

Comments to COBI Ethics Board

RE: Chip McDermott Complaint

November 14, 2018

By Ron Peltier, COBI City Council Member

RESPONSE TO CHIP MCDERMOTT COMPLAINT

On February 1st I met at City Hall with my colleague, Rasham Nassar, and residents of Grow Avenue, Patty Lyman, and Chip McDermott to discuss long sought after traffic calming measures for Grow Avenue. Mr. McDermott has subsequently filed an ethics complaint against me for what I assume he believes to be a conflict of interest because I own a house on Lovell Avenue and because I insisted that any changes to the speed limit on Upper Grow Avenue should be accompanied by the same changes on Lovell Avenue.

For some additional background, my family has owned a house on Lovell Avenue since 1966. I am very familiar with the traffic issues on Lovell Avenue, which are similar to those on Grow. I currently rent the house to my Son and two or three other young people.

In responding to Mr. McDermott's complaint I am going to focus on three things:

1. A difference in philosophies regarding how decisions should be made by the city council;
2. How Mr. McDermott has characterized my comments and motives; and,
3. The end results.

Conflicting Philosophies

My philosophy, as a member of the city council and member of the community, is that when decisions are made to benefit one neighborhood or part of the Island, all those who would be impacted by the change need to be considered. There are often unintended consequences to the larger community when we simply respond to the interests of one group without considering all those who would be impacted. It doesn't matter if that group, street, or neighborhood lobbying for the changes is more organized: as a council member it's my responsibility to consider everyone.

Mr. McDermott seems to have a more elitist philosophy, which he passionately describes in his response to my comment about the need for Lovell Avenue to be given equal treatment when considering potential changes to the speed limit. From Chip's complaint:

"This took me back and I asked Ron repeatedly, why (is suddenly) Lovell too, being thrown into the mix? I was pretty upset after all the hoops we jumped thru, to finally get Grow finally teed up, which included Grow residents' desire documented as well, to have Ron, seemingly under the guise of helping Rasham navigate procedure and helping the community, casually want to 'throw in' a neighboring street too.

"I asked Ron, "Why Lovell?" and basically said, "You have to do your due diligence, Ron as we did; get neighborhood buy-in via petition," and so forth—just as we were told by Chris Hammer as the best course of action to insure it is the goal of the majority of

residents. “Don’t try to simply piggyback on our work--and perhaps even hold up our 1-2 years of diligent setup, for a neighboring street (Lovell) which has not advocated for itself, as we have so publicly.”

A Twisted Account of our Meeting

Mr. McDermott’s account of our meeting is not accurate. He portrays my initial comment about equal consideration for Lovell Avenue as a sordid attempt at backroom deal making. According to Chip, here’s what I said,

“Ron’s basic position was this: I can help you, but I want 20 MPH on Lovell, too.”

That’s not what I said or how I said it. I simply stated a position that I later explained: lowering the speed limit on Grow, without lowering it on Lovell, would result in more vehicles moving over to Lovell to take advantage of a higher speed limit. I thought it was pretty obvious and didn’t at all expect Mr. McDermott’s angry response. It set an uncomfortable tone for the rest of the meeting.

“I have a house on Lovell”

My point in mentioning that I own a house on Lovell Avenue was to let Chip and Patty know I’m no stranger to the neighborhood. Had it been a more relaxed and amicable meeting I might have taken the time to explain how my family has lived on Lovell Avenue since 1966. I grew up there and walked to High School on Lovell Avenue. That my Father lived in that house until 2015 and my Son now lives there. It wasn’t, however, an amicable meeting at that point and I simply said I owned a house on Lovell just to let them know I had some history in the neighborhood.

Mr. McDermott portrays this exchange as some sort of reluctant admission regarding my real motive for wanting Lovell Avenue to be given equal consideration, going to some length to describe himself prying the truth out of me and then getting a pit in his stomach when he finally exposed “*Small-town, old-boy politics at its worst*”. That is total B.S.

“I’m on the city council”

I may have had an uncomfortable smile on my face when I said this. At that point I was pretty uncomfortable sitting in the same room with Mr. McDermott. It doesn’t change the meaning. As a member of the city council I have a responsibility to consider more than the narrow interests of activists advocating for something to benefit just their neighborhood. I knew that if Chip got what he wanted, special and exclusive treatment for Grow Avenue, because they had done their “due diligence”, that Lovell Avenue would be negatively impacted. It was my way of saying, “you may have been done all of your “due diligence”, and believe that has earned you special consideration, but I’m on the City Council and that’s why I want the folks on Lovell Avenue to be given equal consideration: even though they haven’t organized themselves to advocate for their interests”.

The end result of our meeting

Several days after our meeting with Chip and Patty Rasham and I met with Chris Hammer of COBI Public Works, where we were joined by council colleague Joe Deets. The result was an administrative decision by Public Works to reduce the speed limit on Lower Grow Avenue as discussed at our earlier meeting with Chip and Patty. This was presented to the city council at a meeting, where it was fully supported. In addition, Grow Avenue and other neighborhood streets in Winslow were included in a speed limit study for Island roads. The study later recommend lowering speed limits to 20 mph for neighborhood streets in Winslow. This change included both Grow and Lovell Avenues, giving Lovell the equal consideration it deserved. Council then voted unanimously to approve that recommendation.

While Rasham was most instrumental and getting the speed limit lowered for neighborhood streets I also was supportive of first lowering the speed limit on Lower Grow and later for all the neighborhood streets in Winslow. Rasham and I both advocated for all neighborhood streets to be given equal consideration. There was no special treatment for any street or neighborhood that was more organized or had outdone others by “doing their due diligence.”