

Respondent Names
City of Edmonds Officials
Complainant Name
Theresa Campa HUTCHISON
Complaint Description
<p><u>Theresa Hutchison</u> reported via the portal 3 days ago (Mon, 24 Feb 2025 at 3:41 PM)</p> <p>**Formal Complaint to the Washington State Public Disclosure Commission (PDC)** **Subject:** Alleged Misuse of Public Funds by the City of Edmonds for Advocacy Related to the Regional Fire Authority (RFA) Annexation Ballot Measure --- **To Whom It May Concern:** I am submitting this formal complaint regarding potential violations of Washington State law by the City of Edmonds in its engagement with Liz Loomis Public Affairs (LLPA) concerning the Regional Fire Authority (RFA) annexation ballot measure. Based on the evidence outlined below, it appears that public funds may have been improperly used for advocacy purposes, rather than neutral education, in violation of Washington State law and constitutional principles. --- ### **Summary of Allegations** The City of Edmonds contracted LLPA for "strategic communication services" related to the RFA annexation ballot measure. Evidence suggests that these services went beyond neutral education and included explicit advocacy designed to influence voter approval, which is a misuse of public funds. --- ### **Key Evidence Supporting the Complaint** ##### **1. Contracting for Advocacy** The City of Edmonds signed a Professional Services Agreement with LLPA (PRR 002434-021225), which explicitly states that LLPA would provide "strategic communication consulting services related to the potential South County Fire annexation." Exhibit A of the contract includes tasks such</p>

as:

- Messaging about annexing to South County Fire.
- Developing communication materials to "educate" on the proposed annexation.

While framed as educational, evidence suggests these efforts were advocacy-driven, as detailed

below.---

2. Role and Expertise of Liz Loomis Public Affairs

LLPA specializes in securing voter approval for revenue measures, boasting a high success rate in

passing ballot initiatives. This track record strongly indicates that LLPA was hired not for neutral

communication but to actively support and promote the RFA annexation.

3. Proactive Advocacy Efforts

LLPA's communications plan, provided in December 2024, outlined tools and strategies to shape

public opinion about the RFA project. Specific examples include:

- Monthly meetings with City officials to craft "key messages" and a "strategic communications

plan."

- Development of talking points designed to persuade voters.
- Drafting text for direct mail pieces, news releases, and website content that presented the annexation in a favorable light.
- Preparing a video script for Mayor Rosen and Chief Eastman to promote the annexation.

4. Direct Involvement in Persuasive Messaging

LLPA's work included crafting materials that explicitly aimed to influence public opinion:

- News releases and e-news articles promoting the annexation.
- Revised PowerPoint presentations for town halls, including updated financial data.
- FAQs addressing potential criticisms of the annexation.
- Suggested responses for Council members to "tough questions" from constituents.
- Text for direct mail pieces, including examples from past successful annexation campaigns.

These actions go beyond neutral information dissemination and demonstrate intent to advocate for

voter approval.

5. Specific Examples Highlighting Advocacy

Several documented communications further underscore LLPA's advocacy role:

- **January 17, 2025:** Liz Loomis assured Mayor Rosen, "Let me do my job. We have won five of

these projects in the state."- **January 18, 2025:** Mayor Rosen acknowledged Loomis's experience in similar projects but

noted Edmonds posed unique challenges due to opposition.

- **February 6, 2025:** LLPA prepared slides addressing changes in property tax bills, intended for presentation at an ECR event on February 10. These slides appear designed to mitigate concerns about financial impacts.

6. Direct Mail Piece

On February 4, 2025, LLPA provided text suggestions for a direct mail piece and examples from previous successful campaigns. If this piece was distributed using public funds and contained persuasive messaging, it constitutes clear evidence of advocacy.

Legal Concerns

Violation of RCW 42.17A

Under Washington State law (RCW 42.17A), public agencies are prohibited from using public resources to support or oppose ballot measures. The evidence outlined above suggests that:

1. The City of Edmonds contracted LLPA with knowledge of its advocacy expertise.
2. LLPA's work included crafting persuasive messaging aimed at securing voter approval.
3. Public funds were used improperly to develop and disseminate this messaging.

