

BEFORE THE BOARD OF ETHICS
FOR THE CITY OF TACOMA

In re: the Matter of the Complaint Against
Chris Karnes

FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND
ORDER OF DISMISSAL OF
BOARD OF ETHICS COMPLAINT
NO. 2021-003

Board of Ethics Complaint No. 2021-003

I. JURISDICTION AND PROCEDURAL HISTORY

- 1.1. On May 2, 2021, Teresa H. submitted an ethics complaint through the City of Tacoma's TacomaFIRST 311 Customer Support Center (processed as W189550-050221) regarding City Planning Commission member Chris Karnes regarding comments he made on social media on or about April 14, 2021 (attached hereto as Exhibits A and B).
- 1.2. Per Tacoma Municipal Code (TMC) 1.46.025.C and 1.46.040, the BOE has jurisdiction over this matter insofar as an alleged violation of the City of Tacoma Code of Ethics (TMC 1.46) for purposes of making findings of fact, conclusions of law, and recommending disposition as the subject of the Complaint (Chris Karnes) is a current "City officer" as he is an appointed member of a City Commission.

II. FINDINGS OF FACT

2.1. The Board makes the following findings of fact:

Complaint No. 2021-003 was submitted as a violation of the “City of Tacoma Code of Ethics” (City of Tacoma Municipal Code Chapter 1.46) alleging conduct including: sharing and making fun of public comments he does not agree with provided by citizens at City of Tacoma planning meetings. The Complaint did not specify which provision(s) Mr. Karnes violated.

III. CONCLUSIONS OF LAW

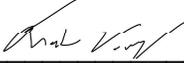
- 3.1 TMC 1.46.030 provides for what would be prohibited conduct (what would be a violation of the City of Tacoma Code of Ethics).
- 3.2 Complaint No. 2021-003 does not allege sufficient facts, which, if proven true, would constitute “prohibited conduct” as provided for under TMC 1.46.030 and therefore be a violation of TMC 1.46.
- 3.3 Therefore, Complaint No. 2021-003 is dismissed pursuant to TMC 1.46.045.F.2.a.i.

IV. ORDER

Based on the foregoing, Complaint No. 2021-003 is hereby DISMISSED.

DATED this 27 day of May, 2021

City of Tacoma Board of Ethics

By: 
Ohad Lowy, Chair

cc: Mayor and Council
City Attorney
Chris Karnes

File a Conduct Complaint (W189550-050221)

Request Location

Address 1: 747 MARKET ST

Address 2:

City: Tacoma

State/Province: WA

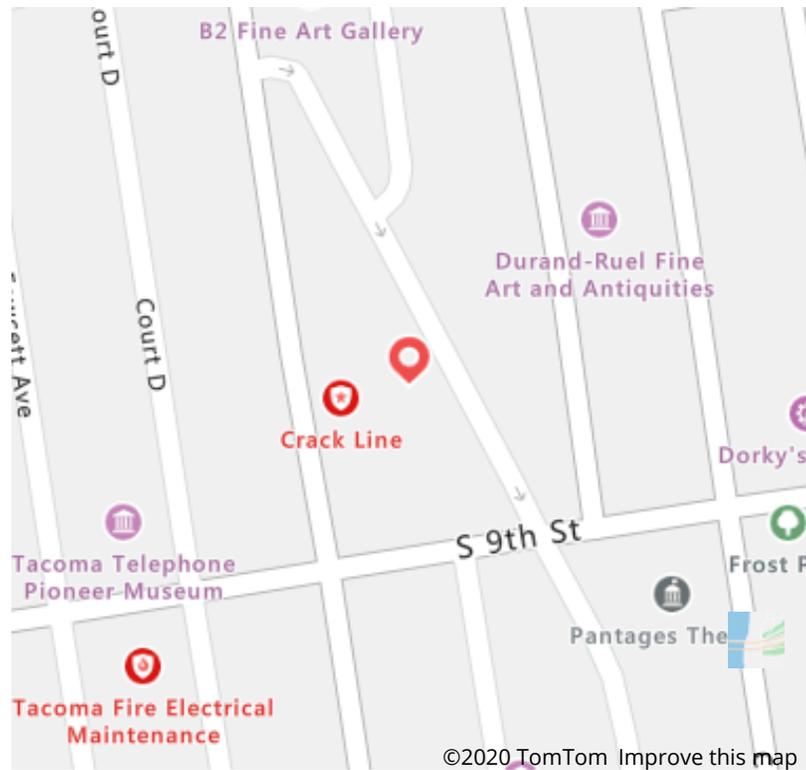
Zip/Postal Code: 98402

Neighborhood Council: NEW TACOMA

Police Sector Sub Sector: 1-1

Councilmanic 2012: D2

Map:



Map

File a Conduct Complaint Details

If you prefer to manually submit your complaint, then **Click to download the Conduct Complaint Form**, please fill out, then return to Customer Support Center, 747 Market St. Room 243. Otherwise proceed below.

