

CITY OF GROSSE POINTE PARK

ETHICS REVIEW BOARD

OPINION 2025-01

NOVEMBER 6, 2025

INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF FACTS

Lisa Kyle, Chairperson of the Grosse Pointe Park Beautification Commission (“GPPBC”), submitted a request for advisory opinion from the Review Board relating to the GPPBC’s interest in contracting with Hansen Catering, a Grosse Pointe Park catering company, to cater the GPPBC’s annual awards ceremony. Hansen Catering apparently is owned by Sarah Hansen, daughter of Shellie Hansen and Robert Hansen.¹ Shellie Hansen is a member of the GPPBC board and Robert Hansen is an employee of the Grosse Pointe Park Department of Public Works.

Hansen Catering had, in the past, catered the annual awards ceremony. However, in 2024, the GPPBC was advised not to use Hansen Catering because of the potential conflict of interest in contracting with a catering company that is owned by the daughter of one of the GPPBC Board members; the GPPBC instead contracted with Nino Salvaggio's, a local merchant, at a substantially higher cost. Because Hansen Catering was willing to cater the event for half of what was paid in 2024, the GPPBC has requested an advisory opinion; specifically, would contracting with Hansen Catering be in violation of the City’s ethics ordinance (“The Ordinance”)?²

ISSUES PRESENTED

¹ The record is unclear in this regard. It is possible that Hansen Catering is co-owned by Sarah and her mother, Shellie. The request for advisory opinion asks for “approval to use either Sarah Hansen or Shellie Hanson (commissioner who works in the catering industry) as [GPPBC’s] caterer this year[.]”

² Ordinance No. 219, “AN ORDINANCE TO AMEND THE CODE OF THE CITY OF GROSSE POINTE PARK BY ADDING SECTIONS 2-1 TO 2-7, TO ARTICLE I, TO ESTABLISH STANDARDS OF ETHICAL CONDUCT FOR CITY OFFICIALS AND EMPLOYEES AND ESTABLISH AN ETHICS COMMITTEE”, adopted August 1, 2020.

1. Is the City and/or the GPPBC³ in breach of The Ordinance if it contracts with Hansen Catering even though
 - a. Hansen Catering is owned by the daughter of a City Employee (Robert Hansen) and a member of the Board of the GPPBC?
 - b. Hansen Catering may in fact be co-owned by a member of the Board of the GPPBC?
2. If the City and/or the GPPBC is not in breach of the Ordinance by contracting with Hansen Catering, may Shellie Hansen participate in the deliberations relating to whom to hire, or must she recuse herself from deliberations and from voting to contract with Hansen Catering?

ANSWER AND ANALYSIS

Initially, it is important to note that The Ordinance does not prohibit the City from entering into contracts with a business owned by one of its employees or officials. While it is true that The Ordinance deems it a “conflict of interest” for an employee or official of the City to enter into a contract with the City (Ordinance 2-5(a)(6)),⁴ the remedy for such conflict is for the employee or official to abstain from voting on the decision to enter into the contract, and even further, to recuse one’s self from participating in deliberations on the subject.⁵

Thus, there is no question that if Hansen Catering is owned in part by Shellie Hansen, Ms. Hansen would be required, under The Ordinance, to recuse herself from voting on, or even entering into deliberations relating to, whether to contract with Hansen Catering.

However, does this same result follow if Hansen Catering is owned by Sarah Hansen alone?

Ordinance Sec. 2-7 sets forth a requirement that City employees, officials and appointees, upon commencement of their service, and annually thereafter, disclose to the City Clerk

³ In point of fact, the GPPBC does not have authority to enter into contracts; if Hansen Catering is retained to cater the awards ceremony, it would be the City itself entering into the contract.

⁴ “No official or employee of the city shall engage in a business transaction in which he or she may profit because of his or her official position or authority . . .” Ordinance Sec. 2-5(a)(6).

⁵ Sec. 2-5(b)(1): “Responsibility to disclose. It shall be the responsibility of the official or employee to disclose the full nature and extent of his or her direct or indirect financial or personal interest in a matter before him or her. . . . No official or employee of the city shall participate, as an agent or representative of the city, in approving, disapproving, voting, abstaining from voting, recommending or otherwise acting upon any matter in which he or she has directly or indirectly a financial or personal interest. The official or employee shall, in such circumstances, recuse himself or herself from the matter before him or her.

information relating to, among other things, businesses that have contracts with the City and are owned by family members:

Immediately following an election, employment or appointment of a city official, or employee, and on the one-year anniversary of such election, employment or appointment, the city clerk shall provide the individual with an affidavit and disclosure statement form. Within 20 days after election, appointment, employment or any change in the facts set forth in the city official's or employee's previously filed affidavit and disclosure statement, all city officials or employees shall file with the city clerk an affidavit and disclosure statement including the following:

A. A disclosure statement responding in detail to the following questions:

* * *

5. To the best of your knowledge, do you or any members of your immediate family have any direct financial or business relationships with any supplier, service provider or contractor of the City of Grosse Pointe Park from which you or they derive direct compensation or financial benefit that is not reported in the prior answers.

