

'Faceoff' at Sept. 12 Council Meeting

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Letters To Editor

By

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At the Sept. 12, 2016 City Council meeting, will the City Council express shock, like Capt. Louis Renault in *Casablanca*, when he discovered that there was gambling in the backroom? It could. After all, the City Council members are learning from us that: (1) in 1996, the City adopted a Code of Ethics; (2) a copy of the Code of Ethics is not posted on the City's award-winning website; (3) the Ethics Advisory Committee exists on paper only; (4) Culver City has pothole and graffiti hotlines, but no ethics hotline; and, (5) even though officials have a biennial legal obligation to undertake ethics training, Culver City does not require its employees (senior or otherwise) to submit to any ethics training.

But the Code of Ethics imposes watchdog duties upon the City employees. The Code states, "Public employees and officials have a duty to prevent and report unethical... action. Hence, it is appropriate to be a 'whistle blower' if another employee or official may be acting improperly."

Obvious questions arise. Without ethics training, how does a Culver City employee, who has duty to "prevent and report unethical ...action," know he/she has such a duty? Also, how would he/she know what is the "unethical action" that they are duty bound to "prevent and report"?

In our case, former City Council member Andrew Weissman pressured staff to conduct a “parking study” that the staff had declined to initiate. Weissman told staff that the City Council already preferred his methodology. However, the City Council had not met on the issue. If Weissman was truthful about what the City Council would prefer, he had already consulted with at least two other council members—a no-no. If Weissman was not truthful, he used some heavy-handed influence peddling and fraud on staff—another no-no. Eventually, staff went along with Weissman’s desired criteria, but informed Weissman that it was intellectually dishonest and unfair to residents. Neither Weissman nor staff publicly disclosed their communications or staff’s criticisms.

We have provided the City Attorney and the City Council with a copy of the e-mail-evidenced communications. The City Attorney and Chief Administrative Officer received a copy in real time, but took no action.

These blatant ethical violations may not be isolated events. The Code of Ethics affects every issue that comes before the City Council.

We should “round up the usual suspects.” One could reasonably argue that Culver City needs a new City Attorney—one who will see ethics in government as a priority, not as a nuisance. Further, if this City Council takes no action to assure compliance with the Code of Ethics, one could reasonably argue that the City Council believes the wheels of commerce are better greased when City employees do not know that they are duty bound to function as “whistle blowers” or what constitutes “unethical action.”

Residents should join our efforts to expose and cure this late-stage-ethical cancer before it is too late. The City Council should have the courage and integrity to acknowledge and address the problem. Looking the other way is no solution to this urgent issue.

We look forward to seeing you at the Sept. 12, 2016 City Council meeting.

Les Greenberg

—Culver City