

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
STATE ELECTIONS ENFORCEMENT COMMISSION

In the Matter of a Complaint by Joseph Quaranta and Meredith Quaranta
New Milford

File No. 2021-030

FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

Complainants Joseph Quaranta and Meredith Quaranta of New Milford filed this complaint on February 11, 2021 alleging that Pete Bass, mayor of New Milford, had failed to put a disclaimer on a Facebook page that he operates and had collected contributions through that Facebook page without having registered a candidate committee. After investigating the allegations raised in the complaint the Commission makes the following findings and conclusions:

1. Complainants alleged that Bass was using a Facebook page entitled "Re-Elect Pete Bass for Mayor" even though he had not yet registered a candidate committee and the page did not include an attribution. Additionally, the complainants alleged that Bass was using the page to collect contributions and that he had posted several videos that had originally been created for the town's benefit on his campaign Facebook page.
2. Respondent Bass is the incumbent mayor of New Milford. In response to a subpoena, Bass was interviewed at the Commission's offices on May 31, 2022. During the interview, Bass explained that his "Re-Elect Pete Bass for Mayor" Facebook page was one of three that he controlled. He also administered his personal Facebook page and a page for the mayor's office.
3. Bass said that his "Re-Elect Pete Bass for Mayor" Facebook was one that he kept active, even when he was not running for re-election. Bass said that during the COVID-19 pandemic, he began posting videos regarding the pandemic response and other municipal news to all three of the Facebook pages that he controlled: the town's, his personal page, and his campaign page. Bass stated that he wanted to spread the news about the pandemic as broadly as possible.
4. Bass stood for re-election on November 2, 2021. He established a candidate committee to support his candidacy for the mayor's office on or about July 16, 2021. Bass said that prior to the establishment of his candidate committee, he had neither collected contributions to support his election nor had he or anyone acting on his behalf spent money to promote his candidacy.
5. According to Bass, any contributions that were initiated through the Facebook page were redirected to his website, where contributions were collected through an online interface.

Any contributions that were received were documented and reported in the committee's campaign finance reports, Bass said.

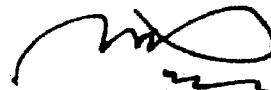
6. There was no evidence that Bass collected any contributions or spent any money prior to the establishment of the candidate committee.
7. General Statutes § 9-621 require communications from a candidate committee to bear the attribution of stating that the communication was paid for by a candidate committee and who the treasurer of that committee is and also that the communication was approved by the candidate. Here, however, there was not a candidate committee to claim those communications and Bass was not yet a candidate. It appears that other than the name of the page, nothing on the Facebook pages directly promoted Bass.
8. As part of the interview, Bass was counseled to cease using his "Re-Elect Pete Bass for Mayor" Facebook page when he was not actively running for office. Bass agreed to shut down the page when he was not running for office.
9. Complaints alleged that Bass had utilized the town videography services to promote his candidacy. There was no evidence found to show that Bass had re-directed town resources to promote his candidacy via use of the municipal videography services.
10. As part of his re-election campaign, Bass hired a videographer to create content to promote his candidacy. The candidate committee paid Myke Foo Media, which is operated by Michael V. Furhman, to create video content to promote the candidate. The candidate committee paid Myke Foo Media a total of \$9,506.05 for those video services.
11. Based on the investigation conducted by the Commission, there are no violations related to the activities raised by the complainants, although the continuous operation of the campaign website by Bass does create potential issues under Connecticut's campaign finance statutes, as can be seen by this complaint. Respondent should be careful to avoid any use of either campaign websites or social media accounts linked to his re-election effort when he is not actively campaigning.
12. The Commission will take no further action on this matter.

ORDER

The following Order is recommended on the basis of the aforementioned findings:

That the Commission will take no further action on this matter.

Adopted this 15th day of June, 2022 at Hartford, Connecticut.



Stephen Penny, Chairperson
By Order of the Commission