



Village of River Forest
Village Administrator's Office
400 Park Avenue
River Forest, IL 60305
Tel: 708-366-8500

MEMORANDUM

Date: January 12, 2026
To: Village Board of Trustees
From: Matt Walsh, Village Administrator
Subj: Review of Ethics Commission Recommendation and Determination on Paul Harding's Complaint against Development Review Board Members.

Background: Resident Paul Harding filed an ethics complaint on November 9, 2025. The Local Ethics Commission convened on December 2, 2025 to perform an initial review of the complaint. During the initial review, the Commission determined that certain aspects of the complaint had sufficient basis to further investigate. Accordingly, the Commission held a hearing on January 5, 2026, to evaluate the complaint.

Summary of Determination: The Ethics Commission's complete determination and recommendation is attached. The Commission made recommendations on December 2, 2025 to dismiss certain aspects of the complaint and made additional recommendations on January 5, 2026. The Commission voted unanimously to dismiss the complaints against Development Review Board members Maryann Fishman, Jane McCole, Ron Lucchesi and Elias Yanaki.

Motion for Board Consideration: If the Village Board wishes to adopt the recommendation of the Ethics Commission, the following motion would be appropriate:

Motion to accept the Ethics Commission's findings, dismissing the complaint against Fishman, Lucchesi, McCole and Yanaki.

**Local Ethics Commission Determination and Recommendation Regarding the Ethics
Complaint filed by Paul Harding on November 9, 2025.**

On November 9, 2025, resident Paul Harding submitted the attached ethics complaint alleging certain violations of the Ethics Ordinance. The Local Ethics Commission convened on December 2, 2025 to perform an initial review of the complaint. The Local Ethics Commission convened on January 5, 2026 to hold a hearing to further evaluate the complaint.

Initial Review Findings

The Local Ethics Commission performed its initial review of the complaint on December 2, 2025. At that time, the Commission evaluated four (4) aspects of the complaint separately, and recommended the dismissal of two aspects.

1. The Commission voted 3-0 to dismiss allegations in the complaint alleging the planned development application was not truthful. The Commission only has jurisdiction over Village Covered Individuals and entities, and the River Forest Tennis Club is not a Village Covered entity.
2. The Commission voted 3-0 to dismiss allegations in the complaint alleging the River Forest Tennis Club planned development application should not have been presented to the Development Review Board. The Commission determined the issue is determined by the Zoning Code of the Village Ordinance and is not a violation the Ethics Commission can act on.

Commission Hearing Findings

At the January 5, 2026 Special Meeting of the Local Ethics Commission, the Ethics Commission voted 2—0 to approve the following recommendation and determination to the Village Board.

Based on the Village Attorney's interpretation of the Ethics Code and related advice to the Development Review Board members, the Commission dismisses the complaint against Members Fishman, McCole, and Lucchesi.

As to the allegations regarding Mr. Yanaki, the Commission believes presenting to the Development Review Board on November 6, 2025, was inconsistent with Ethics Ordinance 1-23-5 (C)(9), which states,

Representation Of Private Interests: In keeping with their role as stewards of the public interest, Village covered individuals and contractors shall not appear on behalf of the private interests of third parties before any board or commission of the Village on which they serve, and for purposes of this Subsection the Plan Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals, and Development Review Board shall be considered as one

commission. This prohibition shall not prohibit a Village covered individual or contractor from appearing on their own behalf before any board or commission of the Village on which they serve.

However, based on the full record in the case, including Mr. Yanaki's prior appearances before the Development Review Board and his communications with Village staff, the Commission does not believe the complaint has been sustained.

Going forward, the Commission believes the community wants Village Covered Individuals to err on the side of caution and recuse themselves in the future in this type of situation. To the extent the Ethics Code is not clear, the Commission wants to explore whether such changes can be added legally, and if so, amend the Code to provide such clarity.