CONDUCT COMPLAINT DETAILS:

Date of Incident: 4/14/2021

Incident Location/Address
(Optional):

Race:

Gender:

Complaint Type: Ethics Violation | Misconduct | Unsure |

REVIEW CODE OF ETHICS: City Ordinance Title 1 - Chapter 1.46

Was the person wearing a City uniform?: No

Department if known: City Board or Commission

Was the person wearing a name tag or badge?: No

Enter Employee name if known: Chris Karnes (Commissioner)

Please enter Employee ID / Badge Number:

City Vehicle #:

What is your complaint? If your complaint is more than 1000 words, please attach a word document with all the necessary information to help the City resolve this issue. Thank You :

I moved to Tacoma around 5 years ago and started following Tacoma related social media accounts, one is an account named TacomaTransit, from Chris Karnes on twitter, which I noticed he is also a Planning Commissioner for the city. In the last few months, I've been shocked at what he is putting on his Twitter account, making fun of public comment that has occurred at City of Tacoma planning meetings and most recently via written public comment, going as far as calling a commenter KKK. He's definitely gaslighting his followers, some are saying they can't wait to see the names on the comments so they can track the commenters down. I feel that as an appointed member of the planning commission this is not the right way to treat fellow citizens comments, by airing them out on social media. Isn't there ethics training? Granted, some of these comments are not good, however, he is also putting down ANY comment that doesn't align with his views and riling up others online. As a commissioner, isn't he supposed to be open to public feedback and comments? If he isn't, why would citizens believe their opinions are truly being considered and why is he involved in making recommendations to Council? I will include a few links to the social media comments he is making, which unfortunately have spurred horrible conversation and reaction online across accounts from The Urbanist, Move to Tacoma (who made an IG video of the bad comments after Chris posted them), and others who have dotted connections to the City, even catching the attention of Pierce County Council Chair Young. I didn't know that if citizens submitted comments that they were opening themselves up to be shamed online if Chris didn't agree with them? This isn't conduct that should be acceptable for a commissioner, who is a rep of the City. Screenshots are attached as well, since he can easily delete tweets. The screenshot 'Karnes 05' is him commenting during/after a commission meeting that included hours of live public comments. In another comment, he screenshot a comment from a public comment packet, then said it made him think of the KKK, along with a photo he inserted. How is this ok, to label citizens as racist, with no chance for them to defend themselves? I'm not saying that the comments were all comments that deserve defending, but this behaviour from a commissioner is wrong. Also, pulling comments completely out of context, framing the narrative as negative when some of the comments elsewhere in the letters might have valid points. How is it okay for him to pull comments out of context for the fodder of his followers? This is so disappointing to see a representative of the City allowed to do things like this. I'm also including a screenshot from Move to Tacoma, with comments that are the direct result of Chris' tweeting to bring it to everyone's attention. I suggest that the Council seriously consider removing Chris from the commission and not allowing him to serve elsewhere as a rep of the city. He has spun the narrative that people that are concerned about housing changes are racist and exclusionary (screenshot Karnes 06), all while publicly shaming them and almost egging people on to track down the commenters. Thank you for your consideration and attention to this matter. While I didn't send in a comment about Home in Tacoma, I'm seriously doubting ever submitting a public comment after seeing what has happened here. Citizens now need to fear having their comments judged online by commissioners.

Here he's playing games with comments, asking people to throw out a number and he'll pull a comment out (Karnes08): <https://twitter.com/TacomaTransit/status/1383488789373284365>

Alleging that a commenter is KKK (Karnes 01):

<https://twitter.com/TacomaTransit/status/1382500801306783744>

Here he screenshots a comment, then in the reply thread says someone can ask the commenter to defend themselves when the public comments are posted (Karnes 07):

<https://twitter.com/TacomaTransit/status/1382507523853352960>

Here is compares a redlining map to a comment he pulled from written comments (Karnes 06):

<https://twitter.com/TacomaTransit/status/1384129658027872257>

Additional screenshots attached putting down commenters.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT:

By checking this box, you are acknowledging that the information on this form is true and correct to the best of your knowledge, and that the information may be used by the City of Tacoma to further investigate the complaint.: Yes

By submitting this request, you are acknowledging that the information on this form is true and correct to the best of your knowledge, and that the information may be used by the City of Tacoma to further investigate the complaint.: YES

RESOLUTION AND FINDINGS::

Resolution Type:

Tacoma Police Department IA
Tracking Number:

Summary of Findings:

▼ Message History

Date

On 5/2/2021 10:27:11 PM, System Generated Message:

Subject: City of Tacoma - Citizen Support Center Request :: W189550-050221

Body:

Thank you for contacting the City of Tacoma with your concerns. Your Conduct Complaint has been submitted to the City Managers Office to be reviewed by the Conduct Complaint System Auditor. Please note that it is typical for an investigation to take several months to be resolved.

Please Note: At this time, the City is working hard to address all requests as timely as possible. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, budgetary and staffing constraints have resulted in some request completion delays.

Your TacomaFIRST 311 Conduct Complaint request number is: W189550-050221.

If you were logged in as a Citizen account when you submitted this request, please click here to [review your request](#), otherwise call 311 (within city limits), (253) 591-5000 (outside city limits).

