

Dear Editor:

I've written to you about Open Meetings Act and Freedom of Information Act issues. Today, I write about what Eric Haven, Sharron Catallo, David Marsh, and Al Avery did with regard to the November election.

If you don't pay much attention to election matters, you may only recall that the deadline for candidates to file nominating petitions was extended. But the publicly filed election documents tell a more concerning story. I urge you to look at the records for yourself, consider the timing of the events, and draw your own conclusions – as I have.

This year was the first of Eric Haven's most recent two-year term as a city council member. Because he wanted to abandon that office and run for a different position (mayor) a mere nine months into his two-year term, our city charter required that he resign from his city council position *before* he began his campaign for mayor. The charter also requires that vacancies be posted for at least 7 days so that everyone has a chance to run.

On July 12, 2018, Eric Haven – *without resigning and while still holding office as a city council member* – quietly started circulating nominating petitions for mayor. Several candidate petitions were circulated that day and when you examine those petitions side by side, it appears that many of the signers were at the same place at the same time, including Al Avery, Sharron Catallo, David Marsh, and Eric Haven (whom I've referred to as the anti-transparency candidates). This means that David Marsh was aware as early as July 12th that there would be a one-year council position available once Eric Haven resigned. Eric Haven also completed an Affidavit of Identity, swearing under oath that his campaign for mayor was in compliance with Michigan campaign finance law as of July 13th.

The city said the deadline to submit nominating petitions was Tuesday, July 24th, a date requested by the clerk, supported by the city attorney, and affirmed by the city council in violation of the city charter (which says the deadline is on the August primary day). Eric Haven held back his resignation until Friday, July 20th, creating a council opening with less than 7 days to post it. David Marsh was one of the few insiders who were aware of Haven's resignation, and he began collecting signatures that very day. He also received help over the weekend from other insiders, including Sharron Catallo. The rest of us didn't know that Eric Haven had resigned until Monday, July 23, 2018, one day before the deadline. (You should keep Eric Haven's conduct in mind for the future, because city council plans to ask you to vote on a change in the charter that would allow others to do the same thing that he did.)

On July 24, 2018, the candidates were announced and non-insiders learned that David Marsh was the only person running for Eric Haven's vacated council seat. Imagine that - David Marsh had won the seat before the election even occurred, because he needed only one vote (his own) to win.

After reviewing the election-related paperwork, I filed an election complaint because it appeared to me that a small group of people had manipulated the timing of events to get their preferred candidate on the city council as Mr. Haven's replacement. After reviewing my complaint, the city attorney decided that the signatures that Eric Haven collected before his resignation were invalid and the previous deadline was improper because it violated state law and the city charter. The deadline was extended to give others a chance to run for the vacancy created by Eric Haven's resignation. Both Eric Haven and David Marsh now have competition as a result of that time extension.

I support open and honest government, and that's why I will vote for Steven Percival for mayor; Sue Wylie, Rick Detkowski, and newcomer Hampton Swayne for two-year council terms; and, Mike Cascone for the one-year city council position. I would encourage you to do the same.

Thank you for listening.

Susan Bisio
Clarkston