Submitted by the River Forest Local Ethics Commission



Rebecca DeGroff



Ross Lissuzzo



Chair Greg Ignoffo (not present and not voting at January 5, 2026 meeting)

VILLAGE OF RIVER FOREST LOCAL ETHICS COMMISSION SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

January 5th, 2026

A special meeting of the Local Ethics Commission was held on January 5th, 2026, at 6:00 p.m. in the First Floor Community Room at the River Forest Village Hall, 400 Park Avenue.

I. CALL TO ORDER/ROLL CALL

The meeting was called to order at 6:00pm. Upon roll call, the following persons were:

Present: Commissioner DeGroff and Commissioner Lissuzzo

Absent: Chairman Ignoffo

Also Present: Village Administrator Matt Walsh, Deputy Clerk/Management Analyst Luke Masella, Village Attorney Lance Malina

Village Attorney Malina announced that Chairman Greg Ignoffo was unable to attend the meeting due to a last-minute family emergency.

A MOTION was made by Commissioner Lissuzzo to appoint Commissioner DeGroff as Chair Pro Tem. Seconded by Commissioner DeGroff.

AYES: Commissioner Lissuzzo and Commissioner DeGroff

NAYS: None

Motion Passes.

II. CITIZEN COMMENTS

James Ford provided public comment stating that if board members with serious conflicts of interest did not recuse themselves, he would find it abominable.

Mark Hosty provided public comment noting that he has heard people describe this complaint as a personal attack on those named. He emphasized that he does not view it that way, seeing it instead as a critique of the process, and expressed hope that the Ethics Commission can ensure a similar situation does not occur in the future.

III. MEETING MINUTES REVIEW AND APPROVAL

- a. December 2nd, 2025, Meeting Minutes
- b. December 2nd, 2025, Executive Session Meeting Minutes

A MOTION was made by Commissioner Lissuzzo to approve the Meeting Minutes for December 2nd, 2025 Ethics Commission meeting. Seconded by Commissioner DeGroff.

Local Ethics Commission Meeting Minutes
January 5th, 2026

AYES: Commissioner Lissuzzo and Commissioner DeGroff

NAYS: None

Motion Passes.

IV. NEW BUSINESS

a. Public Hearing to Review Paul Harding's Ethics Complaint

Commissioner DeGroff outlined how the Commission would conduct its review of the complaint that evening.

Paul Harding, the complainant, offered background on his submission, emphasizing that his concern centers more on the process than the lighting itself. He urged the Ethics Commission to review and strengthen the procedures boards and commissions follow regarding conflicts of interest to prevent a situation like this from occurring in the future.

Elias Yanaki then responded to the complaint, providing background on his involvement with the River Forest Tennis Club. He addressed the complaint point by point, highlighting what he identified as inaccuracies. He stated that the timeline showed that he and the other individuals named never knowingly or intentionally violated the Ethics Ordinance, and he shared emails exchanged with Village officials that he believed supported his position.

Commissioner DeGroff noted that certain portions of the complaint had been dismissed at the previous meeting.

Mr. Yanaki responded that he had only recently been made aware of this and requested to continue with his comments.

Member DeGroff asked whether all applicants receive public comments as they are submitted for public hearings.

Mr. Yanaki explained that, in his experience on the Board, staff have traditionally shared all public comments with Commission members as they are received.

Administrator Walsh then provided an overview of how staff manages the distribution of public comments for applications before Boards and Commissions.

Jane McCole addressed the complaint filed against her, stating that she was taken aback upon receiving the notification. She noted that she had relied on guidance from Village Staff and the Village Attorney and believed she had approached the matter impartially. McCole urged the Ethics Commission to examine the complaint process, describing it as flawed, and expressed concern that procedures like this could discourage residents from volunteering for Village Boards and Commissions in the future.

Local Ethics Commission Meeting Minutes
January 5th, 2026

Village Attorney Malina offered an opinion on the matter, addressed several points raised by Ms. McCole and Mr. Yanaki, and also fielded and responded to questions from members of the Ethics Commission.

