Ethics Board

Case # 2019-08

Date Filed: 26 March 2019

Complainant: Salvatore DeRosalia

Respondent: Councilmember Deets

Response Filed: 2 April 2019

Advisory Opinion Issued: 15 April 2019

Background:

A comment was made in public at a City Council ward meeting on January 12, 2019. The complainant filed this complaint to express his concern at the use of language by Councilmember Deets, specifically the statement, "Thanks for being the only diversity in the room, Sal."

Subsequently, Councilmember Deets responded to the incident and the complaint, including the apologies he sent on two separate occasions (February 13 and March 6) to Mr. DeRosalia.

Mr. DeRosalia filed a complaint regarding this situation on March 26, 2019, and Councilmember Deets responded to the complaint on April 2, 2019.

Advisory Opinion:

It is unfortunate that our society has not evolved socially to the point where we are all more aware of using language that avoids statements that cause discomfort, embarrassment or similar negative feelings in other people. This is often a particular problem when members of different cultural backgrounds interact, and it occurs even when people share a common culture.

A key element in encouraging awareness in our society is to express the concerns and to be sure that these concerns are heard by everyone, and especially by the person(s) who caused the discomfort in the first place. One indication that Mr. DeRosalia's concern was heard was by the issuance of an of apology. In this case, the two written apologies by Councilmember Deets fulfill this obligation by recognizing the hurt that was engendered by his comment. Further, Councilmember Deets pledges to work to become more aware in the future of his use of appropriate terms and phrases.

Given the nature of the original comment and the subsequent interaction between Mr. DeRosalia and Councilmember Deets, the Ethics Board concludes that this matter has been resolved.