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The City of Springfield
Massachusetts

February 5, 2026

City Councilor President Tracye Whitfield
36 Court Street
Springfield, MA, 01103

Dear President Whitfield:

I received your email Monday evening subsequent to the City Council meeting of February 2, 2026. In your email, you request legal guidance and review on a recusal issue during the Council meeting. Further you request a recommendation as to whether a corrective action is required, and, if so, what guidance does the Springfield Law Department recommend. Please treat the attached memorandum of law as the law department's response. The memorandum includes a summary of the facts, a legal analysis, and a recommendation on how the entire City Council should proceed on addressing the issues at hand.

A. CITY COUNCIL

On February 2, 2026, the City Council as a whole held a public meeting. The posted agenda included a discontinuance of a section of Wallace Street. The party who appeared to present the item and testify before the City Council was Jelani Bland. Mr. Bland identified himself as representing JETS Property Development, LLC. ("JETS"), the petitioner. Mr. Bland had previously submitted the request for discontinuance to the DPW under the same business entity. Mr. Bland is your son and business partner. JETS Property Development, LLC is a registered business entity with the Massachusetts Secretary of State's Office. You, Tracy Whitfield of 122 Cuff Avenue, Springfield, MA 01104, are listed as the resident agent of JETS and one of four listed managers. One of the other managers is Jelani Bland. As a manager and officer of the LLC, you have a financial interest in the JETS. If the City Council approved JETS' petition, JETS would receive a parcel of land that had financial value. As a City Councilor and President, you must comply with the Massachusetts conflict of interest laws, notably MGL c.268A. Training and certification are regularly required by the Commonwealth to remain educated on the statute.

LEGAL CONCLUSION

The law department concludes that you violated MGL c. 268A at the Council meeting in multiple ways:

1. You failed to properly recuse yourself from all deliberation on a matter that came before the City Council of which you and an immediate family member had a direct financial interest. Recusal must occur for all deliberation and voting. By continuing to preside over the matter for a significant amount of the debate, you not only failed to remove yourself from all deliberation but as President controlled discussion on the matter, actions that violate MGL c.268A.

2. You failed to disclose that Jelani Bland is your son and business partner for the same entity that was the named petitioner for the discontinuance. MGL c.268A requires a complete disclosure on the record so that all the other Councilors are informed of the relationship and business interest.
3. You failed to disclose that you have a financial interest in JETS. As the resident agent who receives all correspondence for the LLC and a manager with a financial interest, MGL 268A mandates recusal and disclosure on the record.
4. You have failed to file any disclosures of a conflict of interest with the Springfield Clerk's Office, the keeper of such records. The Clerk's Office reported to the Law Department that they have no disclosure forms by you for this matter or any other matter.

The Law Department has been in contact with multiple City Councilors who report that they were unaware of your relationship with Mr. Bland and unaware of your financial interest in JETS for the entirety of the discussion and vote on the matter.

B. PLANNING BOARD

In addition, while investigating the City Council meeting, the Law Department became aware of previous engagements by you on matters related to JETS. The Planning Board held meetings in 2024 on a petition for a zone change for 22 Wistaria Street (the same parcel discussed at Monday's Council meeting). An item on both agendas was a petition by JETS for a zone change of the parcel that abuts the same piece of land at issue at Monday's City Council meeting, 22 Wistaria Street.

LEGAL CONCLUSION

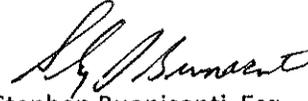
At those meetings, you acted as an agent for JETS while also revealing yourself as a City Councilor, and you advocated for the zone change as positive improvement for development in the City. You never reported or disclosed yours or your family's interest in JETS or your direct financial interest in the decision of the Planning Board. Again, pursuant to MGL c. 268A, you are prohibited from participating, deliberating or influencing another City government body on matters that impact your financial interest or the interests of immediate family members. Moreover, disclosures with the Clerk's Office are required to be filed. None were filed on this matter. Further, under MGL c. 268A you are prohibited from acting as an agent for JETS in any matter where the City has a direct and substantial interest, such as a Zone Change.

C. RECOMMENDED ACTION

The City Council's vote on the discontinuance of Wallace Street is tainted and rife with conflict-of-interest violations. Due to your failure to recuse yourself from all deliberation, your failure to disclose on the record to the Council and the public at large your financial interest in JETS and your relationship as mother and son to the petitioner who testified before the City Council, the Law Department recommends a motion to rescind the previous vote.

Note that a motion to reconsideration would be ruled out of order because it was not filed prior to the conclusion of Monday night's meeting. City Council Rules do not directly address a process in such a circumstance. When the matter is not contemplated by the City Council Rules, Rule 38 states that Robert's Rules of Order shall govern. Robert's Rules of Order permit a motion to rescind be filed at a subsequent meeting. A motion to rescind that is filed prior to the meeting prevails on a majority vote.

Based on the facts and the repeated violations of MGL c.268A, the Law Department is referring this letter and the attached legal memorandum to the Massachusetts Ethics Commission as the body empowered to investigate conflicts of interest of public officials.



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CC: City Council,
Mayor