Commissioner DeGroff asked why the Village's recommendation to the Development Review Board members did not cite the Village's ethics ordinance.

Village Attorney Malina provided an explanation as to why he did not cite the ethics ordinance.

Members of the Commission, staff, and Village Attorney Malina discussed the recommendations staff made to Commission members regarding recusals.

Village Attorney Malina discussed how the Village's Ethics Ordinance differs from and interacts with Illinois state statutes. He also noted that he was unaware Mr. Yanaki would be presenting on behalf of the River Forest Tennis Club and therefore his guidance to staff and Commission members did not address that issue.

Administrator Walsh stated that Village Attorney Malina was correct and reiterated the guidance that was provided to board members, including the scope of the advice and the topics it addressed.

A MOTION was made by Commissioner DeGroff to enter into Executive Session pursuant to 5 ILCS 120/2(c) 4), (4) Evidence or testimony presented in open hearing, or in closed hearing where specifically authorized by law, to a quasi-adjudicative body, as defined in this Act, provided that the body prepares and makes available for public inspection a written decision setting forth its determinative reasoning. Seconded by Chairman Lissuzzo.

AYES: Commissioner Lissuzzo and Commissioner DeGroff

NAYS: None

Motion Passes.

The Commission left the room for executive session at 6:51pm.

b. Discussion and Potential Action on Recommendation to Village Board regarding Ethics Complaint

The Commission returned from executive session at 8:00pm.

Upon roll call, the following persons were:

Present: Commissioner DeGroff and Commissioner Lissuzzo

Absent: Chairman Ignoffo

Also Present: Village Administrator Matt Walsh, Deputy Clerk/Management Analyst Luke Masella, Village Attorney Lance Malina

Local Ethics Commission Meeting Minutes
January 5th, 2026

Member DeGroff read aloud the following recommendation.

Based on the Village attorney's interpretation of the Ethics Code and related advice given to the DRB Board members, the Commission dismisses the complaint as to Fishman, McCole, and Lucchesi. As to the allegations regarding Mr. Yanaki, the Commission believes presenting to the DRB on November 6, 2025, was inconsistent with Ethics Ordinance 1-23-5(C)(9). However, based on the full record in the case, including Mr. Yanaki's prior appearances before the DRB and his communications with Village staff, the Commission does not believe the complaint has been sustained. She then stated, going forward, the Commission believes our community wants Village Covered Individuals to err on the side of caution and recuse themselves in the future in this type of situation. To the extent the Ethics Code is not clear, the Commission would like to explore whether such changes can be added legally and if so, amend the Code to provide such clarity.

A MOTION was made by Commissioner Lissuzzo to adopt the Commission's findings and forward them to the Village Board for review, seconded by Commissioner DeGroff.

AYES: Commissioner Lissuzzo and Commissioner DeGroff

NAYS: None

Motion Passes.

Commissioner DeGroff thanked the members of the Village's Boards and Commissions, recognizing the difficult position they are in when ethics complaints arise, as such situations can feel like a public questioning of their character and principles.

Commissioner Lissuzzo agreed with Commissioner DeGroff's remarks, noting that the Ethics Commission did not intend to publicly question anyone's character. He added that the public rightly expects the commission to review the matters brought before it. He then expressed gratitude to the Village's boards and commissioners for their service, both in their official roles and as volunteers with other organizations.

Member DeGroff highlighted the need for greater clarity in the Ethics Code and stated that the Commission will work to provide it in the future.

V. OTHER BUSINESS

None.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

A MOTION was made by Member DeGroff and SECONDED by Commissioner Lissuzzo to adjourn the January 5th 2026, meeting of the Local Ethics Commission at 8:05pm.

AYES: Commissioners Lissuzzo and DeGroff

NAYS: None.

Local Ethics Commission Meeting Minutes
January 5th, 2026

Motion Passes.

Respectfully submitted:

Luke Masella
Deputy Village Clerk/Management Analyst

luke masella