

9-27-2021

To County Commission Chairman Jewell, and Hon Branden Bellar County attorney,

We are compelled to file a formal complaint against Mayor Stephen Chambers concerning his actions at the Special called Commission meeting on **7/19/2021**. This letter is that complaint and request for an official investigation. We also request this be read and spread on the minutes of the commission meeting.

The 7-19-2021 special called meeting was to have discussion and possible vote over resolution: **2021-18-7222**, regarding the Water Department proposed construction of a building at 328 Broadway, behind the Administration Building on County property.

The Water & Sewer Department previously stated an urgency for this meeting to meet their deadlines. Thus, the purpose and sole purpose was for a decision by the commission on this issue.

Chairman Jewell convened the meeting, and immediately the meeting was interrupted by Mayor Chambers. He stated that a few commissioners had engaged in conversation about said building prior to the beginning of a Education committee meeting. Mayor Chambers was present at the time and never voiced any concern or objection to the conversations. He stated that this was a violation of the open meetings act, and that he had a recording of those conversations, and threatened legal action against the commissioners. He stated that County attorney Bellar had reviewed the recording. Chairman Jewell asked Attorney Bellar if it was a violation, he stated that it could be perceived by some as having a potential violation. He further stated that if the things discussed were also discussed in another open and advertised meeting that would remedy any possible violations.

Mayor Chambers read a list, complete with times, of the conversations prior to said meeting. During the ensuing discussions Mayor Chambers threatened to take this to the Water Board and assist them in filing suit against the County commissioners. Chairman Jewell asked to be provided the list of allegations, but Mayor Chambers refused saying it was for his use only. Chairman Jewell acting on Mr Bellar advice asked the Mayor to state each of his allegations and they were discussed to the Mayors satisfaction one at a time.

Our concern is, during the meeting, Mayor Chambers led us to believe that we as commissioners were under the threat of litigation regarding a violation of the "Open Meetings Act". On two occasions he alluded to the fact that we were under said threat. Even though he knew there was a remedy to any potential violation being proposed. The mayor as a member of the water board, said he would turn over evidence to them and advise them to pursue legal action against the commission.

This threat evidently resulted in some members to vote for the project, simply because they were intimidated and coerced to do so, to avoid the county being involved in litigation against itself.

Also, there was the topic of a utility extension having been completed prior to the commission's final approval of the project, with the mention of "who was going to reimburse the Water Department for it if it was not approved". We believe this and other concerns that were voiced, and the building being built by a county department on county property, necessitated the attention and vote of the commission, not just the mayor's approval.

We believe mayor Chambers actions were nothing more than an overt attempt to influence the vote. This resulted in possible "official oppression" by him, in possible violation of T.C.A. 39-16-403. Also T.C.A. 39-16-404 States "a public servant commits an offense who, by reason of information... attains or aids another to attain a benefit." Further T.C.A. 39-16-402 "a public servant commits an offense who, with intent to obtain benefit or harm another knowingly." These and any other statutes that were possibly violated need a thorough and serious investigation.

Our concern, these actions by the mayor resulted in the outcome of a million dollar plus project possibly being affected. Also placing the mayor's office and the commission in an adversarial position due to these litigious threats. Therefore, we officially request the county attorney investigate these actions for any ethical or legal infractions and pursue any legal recourse necessary against Mayor Chambers.

Respectfully requested the undersigned Hartsville/Trousdale Commissioners,

- Jerry C. Ford
- W. Ferguson
- Neil R. ...
- Richard ...
- Paul ...
- Coy R. ...
- Bary Claridy
- Rach ...
- Phil ...
- Steve ...

Received 9-17-21  
D. J. ...