These actions appear inconsistent with legal requirements for neutrality when using public resources.

Violation of Constitutional Principles

The Washington State Constitution reflects a commitment to providing voters with balanced and impartial information about ballot measures:

Washington State Constitution, Article II, Section 1(e):

This section mandates that the legislature provide methods of publicity for all laws, amendments, and measures referred to the people. It specifies that arguments both *for* and *against* such measures must be distributed so voters can make informed decisions based on balanced information.

The actions taken by the City of Edmonds appear contrary to this constitutional principle by using public resources to present only one side of the issue—the benefits of annexation—without providing balanced perspectives or arguments against it. This undermines voters' ability to make informed decisions based on impartial information.

Request for Investigation

I respectfully request that the PDC investigate whether the City of Edmonds violated state law by using public funds for advocacy related to the RFA annexation ballot measure. Specifically:

1. Did LLPA's activities constitute advocacy rather than neutral education?
2. Were public funds used improperly to influence voter opinion?
3. Did City officials knowingly authorize or participate in these activities?

Conclusion

The evidence provided raises serious concerns about potential misuse of public resources by the

City of Edmonds. The engagement with LLPA appears inconsistent with both RCW 42.17A and

Article II, Section 1(e) of the Washington State Constitution, which emphasize neutrality in publicly

funded communications regarding ballot measures.

I urge the PDC to conduct a thorough investigation into this matter and take appropriate action if

violations are confirmed.

Thank you for your attention to this complaint.

Appended: Additional Information:

The original documents referenced in this complaint can be found on the Public Records Requests

Archives website under the following identifiers:

- R002437-021425
- R002434-021225
- R002433-021125
- R002426-020225
- R002427-020225
- R002420-012825
- R002414-011725

Please note that some of these requests have not been fulfilled at the time of this complaint filing.

What impact does the alleged violation(s) have on the public?

****Formal Complaint to the Washington State Public Disclosure Commission (PDC)****

****Subject:**** Alleged Misuse of Public Funds by the City of Edmonds for Advocacy Related to the

Regional Fire Authority (RFA) Annexation Ballot Measure

****To Whom It May Concern:****

I am submitting this formal complaint regarding potential violations of Washington State law by the

City of Edmonds in its engagement with Liz Loomis Public Affairs (LLPA) concerning the Regional

Fire Authority (RFA) annexation ballot measure. Based on the evidence outlined below, it appears

that public funds may have been improperly used for advocacy purposes, rather than neutral education, in violation of Washington State law and constitutional principles.

Summary of Allegations

The City of Edmonds contracted LLPA for "strategic communication services" related to the RFA

annexation ballot measure. Evidence suggests that these services went beyond neutral education

and included explicit advocacy designed to influence voter approval, which is a misuse of public funds.

Key Evidence Supporting the Complaint

1. Contracting for Advocacy

The City of Edmonds signed a Professional Services Agreement with LLPA (PRR 002434-021225),

which explicitly states that LLPA would provide "strategic communication consulting services

related to the potential South County Fire annexation." Exhibit A of the contract includes tasks such

as:

- Messaging about annexing to South County Fire.
- Developing communication materials to "educate" on the proposed annexation.

While framed as educational, evidence suggests these efforts were advocacy-driven, as detailed

below.---

2. Role and Expertise of Liz Loomis Public Affairs

LLPA specializes in securing voter approval for revenue measures, boasting a high success rate in

passing ballot initiatives. This track record strongly indicates that LLPA was hired not for neutral

communication but to actively support and promote the RFA annexation.

3. Proactive Advocacy Efforts

LLPA's communications plan, provided in December 2024, outlined tools and strategies to shape

public opinion about the RFA project. Specific examples include:

- Monthly meetings with City officials to craft "key messages" and a "strategic communications

plan."

- Development of talking points designed to persuade voters.