Ostensibly, then, it would appear that the Council intended to include, as a “conflict of interest” under The Ordinance, facilitating one’s family members in contracting with the City without disclosing that business and family relationship.

However, a reading of the operative provisions of The Ordinance do not, in fact, expressly prohibit the facilitation of business relationships between the City and family member-owned businesses. For example, Sec. 2-5(a)(6), quoted above, seemingly counts as a conflict of interest only those business arrangements where the employee or official himself or herself is the owner (in part or in whole) of the business at issue. There is no reference in that subsection to “members of your immediate family” (as is the case in Section 2-7).

Similarly, Sec. 2-5(a)(1) provides that “It shall be the responsibility of the official or employee to disclose the full nature and extent of his or her **direct or indirect financial or personal interest** in a matter before him or her.” Oddly, once again, there is no inclusion of children’s businesses here (the reference to “indirect financial interest” is not defined and is not a term defined in the “Definitions” section, 2-3).

Two other sections of The Ordinance, however, would appear to consider there to be a conflict of interest in this case (even if Hansen Catering is owned solely by Sarah Hansen). Specifically, Sec. 2-5(a)(10) reads:

No official or employee of the city shall use, or attempt to use, his or her official position to secure, request or grant unreasonably any special consideration, privilege, exemption, advantage, contract or preferential treatment for himself, herself, **or others**, beyond that which is available to every other citizen. (emphasis added)

While the “or others” language is undefined and is very broad, even the narrowest of readings would lead one to reasonably believe that facilitating one’s child to enter into a contract with the City is itself a conflict of interest.

Furthermore, Sec. 2-4, which lays out the express intent of the Ordinance, provides:

It is the intention of section 2-5 below that city officials and employees avoid any action, whether or not specifically prohibited by section 2-5, which might result in, or create the appearance of:

- (1) Using public employment or office for private gain;
- (2) Giving or accepting preferential treatment, including the use of city property or information, to or from any organization or person;
- (3) Losing complete independence or impartiality of action;
- (4) Making a city decision outside official channels; or
- (5) Affecting adversely the confidence of the public or the integrity of the city government.

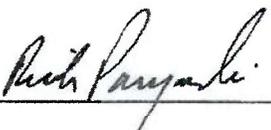
It can hardly be doubted that, again, a conflict exists where there is an appearance of “giving preferential treatment” to a business owned and run by one’s daughter.

As stated above, the fact that a conflict exists does not in itself mean the City may not contract with Hansen Catering. Indeed, it would be an absurd result to have the City pay over double to have someone else cater the awards ceremony solely so that the City might avoid looking like it favored a business owned by the daughter of one of its Commission members.

Instead, The Ordinance deals with this potential for conflict simply by requiring that the official whose business is involved recuse himself or herself from deliberations as to whether to contract with Hansen Catering and from voting on the measure.

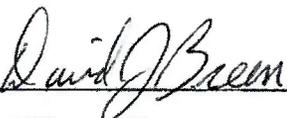
Sec. 2-5(b)(2)(a) mandates that "Any city official or employee who has a conflict of interest, as defined herein, in any matter before the city shall disclose such fact on the appropriate record⁷ of the city prior to discussion or action thereon and shall refrain from participating in any discussion, voting or action thereon."

Accordingly, it is the recommendation of this Ethics Board that Shellie Hansen disclose to the GPPBC the fact that her daughter is the owner of Hansen Catering⁸ and to recuse herself from both deliberations on whether to engage Hansen Catering and voting on the measure. We otherwise see nothing inappropriate in having the City, with this full disclosure having been made, contracting with Hansen Catering if the GPPBC and the City deem it economical and in the interests of the citizens of Grosse Pointe Park.⁹



Rick Pacynski

Date: 11/7/25



David Breen

Date: 11/7/25



Anthony Agosta

Date: 11/7/25

⁷ Sec. 2-5(b)(2)(a)(2) reads: "A member of any city board, council or committee shall disclose any conflict of interest and the nature and extent of such interest on the records of said board, council or committee;"

⁸ Which, of course, she has admirably already done.

⁹ As an aside, we are grateful that Lisa Kyle, Shellie Hansen and Nick Sizeland concluded that this situation merited a request for an advisory opinion. The Ordinance was written to encourage requests like the one in this case and it is a pleasure to see City officials taking advantage of the opportunity to determine in advance whether a conflict of interests exists.