

Memorandum

TO: HONORABLE MAYOR AND CITY
COUNCIL

FROM: NORA FRIMANN
City Attorney

SUBJECT: Appeals Hearing Board
Applicant

DATE: December 2, 2024

BACKGROUND

This Office routinely reviews applications to City Boards, Commissions and Committees. The applications do not provide complete information; however, they do occasionally disclose potential conflicts of interest or incompatible offices. The purpose of this memorandum is to highlight major areas of potential conflict that are disclosed by the application. To analyze potential conflict, it is necessary to consider the duties of the commission or committee to which the applicant is seeking appointment. This review is limited to the information provided on the application and is not intended to be comprehensive investigation of potential conflicts involving the applicant.

BOARD DUTIES

The Appeals Hearing Board sits as a quasi-judicial Board which hears code enforcement appeals of blighted conditions; illegal building activity; unsafe and unsanitary living conditions; abandoned, dismantled and inoperative vehicles; neglected vacant houses; weed abatement liens; garbage liens; police permittee denials or revocations; sign removal fees; stop control devices or traffic sign appeals; and utility billing and graffiti abatement fees. The Board has the authority to impose certain penalties in lieu of criminal and civil judicial enforcement. At least one member of the Board must be an attorney licensed to practice law in the State of California.

APPLICANT

Applications from the applicants listed below were reviewed by our Office. Unless otherwise indicated, the applications do not disclose any incompatible offices or apparent conflicts of interest that would substantially impair the functioning of the Board.

LEGAL CONFLICTS THAT MAY PRECLUDE VOTE OR PARTICIPATION

Certain positions may preclude a member from participating in the Board discussion or from voting if a matter involving the entity comes before the Board. While this list is not complete, these types of conflicts generally fall within one or more of the following situations:

- An application shows entities that are “sources of income” to a potential member within the 12 months preceding the start of the Board term, as defined under the Political Reform Act.
- An application shows sources of income to a Spouse or Domestic Partner of a potential member within the 12 months preceding the start of the Board term.
- An applicant or the Spouse or Domestic Partner of an applicant, is an Officer or Board Member of an entity and it is foreseeable that the entity could be involved in a matter coming before the Board.
- Proximity of the property before the Board to the applicant’s residence or business.

APPEARANCE OF BIAS

There may be facts which would not amount to a legal conflict of interest requiring a member to recuse him or herself from a Board vote or discussion, however the relationship could create an appearance of bias on the part of the member. City Council policy requires members to be free of bias in their decision making and may require a member to recuse him or herself if the facts could reasonably lead one to conclude that the applicant would be biased for or against an entity or entities.

REVIEW OF APPLICANT

Set forth below are the applicants, and any apparent legal conflicts of interest and/or appearance of bias related to entities that are likely to come before the Board in some manner, as identified in their application.

Willie Adams – Mr. Adams is unemployed. He was the Chief Financial Officer of a business-to-business organization. Mr. Adams previously served on the Traffic Appeals Board from 1999 to 2006 as a commissioner. He also served on the Appeals Hearing Board during the same time frame. His application indicates his candidacy for the Historic Landmarks Commission in addition to the Appeals Hearing Board. This may implicate Council Policy 0-4 which states “no commissioner shall serve on more than one commission at a time”.

CONCLUSION

The applicant does not appear to hold incompatible offices or to have pervasive conflicts of interest that would preclude them from serving on the Appeals Hearing Board. The applicant states they reside in San José. The Committee may wish to consider the above comments in making its recommendations regarding any appointment to the Appeals Hearing Board.

Genevieve Altwer – Ms. Altwer is a marriage and family therapist. She currently receives pension benefits from CALPERS. She was formerly a police officer for the City of San Mateo from 2003 to 2017. Her application indicates her candidacy for the Historic Landmarks Commission, in addition to the Appeals Hearing Board. This may

implicate Council Policy 0-4 which states “no commissioner shall serve on more than one commission at a time”.

CONCLUSION

The applicant does not appear to hold incompatible offices or to have pervasive conflicts of interest that would preclude them from serving on the Appeals Hearing Board. The applicant states they reside in San José. The Committee may wish to consider the above comments in making its recommendations regarding any appointment to the Appeals Hearing Board.

Matthew Berry – Mr. Berry is a private client banker with JPMorgan Chase and is pursuing his master’s in finance from Southern New Hampshire University. His application indicates his candidacy for the Planning Commission, in addition to the Appeals Hearing Board. This may implicate Council Policy 0-4 which states “no commissioner shall serve on more than one commission at a time”.

CONCLUSION

The applicant does not appear to hold incompatible offices or to have pervasive conflicts of interest that would preclude them from serving on the Appeals Hearing Board. The applicant states they reside in San José. The Committee may wish to consider the above comments in making its recommendations regarding any appointment to the Appeals Hearing Board.

Hai Bui – Mr. Bui is a principal software engineer with VMware. His application indicates his candidacy for the Police and Fire Retirement Plan Board, Climate Advisory Commission, and others, in addition to the Appeals Hearing Board. This may implicate Council Policy 0-4 which states “no commissioner shall serve on more than one commission at a time”.

CONCLUSION

The applicant does not appear to hold incompatible offices or to have pervasive conflicts of interest that would preclude them from serving on the Appeals Hearing Board. The applicant states they reside in San José. The Committee may wish to consider the above comments in making its recommendations regarding any appointment to the Appeals Hearing Board.

Samantha Keh – Ms. Keh has a professional background in business strategy, operations and risk assurance, having worked for PricewaterhouseCoopers and Cisco Systems. Her application indicates her candidacy for the Historic Landmarks Commission, in addition to the Appeals Hearing Board. This may implicate Council Policy 0-4 which states “no commissioner shall serve on more than one commission at a time”.

CONCLUSION

The applicant does not appear to hold incompatible offices or to have pervasive conflicts of interest that would preclude them from serving on the Appeals Hearing Board. The applicant states they reside in San José. The Committee may wish to consider the above comments in making its recommendations regarding any appointment to the Appeals Hearing Board.

Quincy Lowery – Mr. Lowery is a student at Santa Clara University School of Law where he serves as the President of the Black Law Student Association. He has an educational background in mechanical engineering. He previously sat on the advisory board for the Mechanical Engineering Department at North Carolina A&T State University. His application indicates his candidacy for the Civil Service Commission and the Housing and Community Development Commission, in addition to the Appeals Hearing Board. This may implicate Council Policy 0-4 which states “no commissioner shall serve on more than one commission at a time”.

CONCLUSION

The applicant does not appear to hold incompatible offices or to have pervasive conflicts of interest that would preclude them from serving on the Appeals Hearing Board. The applicant states they reside in San José. The Committee may wish to consider the above comments in making its recommendations regarding any appointment to the Appeals Hearing Board.

NORA FRIMANN
City Attorney

By /s/
Leanne Bolaño
Deputy City Attorney

cc: Jennifer Maguire, City Manager
Toni J. Taber, CMC, City Clerk