



**State of Washington
PUBLIC DISCLOSURE COMMISSION**

711 Capitol Way Rm. 206, PO Box 40908 • Olympia, Washington 98504-0908
(360) 753-1111 • FAX (360) 753-1112

Toll Free 1-877-601-2828 • E-mail: pdcc@pdcc.wa.gov • Website: www.pdca.wa.gov

January 22, 2020

Delivered electronically to Michael Sheetz at "sheetz72@hcc.net"

Subject: Complaints filed by Jeffrey Brittig & Joseph D. Cooper, PDC Case 59376

Dear Mr. Sheetz:

Below is a copy of an electronic letter sent to Jeffrey Brittig and Joseph Cooper concerning a complaint filed with the Public Disclosure Commission (PDC).

As noted in the letter to Mr. Brittig and Mr. Cooper, the PDC has dismissed this matter in accordance with RCW 42.17A.755(1) and will not conduct a more formal investigation into these allegations or take further enforcement action in this matter.

If you have questions, you may contact Jennifer Hansen at 1-360-586-4560, toll-free at 1-877-601-2828, or by e-mail at pdcc@pdcc.wa.gov.

Sincerely,

Endorsed by,

/s

Jennifer Hansen
Compliance Officer

/s

Barbara Sandahl
Deputy Director
For Peter Lavalley
Executive Director



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January 22, 2020

Delivered electronically to Jeffrey Brittig at “jeffrey.brittig@gmail.com” & to Joseph D. Cooper at “joecoopdog@yahoo.com”

Subject: Complaint regarding Michael Sheetz, PDC Case 59376

Dear Mr. Brittig and Mr. Cooper:

The Public Disclosure Commission (PDC) has completed its review of the complaint Mr. Brittig filed on October 25, 2019 and the complaint filed by Mr. Cooper on November 10, 2019. Staff reviewed the complaint filed by Mr. Cooper and, finding the allegations similar to those already being investigated under the original complaint filed by Mr. Brittig, merged the two complaints and notified Mr. Cooper of this action on November 15, 2019. The complaints alleged that Michael Sheetz, incumbent Fire Commissioner for Mason County Fire Protection District 6, Position 2 and candidate in the 2019 election, may have violated RCW 42.17A.555 by using public facilities to support his 2019 re-election campaign.

PDC staff reviewed the allegations; the applicable statutes and rules; PDC Interpretation 04-02; and the response provided by Commissioner Sheetz, to determine whether the record supports a finding of one or more violations.

Based on staff’s review, we found the following:

- Michael Sheetz was the incumbent Fire Commissioner for Mason County Fire Protection District 6 (MCFD 6), Position 2 and candidate for re-election in the November 5, 2019 general election.
- Commissioner Sheetz defeated opponent, Michelle M. Ozaki, after receiving 66.83 percent of the votes.
- RCW 42.17A.555 prohibits the use of public facilities to support or oppose candidates, including county offices, equipment and staff time.
- The Commission adopted PDC Interpretation 04-02, *Guidelines for Local Government Agencies in Election Campaigns*, which provides information concerning the use of public facilities including activities that are permitted or prohibited, activities which are part of the “normal and regular conduct” of the fire district office, equipment, permissible activities of local elected officials, staff, and other general considerations.
- Both complaints included a copy of a mailed political advertisement that included a written endorsement by Union Volunteer Firefighters, a photograph of fourteen individuals under a sign reading “Union Fire Department”, followed by the names and signatures of thirteen individuals, likely most of those appearing in the photo. The location of the photograph appears to have been taken outside of the Union Fire Department building and contains individuals wearing what appears to be clothing with a fire department logo.

- The mailer also includes the message “Vote to Re-Elect Mike Sheetz” followed by sponsor identification stating that the ad was paid for by the Friends of the Union Fire Department.
- A search of previous PDC reports, show a political committee with the name “Friends of the Union Fire Department” registered in election years 2011 and 2013, with a Mason County address and listing Clint Volk as Campaign Manager/Treasurer.
- The complaints alleged that Commissioner Sheetz staged the photo used in the mailer for the purpose of assisting with his 2019 campaign.
- Staff found no evidence to show that Commissioner Sheetz was responsible for the mailer or that he facilitated the photograph used in the advertisement.
- Mr. Brittig’s complaint included an additional allegation that Commissioner Sheetz used a Facebook page published by MCFD 6 to aid his 2019 re-election campaign.
- The Facebook page provided as evidence in the complaint belongs to “The Mighty Mason 6” and is identified in the “about” section as an organization and “the unofficial Mason County Fire District #6 page.”
- MCFD 6 maintains an official website, www.mcfcd6.com, that contains general information regarding the district’s business, commission meeting agendas and minutes, fire safety notices, upcoming events, information for members and volunteers, and contact information. The homepage currently includes a disclaimer stating that MCFD 6 does not own, maintain, or participate in any social media platform and there is no reference to a Facebook page on the site.
- Staff reviewed the Facebook posts from September 2019 to November 2019 and found most to be lacking any type of individual signature or name connected to them. There were a small number of posts written in a letter style format that were signed by “Your Volunteer Firefighters, EMT’s and Responders” or by “the Actual Volunteers.” The signed posts appear to be responding to emails and letters sent out to residents of the fire district.
- On October 11, 2019 at 8:28 p.m., a post was made written in first person, with a message specifically responding to voter pamphlet information submitted by Michelle Ozaki, Commissioner Sheetz’s opponent. This post was not signed by Sheetz or any other individual or group.
- Staff found no evidence that The Mighty Mason 6 Facebook page was the official page for MCFD 6.
- Mr. Brittig’s complaint included additional allegations regarding Public Service Announcements (PSAs), false endorsements, false statements of material facts and provided several supplements of evidence. Apart from the information resulting in a possible violation of RCW 42.17A.555, staff found these allegations and evidence to be outside of the PDC’s jurisdiction or beyond the scope of the investigation and did not address this part of the complaint. Staff sent communication to Mr. Brittig regarding this matter on November 1, 2019.

During staff’s review of the allegations and materials provided in the complaints, no evidence was found to confirm that MCFD 6 maintained a Facebook page or was the creator of the page for The Mighty Mason 6. In addition, no evidence was found to connect Michael Sheetz to the mailed political advertisement sponsored by Friends of the Union Fire Department.

Based on these findings staff has determined that no evidence supports a finding of a violation warranting further investigation.

Based on this information, the PDC finds that no further action is warranted and has dismissed this matter in accordance with RCW 42.17A.755(1).

If you have questions, you may contact Jennifer Hansen at 1-360-586-4560, toll-free at 1-877-601-2828, or by e-mail at pdc@pdc.wa.gov.

Sincerely,

/s

Jennifer Hansen
Compliance Officer

Endorsed by,

/s

Barbara Sandahl
Deputy Director
For Peter Lavallee
Executive Director

cc: Michael Sheetz