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Trick-or-Treat on Cole Street



PHOTOS BY RAY MILLER-STILL

Downtown Enumclaw was packed with little goblins, ghouls, and every manner of costume you can imagine last Sunday as Cole Street was closed down for the annual Halloween celebration. An extra treat this year came from the Plateau Ballet Repertory Theatre, which performed to several Halloween classics like Michael Jackson's "Thriller".

Enumclaw approves motion to research leaving King County

By RAY MILLER-STILL
Editor

Can Enumclaw leave King County? The city council wants to know.

A motion "to seek legal counsel as to the possibility, process, and impacts of annexing a portion of one county into another" was passed unanimously during the Oct. 25 council meeting.

The question of secession has long since hung in the air, given that the fringes of King County tend to feel they're not well-represented politically by the larger cities up north.

"In my opinion, the major reason that the City Council is more inclined to annex into another county is the philosophical differences that Enumclaw faces being a rural community as compared with the majority of urban and suburban King County," Council member Tom Savageau wrote in an email after the meeting. "Those differences relate less to tax and political representation and more to moral and ethical standards. And, I would state probably the largest divisive issue recently is in regards to the handling of COVID on issues such as mask mandates

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A tale of two cities: Enumclaw, Black Diamond city councils introduce 'vaccine inclusivity' resolutions amid verification mandate

After a spirited - and at one point, heated - debate, Black Diamond's resolution failed 5-2.

By RAY MILLER-STILL
Editor

It's not often the Pope gets invoked in a city council meeting, but these are strange times indeed.

The head of the Catholic Church was recently mentioned in the Black Diamond City Council meeting as part of a 40-minute discussion surrounding King County's vaccine verification mandate, which requires people to show proof of vaccination or a negative COVID test to enter businesses like restaurants, bars, and entertainment venues. The mandate went into effect Oct. 25.

The resolution relied heavily on a unanimously-passed Nov. 5, 2020 proclamation made by the city council stating that "division, isolation, hatred, and discrimination have no place in our community and do not reflect our core values," the resolution reads. "Therefore, the city council... hereby resolves... to condemn any form of discrimination toward any person that does not possess or present proof of COVID-19 vaccination."

"It is not about what choice a person has made," Council member Chris Wisnoski said. "This is a resolution that confirms our oath to support the Constitution, both of our country as well as the state, in support of individual rights."

Vaccine status "is the most divisive thing in our country right now, and I think it's time to say, 'We're not going to allow people to discriminate against vaccination status either way,'" he continued. "We're not going

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Enumclaw also decided not to enforce the vaccine verification mandate at the local pool.

By RAY MILLER-STILL
Editor

The Enumclaw City Council, in a unanimous vote, passed a resolution declaring the city to be an inclusive community in respect to vaccination status.

The votes were enthusiastically cast during the Oct. 25 meeting.

Council member Anthony Wright was the author of the resolution, and stated that he began drafting it about a month ago when multiple news agencies — including the Courier-Herald — reported the council was not following either the state of Washington or King County's mask mandate.

"This mandate was announced on September 10, 2021 during peak case counts and hospitalizations due to the rapid surge of the COVID-19 Delta variant wave," the resolution reads. However, "in the roughly six weeks that has passed between the announcement and the implementation of the vaccine verification the hospitalizations and case count within

King County has dropped significantly."

Additionally, the council "recognizes that private businesses have not been given training over vaccine verification, testing verification or de-escalation training for mandates in which they were not given a choice in implementing," the resolution continues, and that the council "does not support government mandates or restrictions promoting COVID-19 classification, grouping, segregating, or discriminating in our community."

Therefore, the council "views requiring testing documentation as a requirement for select business... as an act of discrimination that will disproportionately target lower income citizens, minority communities, citizens who adhere to religious beliefs, citizens with disabilities and citizens with a medical condition," and the city "should not take part in or support a mandate designed to discriminate against its citizens."

Council member Kael Johnson was the

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Buckley city councilor, retired SPD officer responds to report over his social media posts

Ron Smith is running to retain his city council seat.

