

March 4, 2019

Dear Ethics Board,

I am requesting an Article I Advisory Opinion for myself from the Ethics Board, coming from a series of interactions that I had with a citizen. Below is an e-mail string between us, where on Feb. 9th he sent me a message, stating that there had been four instances which, among other things, he describes as “negative interactions” between us. You will see my replies, which include my responses to each of the specific instances he identifies.

Following these e-mails, I met with the citizen (accompanied by Mayor Medina and a friend of the citizen) on Feb. 16th. I would describe the meeting as a rehashing of the contents in the e-mail string. I have since learned that the citizen met with Councilmembers Nassar and Tirman on Feb. 28, which I understand covered the Race Equity Task Force selection process and my conduct. For matters of privacy I have deleted his name, as well as another citizen, and a local organization, replacing them with “XX”. I have also deleted the e-mail addresses of others.

I welcome your recommendations in respect to my conduct. Should you wish, you may in your deliberations apply the measures contained in draft Resolution 2019-13, which approves amendments to the City’s Ethics Program. As I am supportive of the Resolution allowing you to do this only seems fair.

I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Best regards,

Joe Deets
City of Bainbridge Island Councilmember

Feb. 13th E-mail from me to Citizen:

XX,

I wish to honor your request that I provide my perspective of our interactions, and so am providing you with written responses. Please see them in your Feb. 9th e-mail below. As you can see, I have a very different take on what has transpired.

I believe that what has occurred is a series of unfortunate misunderstandings. I look forward to our 12:15 pm meeting at City Hall this Saturday (Feb. 16th), where it is my hope that we can have a constructive dialogue on how we can work well together for the good of the Community.

Best regards,

Joe

Feb. 9th E-Mail from Citizen to me:

From: Saturday, February 9, 2019 4:36 PM
To: Joe Deets <jdeets@bainbridgewa.gov>
Subject: Re: Scheduling a Meeting with You

Joe,

I look forward to hearing your account of the events. It's a shame any of it had to happen in the first place for there to be a misunderstanding.

Next Saturday works. I'll plan on meeting with you with Kol. Based on the subject matter, I would ask that we meet at a place with more privacy than Town and Country. Also, I have reached out to a few of the folks that were at some of these events. They are happy to provide their recounting as well. Let me know and I can line that up.

Please advise.

XX

Feb. 9th E-mail from me to Citizen:

On Feb 9, 2019, at 4:26 PM, Joe Deets <jdeets@bainbridgewa.gov> wrote:

XX,

I take my role as a public servant very seriously, and strive to interact with others in a manner that is courteous and respectful. It saddens me to see your description of our interactions, which to be clear I have a very different take on.

There is so much that needs to be done on Bainbridge, so I really want to resolve this with you, to find a way where we can work constructively together. My offer to meet with you next Saturday still stands. Please let me know if that works for you.

Best regards,

Joe

Feb. 9th, 2019 E-Mail from Citizen to me, and my Feb. 13th responses:

From: Saturday, February 9, 2019 1:46 PM
To: Joe Deets <jdeets@bainbridgewa.gov>
Subject: Re: Scheduling a Meeting with You

Joe,

Below is a message I composed but had not sent yet. In it, it outlines 4 instances where I believe you have treated me unfairly, degraded me, discriminated against me used your power as a council member to try and quit me at inappropriate times.

I can meet with you and Kol or anyone else. What I am looking for is honesty and transparency from you. I do not feel that has been the case thus far.

****My first negative interaction with Joe Deets came at the Public Safety Committee meeting that he personally invited me to. In it, we were asked to give public comment if we had any. I was speaking in my turn when Joe cut me off several times to tell me “we know”, “we have actually walked through there” and then to say, “if you have a question ask it, XX.” I stayed that this was public comment. He apologized in front of the entire group at the end of the meeting.**

Councilmember Deets’ Response:

Providing Public Comment is an important right for citizens at City Council Meetings (outside of Study Sessions, where they are not taken), and City Committee Meetings. People should feel free to speak their minds - with the caveat that they need to do so in a manner that is civil and respectful for all involved. No doubt you’ve noticed how important this issue has been of late.

