

## ETHICS COMMISSION/CITY OF SPOKANE



March 18, 2020

Council Member Karen Stratton  
Office of the City Council  
7<sup>th</sup> Floor Municipal Building  
W. 808 Spokane Falls Blvd.  
Spokane, WA 99201

Re: Written Reprimand

Dear Council Member Stratton,

This letter shall serve as the official written reprimand from the Ethics Commission pursuant to SMC 1.04A.040 B. 5. resulting from the Commission's decision at its January 22, 2020, hearing on the complaint that you violated the City Code of Ethics. The nature of the violation is that you knowingly used your position as a City Council member and, using official council letterhead, authored a letter addressed to the Pasco City Council, upon the request of a local business advocating for legislative action to permit retail activity in Pasco that would provide potential business opportunities for that business. Your action was taken without City Council authorization and did not serve a City function or purpose. Such action violates SMC 1.04A.030 K 1 and 4 by using your position as a City Council member and by using City resources to secure special privileges, benefit, gain or profit for another person and by inducing or coercing another person to take action that will provide another person with something of value directly or indirectly.

Your response to the complaint was that 1) your letter to the Pasco City Council addressed a matter of general public interest and broad application, 2) any benefit applied equally to anyone seeking retail marijuana business activities in Pasco, 3) there was no business relationship between your personal business and the business requesting the letter, 4) any benefit to the business would be removed and 5) your letter was similar to other efforts by the City to recruit business and employers.

The current version of the Code of Ethics was recodified by the City Council in 2014 and recently amended in 2019. The Code of Ethics has consistently maintained that such action constituted a violation. SMC 1.04A.030 K protects the City from misuse of city positions, offices and resources for the benefit of other parties when there is no City purpose being served, no City sanctioned activity and no city involvement in the matter. City offices, positions and resources shall only be used for City-related purposes and functions when authorized by law or in the course of the employee or officer's official duties.

A written reprimand is appropriate because your actions violated the Code of Ethics by using your position and City resources to bring potential financial benefit to the business that request your assistance without any authorization by the City Council, benefit to the City, or involvement or impact to the City. However, there was no intent on your part to violate the Code of Ethics. Therefore, a written reprimand is appropriate.

In the future, the Commission recommends that when you have concerns with compliance with the Code of Ethics, as you did in this situation, that you contact the Ethics Commission for an advisory opinion pursuant to SMC 1.04A.170 or contact the Commission's legal advisor pursuant to SMC 1.04A.110. D. 1.g.

This written reprimand shall be filed with the City Clerk and placed in the City Council minutes.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Sarah O'Hare –Ethics Commission Chairperson

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Date