

RESOLUTION NO. R-2020-

A RESOLUTION authorizing the censure of City Councilmember Jason White.

WHEREAS, the City Council adopted the applicable Rules of Procedure of the Yakima City Council which provide for a remedy for violations by council members of the Council Rules of Procedure, Council Code of Ethics, Council Principles of Conduct, or other applicable laws and/or regulations; and

WHEREAS, on April 7, 2020, the City Council adjourned its business meeting into an executive session called by Deputy Mayor Holly Cousens in accordance with RCW 42.30.110(f) to receive and evaluate complaints or charges brought against a public officer; and

WHEREAS, Councilmember White was not present at the April 7, 2020 general business meeting, nor did he inform the Mayor or the Interim City Manager of his absence before the meeting; and

WHEREAS, following the executive session, the City Council resumed its business meeting, at which time Deputy Mayor Cousens moved that staff draft a resolution censuring Councilmember White; and

WHEREAS, Deputy Mayor Cousens's motion stated that Councilmember White's inflammatory language is not consistent with the Council's policies and procedures; and

WHEREAS, Deputy Mayor Cousens cited to the following sections of the Principles of Conduct for Yakima City Council Members which provides that "As a City Council member, of the City of Yakima, I agree to these principles of conduct:

- I. Consistently demonstrate the principles of professionalism, respect, and civility in working for the greater good of Yakima;
- V. Support a positive and constructive environment for residents, business, and City employees;
- VI. Refrain from abusive conduct, personal charges, or verbal attacks upon the character or motives of other members of the City Council, boards, commission, committees, staff, or the public;
- VII. Avoid personal comments that could offend others"; and

WHEREAS, Deputy Mayor Cousens highlighted the rule that councilmembers refrain from abusive conduct, personal charges and verbal attacks upon the public when Councilmember White made an abusive personal charge aimed at LGBTQ residents; and

WHEREAS, those remarks include a statement to the Yakima Herald-Republic newspaper wherein Councilmember White called the leader of the non-profit organization Yakima Pride "an idiot"; and stated on his public Facebook page that the leader of Yakima Pride "is an idiot and is making the entire LGBTQ community look irrational"; and

WHEREAS, Deputy Mayor Cousens went on to state that in addition to his remarks aimed toward the LGBTQ community, Councilmember White also engaged in abusive conduct when he shared disinformation on the COVID-19 worldwide pandemic; and

WHEREAS, those remarks include statements made on Councilmember White's Facebook page advising others to defy the orders of the Washington State Governor and Yakima Health District, as well as the recommendations of President Trump to limit non-essential trips and business, stay home, and avoid contact with those not in your immediate family; and

WHEREAS, Councilmember White has also made statements on his Facebook page indicating that those persons who are healthy should go back to work and avoid the precautions that have been outlined by the government and health care officials, specifically "calling on all of the Yakima people who say they support me to grow some balls and get back to work (as in making shit happen for yourself, not that old job that is dead and gone most likely). Take off your masks!"; and

WHEREAS, Councilmember White posted on his Facebook page that people should "only avoid getting out if you are sick..and most American's are extremely unhealthy and sick. For the rest of us with healthy immune systems and that keep them that way, this won't effect us, just like all the other viruses in the environment" which is in direct contradiction to the guidance issued by the government and the Center for Disease Control; and

WHEREAS, Mayor Byers further remarked that Councilmember White's remarks regarding COVID-19 and his call to disregard the information provided to the public designed to diminish the spread of the virus were reckless, frightening and dangerous to Yakima community members; and

WHEREAS, the City Council finds that Councilmember White has committed a violation of the Principles of Conduct for Yakima City Council Members that require admonishment greater than that provided for in a verbal reprimand, but does not require additional measures be taken; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF YAKIMA:

Based on the recitals above, which are fully incorporated herein, and in accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the Yakima City Council, Section K(2)(c)(i), the City Council finds that Councilmember Jason White has committed violations of the Principles of Conduct for Yakima City Council Members and that his violations require admonishment greater than a verbal reprimand. Councilmember Jason White is hereby publicly censured.

ADOPTED BY THE CITY COUNCIL this 21st day of April, 2020.

Patricia Byers, Mayor

ATTEST:

Sonya Claar Tee, City Clerk