I serve as Chair to the Public Safety Committee (PSC) and among the responsibilities I’m tasked with is ensuring that civility and respect is maintained at the meetings. When you spoke about the homeless encampment by Hwy 305 & High School Road you said that PSC Committee members “should be ashamed” for what is happening there. This is aggressive language and I took the view that this line of commentary was neither civil nor respectful, that it supported an untruth (i.e. there can be no shame when every PSC Member is working to resolve the issue in a humane manner), and it certainly was not productive. I made the decision to step in. You will recall that others did so as well, including Councilmember Peltier and the Chief of Police.

While I believed that my decision to step in was the right one, I still felt bad about the whole thing. It is a very important issue and wanting to move on I extended an apology to you. You will recall that you apologized as well, and that we shook hands. Ending this as we did, I thought that we could move on.

**In the North Ward meeting Joe stated in front of everyone in attendance, “Thanks for being the only diversity in the room XX.”

Councilmember Deets’ Response:

While I honestly do not recall the language that you cited, I recognize that I can never really know how you felt to what it was I said. The fact that you say you felt uncomfortable is sufficient enough for me to decide that I could have done better, and that I will endeavor to be more mindful of my interactions with you.

**In a City Council meeting Joe came directly up to me and said, “you know you can’t give public comment here tonight.” I said I knew. He went on to ask me why I was there. I told him it was to hear the MLK proclamation. He then recovered and said that I may indeed want to say something when receiving the proclamation.

Councilmember Deets’ Response:

One of the activities that I really enjoy about being a Councilmember is talking with people and listening to what they have to say. Before Council Meetings you may have noticed that I often step into the audience, to thank people for coming, and ask them if there is any particular issue that brought them to City Hall. I have probably done this dozens of times in the past year. It is a friendly gesture on my part, the sole intent is to help people (who took the time and trouble to come to a City Council Meeting) feel welcomed, recognized and valued as citizens. Should it be a Study Session, as a courtesy to people’s time, in case they came with the intention to speak, I let them know that Public Comment is not provided. I am truly sorry that you misinterpreted my gesture and felt threatened by my approaching you for a brief conversation.

**I was informed that Joe Deets had a conversation with XX about me and my role on the Race Equity Task Force. This was before any citizen interviews were made. He then refused himself from both interviews. Neither person made the task force yet we were driving force to get it established.

Councilmember Deets’ Response:

The conversation that I had with XX is a sensitive matter, for it directly involves your behavior at XX. She asked me to meet with her, where she told me that three women at XX felt either uncomfortable or unsafe being around you - and that all three left XX as a direct result of your behavior towards them. This was shocking to me, and while of course I have nothing to do with what happens at XX, I do have a responsibility for considering those who are applying to serve on the City’s Race Equity Task Force. Getting along with others is a crucial attribute for a Committee Member, and what I learned made me concerned about your suitability. However, in order to remove any perception of bias in the process I decided to recuse myself from the decision of whether you or XX should be on the Race Equity Task Force. I thus took no part in your or her interviews or the subsequent internal discussion. That work and ultimate decision was carried out by Councilmembers Tirman and Nassar.

Lastly, I did take part in the process in respect to the other candidates, and I trust that you share with me the excitement that seven outstanding citizens were chosen to serve on the Race Equity Task Force.

Continuation of Feb. 9th E-mail message from the Citizen:

This seems excessive to me.

These are very short versions of the interactions that happened. I would appreciate the opportunity to address these instances and Joe's aggressive behavior towards me over the last few months.

In addition, I do not think it's okay to degrade people in meetings and Joe continues to do just that. It makes me feel Unsafe, unwelcome, discriminated against and singled out.

Please let me know how I should proceed.

XX