Thank you,
The City of Tacoma

Track the issue status and respond at: https://tacomawa.mycusthelp.com/webapp/_rs/RequestEdit.aspx?rid=189550

On 5/2/2021 10:27:08 PM, Teresa H. wrote:
Request Created on Public Portal

▼ Request Details

Reference No: W189550-050221

Create Date: 5/2/2021 10:27 PM

Update Date: 5/3/2021 6:40 PM

Completed/Closed: No

Required Completion Date: 5/24/2021

Status: New Request

Priority: High

Assigned Dept: City Attorney/City Clerk's Office

Assigned Staff: Susan Haigh

Customer Name: Teresa H.

Email Address: teresatacoma@outlook.com

Phone: 2532329876

Group: (Not Specified)

Source: Web



Chris Karnes  @TacomaTransit · Apr 12

...

I am just never going to be able to look at the North End the same way after reading all of these am I?

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Chris Karnes  @TacomaTransit · Apr 12

...

Letters are organized A-Z. I am on letter "C" and have seen 15+ letters where 1) someone's husband is speaking for their partner and 2) two people share an email address. This still happens in 2021??

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Chris Karnes 🏳️‍🌈 @TacomaTransit · Apr 15

...

Homeowners who two months ago said trees blocking their water views were "hurting home values" now *concerned* about tree canopy loss from new housing.



💬 4

↻ 7

❤️ 90





Chris Karnes  @TacomaTransit · Apr 14

...

"You will not succeed in infiltrating the North End with racial and economic diverse populations."



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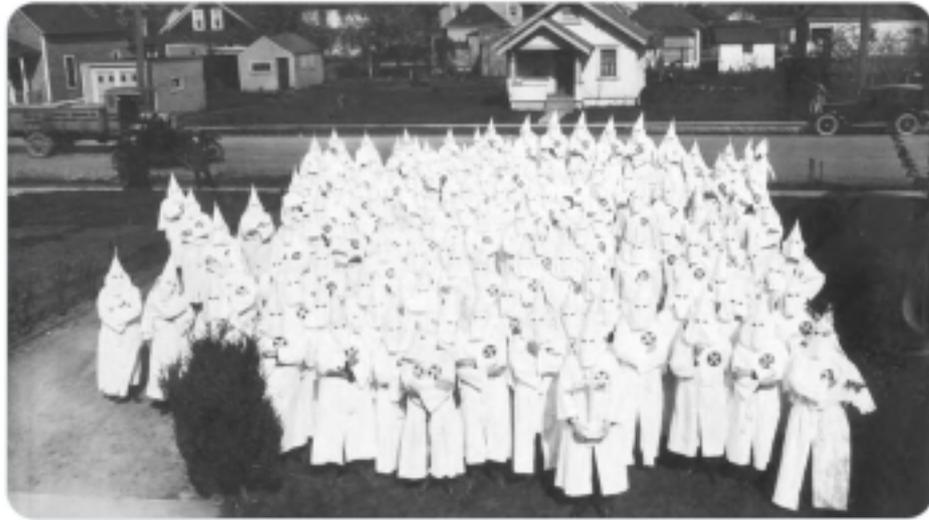
95



Chris Karnes  @TacomaTransit · Apr 14

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All I can see while reading this



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90



Move To Tacoma Retweeted



Chris Karnes 🇺🇸 @TacomaTransit · Apr 19

90 years apart

Left: HOLC map 1931

"D-7, This might be classed as a 'Low Yellow' area were it not for the presence of the number of Negroes and low class Foreign families

Inhabitants: Infiltration of Lower classes

Occupation: Laborers"

Right: Public comment, Home in Tacoma 2021



will not succeed
ing the North
and economic
tions."

14 Apr 21 · Twitter W



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16





Chris Karnes  @TacomaTransit · Apr 14

Someone may ask the author to confirm their comments when the full packet is posted

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Chris Karnes  @TacomaTransit · Apr 17



Since there are almost a thousand pages of [#HomeInTacoma](#) comments, I can't get to all of them. So reply with a number between 1 and 977 and I will give you a quote from that page.

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Move To Tacoma @MoveToTacoma · Apr 26

...

My pro tip is to CTRL F "transient" "transients" "renters" for the truly despicable stuff. I can't believe Tacomans signed their names to these statements. Just awful.



Erik Bjornson, Esq. @ErikBjornson · Apr 26

Home in Tacoma watchers / Tacoma urban geeks: Here all of the comments the city has released in response to the proposal. Now you have something to do in the lockdown! bit.ly/32w80zo
@jasonjgauthier @TacomaTransit @MoveToTacoma @transitdude



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Move To Tacoma @MoveToTacoma · Apr 26

...

Got a pro tip to CTRL F "infiltrate" and that produces a racist result...

"You will not succeed in infiltrating the NE with racial and economic diverse populations."

cityoftacoma.org/UserFiles/Serv...



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Move To Tacoma @MoveToTacoma · Apr 26

...

I turned some of the comments into an Instagram reel...

instagram.com/reel/COJKkMBB8...



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