By ALEX BRUELL
Reporter

Reflecting on his 25-plus year law enforcement career, Buckley city council member Ron Smith has had his share of accomplishments.

There's the two Seattle Police Department (SPD) excellence awards he won in 2012 and 2013, plus his time as an SPD burglary detective, member of the Major Crimes Task Force and experience supervising detectives in the evidence unit.

However, a recent Associated Press (AP) news report spotlighted history that Smith, who retired from SPD in June 2019, is less eager to revisit: Several disciplinary incidents over his

past unprofessional social media usage, one of which ultimately landed him on the local Brady List.

Smith was elected to the Buckley city council in 2017 and ran in this recent election to retain his seat. A former Sergeant with SPD and former president of the police officer's guild, Smith has highlighted his law enforcement experience in the Pierce County

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Buckley Council member Ron Smith.

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Smith

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and in Courier-Herald election coverage.

Running for re-election on that record, Smith agreed to speak with the Courier-Herald this week about his missteps and clarify his perspective.

The Courier-Herald only very recently became aware of Smith's social media history, and was not able to publish this article in print before election day Tuesday.

An Oct. 21 AP article mentioned Smith in an article about "Brady List" officers. (Brady Lists are kept by prosecutors to keep track of officers whose credibility could be questioned during court proceedings.)

Smith's entry on the King County prosecutor's Brady List, which was reviewed by the Courier-Herald, cites a Seattle Office of Police Accountability (OPA) investigation in 2019 which determined Smith had engaged in "bias-based policing."

That investigation was over derogatory, vulgar and sometimes simply juvenile Twitter posts Smith made while he was both employed by SPD and a member of the Buckley City Council.

Smith made the posts from a personal, non-work related account which had still been active as recently as Oct. 21, but Smith acknowledged that he'd deleted the account after the Courier-Herald reached out to him about it last week.

Smith regrets the posts and said in retrospect he should have been more civil, but he disagrees with the reasoning that landed him on the Brady List.

"(It) is not true at it's core," he said, of the finding that he engaged in bias-based policing.

"The SPD policy is a tangled web which allows for that, I suppose," he added. "I am retired, all my cases have been adjudicated and no need for me to testify in King County Superior Court."

That OPA report also cites two previous cases about Smith's social media activity, both of which were disciplined with one-day suspensions and re-training.

Smith doesn't deny that the

tweets or posts contained in the three OPA complaints are his.

The situation is a familiar one for many politicians - local and national - whose social media activity has come back to haunt them.

For Smith's part, he said he's "pretty much done" with social media.

And overall, "rather than 'flamethrowing' those who I disagree with, I should be more civil in discourse," he said in an email. "Social media tends to drag those not on point to a place you can put people on blast and not think twice about your choice of wording."

COMPLAINT #1

Complaint No. 1 didn't warrant a full investigation by OPA and the incident was handled between Smith and his supervisor, according to an OPA spokesperson. That means there is no OPA summary to review.

But Smith said that complaint was over a 2016 post he made on the Seattle Police Officer's Guild when he was union president. The post, related to the fatal shootings of five Dallas police officers, landed Smith in hot water and preceded his retirement from the presidency altogether.

Smith told the Seattle Times that year that his post was misunderstood, but he apologized for any offense he caused when he wrote, in part, "The hatred of law enforcement by a minority movement is disgusting ... #Weshallovercome."

COMPLAINT #2

Complaint No. 2, made by an SPD Lieutenant, related to Smith's posts prior to the 2017 Seattle May Day marches and protests, in which he identified on his personal Facebook page that he'd be working undercover during the events.

Smith posted a picture of himself captioned: "Ready for a long day tomorrow... Please pray for the safety of all Seattle Police Officers and neighboring agencies who will be dealing with MayDay tomorrow."

He confirmed in the comments of the post that he would be working "undercover" during the demonstrations.

One commenter wrote: "Be safe ... That crowd is unpredictable. 'Cuff the councilwoman' should be your game plan." According to OPA, Ron stated in response to that comment: "I'm on a mission." (The councilwoman referenced was Kshama Sawant, Smith confirmed.)

Smith told OPA that he realized the posts were inappropriate the following morning and deleted them, but those posts had already been observed by SPD employees who reported him. Smith ultimately was sent home and did not work the May Day protests.

OPA found Smith violated department policy by divulging confidential department tactics — specifically, that plainclothes officers would be working the May Day demonstrations.

OPA found that Smith's comments also "appeared to suggest that he would target (the) City Councilmember and arrest her, simply for exercising her First Amendment rights."

Smith says that wasn't his intention at all: "I would never arrest someone for exercising their First Amendment rights. I don't remember what I put, but this was late at night after a few drinks. I woke up in AM, saw what the comment thread alluded and deleted the post."

COMPLAINT #3

Findings from the third and most recent OPA complaint cited five social media posts made by Smith:

- A post on February 26, 2019 that was directed towards Governor Jay Inslee read: "you weak wristed lefties don't want border security... you want votes to keep your anti-American party in power."

- A post on April 9, 2019 that was directed towards U.S. Representative Eric Swalwell read: "when is the last time someone told you that you're a little b****?"

- A post on April 18, 2019 that was directed towards U.S. Representative Jerry Nadler read: "break yourself a** hat."

- A post on April 23, 2019 directed towards Governor Jay Inslee read: "If their (sic) illegal they don't live here... they are trespassing on our sovereign soil"

- A post on April 23, 2019 directed towards U.S.

"One thing I should have remembered is something my mother told me 45+ years ago: if you have nothing good to say, don't say anything at all."

Ron Smith,
Buckley Council member

Representative Ilhan Omar read: "thoughts? In the name of your religion, which isn't of peace."

Officers can't use social media to show bias against any protected class of people (such as race or religion), according to SPD policy.

But the post toward Rep. Omar "[suggested] that the Islamic religion and all of its approximately 1.57 billion adherents were supportive of violence," OPA said, adding that the post about "lefties" "identified approximately half of the United States population as being anti-American ... even though liberals, like conservatives, have a wide range of opinions concerning immigration."

OPA concluded the posts showed "ingrained" beliefs about Muslims and Democrats that were "the very definition of biased policing."

Smith regrets the tweets, but disagrees that they impugn his police work.

"The way they have their policy written is so broad — they call it biased policing, that's a stretch," he said. "Because I didn't police anybody. It had nothing to do with my performance or my duties as a law enforcement officer."

That being said: "I regret the heat of the moment tweeting of my thoughts of how politicians I disagree with are handling issues in our Nation/State," he wrote in a follow-up email. "Could have worded them much differently. One thing I should have remembered is something my mother told me 45+ years ago: if you have nothing good to say, don't say anything at all."

Ron said his tweet toward Omar was in response to statements she made during a March 2019 speech to the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), a Muslim civil rights and advocacy group.

Omar's quote in question: "CAIR was founded after 9/11

because they recognized that some people did something and that all of us were starting to lose access to our civil liberties."

Omar's point was that many American Muslims faced hostility after 9/11 out of misplaced anger toward the al-Qaeda perpetrators and collaborators of the terrorist attacks.

But Omar's initial statements offended listeners who, like Smith, felt she had grossly minimized the horrors of 9/11.

"That was highly offensive to many of us," Smith said. "Evidently, I let my emotions take the best of me and tweeted that to her. ... I was just pissed off. For anybody to downplay what happened on 9/11 ... to say that some people did something, that was highly offensive to me."

Omar later clarified to CBS that 9/11 was a terror attack on "all Americans" and that she did not mean to downplay what happened. And Smith said he's not prejudiced against Muslims.

"Obviously, we see that there are portions of the world that hate America, and whatever drives that," Smith said. But he agreed that the average American member of the Islamic faith is "absolutely" just as American as anyone else.

To those concerned his statements could show bias or prejudice against some of the folks he represents, Smith said he cares deeply about the Buckley community and ran for city council in the first place to work for change and progress, work he wants to continue in a second term.

"Over the last three-and-a-half years, I have represented each and every person in this town equally," Smith said. "This was over two and a half years ago. Here I am. This isn't police work; this is taking care of city, legislative business, and should have no bearing on my ability to represent (constituents)."

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