- Drafting text for direct mail pieces, news releases, and website content that presented the annexation in a favorable light.

- Preparing a video script for Mayor Rosen and Chief Eastman to promote the annexation.

4. Direct Involvement in Persuasive Messaging

LLPA's work included crafting materials that explicitly aimed to influence public opinion:

- News releases and e-news articles promoting the annexation.
- Revised PowerPoint presentations for town halls, including updated financial data.
- FAQs addressing potential criticisms of the annexation.
- Suggested responses for Council members to "tough questions" from constituents.
- Text for direct mail pieces, including examples from past successful annexation campaigns.

These actions go beyond neutral information dissemination and demonstrate intent to advocate for voter approval.

5. Specific Examples Highlighting Advocacy

Several documented communications further underscore LLPA's advocacy role:

- **January 17, 2025:** Liz Loomis assured Mayor Rosen, "Let me do my job. We have won five of

these projects in the state."- **January 18, 2025:** Mayor Rosen acknowledged Loomis's experience in similar projects but

noted Edmonds posed unique challenges due to opposition.

- **February 6, 2025:** LLPA prepared slides addressing changes in property tax bills, intended for

presentation at an ECR event on February 10. These slides appear designed to mitigate concerns

about financial impacts.

6. Direct Mail Piece

On February 4, 2025, LLPA provided text suggestions for a direct mail piece and examples from

previous successful campaigns. If this piece was distributed using public funds and contained persuasive messaging, it constitutes clear evidence of advocacy.

Legal Concerns

Violation of RCW 42.17A

Under Washington State law (RCW 42.17A), public agencies are prohibited from using public

resources to support or oppose ballot measures. The evidence outlined above suggests that:

1. The City of Edmonds contracted LLPA with knowledge of its advocacy expertise.
2. LLPA's work included crafting persuasive messaging aimed at securing voter approval.
3. Public funds were used improperly to develop and disseminate this messaging.

These actions appear inconsistent with legal requirements for neutrality when using public resources.

****Violation of Constitutional Principles****

The Washington State Constitution reflects a commitment to providing voters with balanced and

impartial information about ballot measures:

****Washington State Constitution, Article II, Section 1(e):****

This section mandates that the legislature provide methods of publicity for all laws, amendments,

and measures referred to the people. It specifies that arguments both **for** and **against** such measures must be distributed so voters can make informed decisions based on balanced information.

The actions taken by the City of Edmonds appear contrary to this constitutional principle by using public resources to present only one side of the issue—the benefits of annexation—without

providing balanced perspectives or arguments against it. This undermines voters' ability to make

informed decisions based on impartial information.

****Request for Investigation****

I respectfully request that the PDC investigate whether the City of Edmonds violated state law by

using public funds for advocacy related to the RFA annexation ballot measure. Specifically:

1. Did LLPA's activities constitute advocacy rather than neutral education?
2. Were public funds used improperly to influence voter opinion?
3. Did City officials knowingly authorize or participate in these activities?

****Conclusion****

The evidence provided raises serious concerns about potential misuse of public resources by the

City of Edmonds. The engagement with LLPA appears inconsistent with both RCW 42.17A and

Article II, Section 1(e) of the Washington State Constitution, which emphasize neutrality in publicly

funded communications regarding ballot measures.

I urge the PDC to conduct a thorough investigation into this matter and take appropriate action if

violations are confirmed.

Thank you for your attention to this complaint.

Appended: Additional Information:

The original documents referenced in this complaint can be found on the Public Records Requests

Archives website under the following identifiers:

- R002437-021425
- R002434-021225

- R002433-021125
- R002426-020225
- R002427-020225
- R002420-012825
- R002414-011725

Please note that some of these requests have not been fulfilled at the time of this complaint filing.

List of attached evidence or contact information where evidence may be found

List of potential witnesses with contact information to reach them

James Ogonowski
Kevin Fagerstrom.
Theresa Campa Hutchison

Certification (Complainant)

I certify (or declare) under penalty of perjury under the laws of the State of Washington that information provided with this complaint is true and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief.