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Attorney for Plaintiff

NEW JERSEY FOUNDATION FOR OPEN GOVERNMENT, INC. and JOHN PAFF Plaintiffs,

vs.

SUMMIT HOUSING AUTHORITY and JOSEPH M. BILLY, JR. Defendants



SUPERIOR COURT OF NEW JERSEY LAW DIVISION, CIVIL PART UNION COUNTY

DOCKET NO. UNN-L-1927-15

VERIFIED COMPLAINT

Plaintiffs New Jersey Foundation for Open Government, Inc. ("the Foundation") and John Paff ("Paff"), by way of complaint against the Defendants Summit Housing Authority ("the Authority") and Joseph M. Billy, Jr. ("Billy") state as follows:

Preliminary Statement

1. This is an action under the Open Public Records Act, N.J.S.A. 47:1A-1 et. seq. (OPRA), common law right of access and the Senator Byron M. Baer Open Public Meetings Act, N.J.S.A. 10:4-6 et. seq. (OPMA).

Parties

- 2. Plaintiff New Jersey Foundation for Open Government, Inc. ("the Foundation") is a non-profit, New Jersey corporation which has as its mission to increase transparency in New Jersey's state, county and local governments.
- 3. Plaintiff John Paff ("Paff") is an individual who serves as Treasurer of the Foundation and who resides in Franklin Township, Somerset County, New Jersey. Paff is well known as an open government advocate, blogs frequently about open government issues¹ and often appears in the media² regarding his open government advocacy.
- 4. The Foundation and Paff are "any person" within the meaning of N.J.S.A. 10:4-16.
- 5. Defendant Summit Housing Authority ("the Authority") is a public body as that term is defined by N.J.S.A. 10:4-8(a) and a public agency as that term is defined by N.J.S.A. 47:1A-1.1.

Among the blogs Paff authors is "New Jersey Open Government Notes" (http://njopengovt.blogspot.com/), "New Jersey Civil Settlements" (http://njcivilsettlements.blogspot.com/) and "Random Notes on NJ Government" (http://njrandomgovt.blogspot.com/)

Some recent articles that have feature Paff's advocacy include "The 'transparency guru' of New Jersey," Philadelphia Inquirer, May 14, 2015 (http://articles.philly.com/2015-05-04/news/61771681_1_rogue-cops-john-paff-tax-money); "Profile: The Man Who Makes Sure Government Works -- Right Out in the Open," February 26, 2014 (http://www.njspotlight.com/stories/14/02/26/profile-the-man-who-makes-sure-government-works-right-out-in-the-open/); "Judge tells prosecutor to release letters about Wildwood Crest officers," Press of Atlantic City, May 11, 2015 (http://www.pressofatlanticcity.com/news/judge-tells-prosecutor-to-release-letters-about-wildwood-crest-officers/article_c7fad092-f82d-11e4-a301-afd1bf120c66.html); "Ex-fire commissioner says he was falsely accused of luring kids online, gets \$240K settlement," Star-Ledger, March 23, 2015 (http://www.nj.com/somerset/index.ssf/2015/03/former_franklin_fire_commissioner_settle_lawsuit_f.html) and "Fired Bound Brook High teacher wants her job back," Courier News, March 20, 2015 (http://www.mycentraljersey.com/story/news/local/somerset-county/2015/03/20/fired-bound-brook-high-teacher-wants-job-back/25099221/?fb_action_ids=10152946873402562&fb_action_types=og.comments).

6. Defendant Joseph M. Billy, Jr. ("Billy") is the Authority's executive director and acted as the Authority's "custodian of a government record" as that term is defined by N.J.S.A. 47:1A-1.1 in relation to the requests made in this matter.

COMMON ALLEGATIONS

- 7. On or about April 9, 2015, Paff submitted a request (See attached Exhibit 1) under the Open Public Records Act and common law right of access to Billy requesting:
 - 1. The minutes of the Summit Housing Authority's three most recent non-public (i.e. executive or closed) sessions for which minutes are available either in full or in a redacted version.
 - 2. The motions or resolutions, as required by N.J.S.A. 10:4-13, that authorized each nonpublic session for which minutes were furnished in response to #1 above.
 - 3. The motions or resolutions, as required by N.J.S.A. 10:4-13, that authorized all nonpublic sessions that were held after the date of most recent of the nonpublic sessions for which minutes were furnished in response to #1 above.
 - 8. In an April 17, 2015 e-mail and e-mailed letter (Exhibit 2), Billy wrote:

In response to your recent request for documents under OPRA and the Common Law Right to Access Requests, please be advised that the regular monthly agenda for meetings of the Board of Commissioners of the Summit Housing Authority provides time for an Executive Session. The Board will motion and vote to enter into Executive Session, if needed, to discuss matters of ligation or personnel. Those sessions do not occur at each meeting, only when situations warrant. There are no pre-prepared resolutions authorizing entering into Executive Session.

Minutes of Executive Sessions are not maintained and therefore are unavailable.

I hope this satisfies your request.

- 9. The Authority passed a resolution on May 26, 2010 that, in accordance with N.J.S.A. 10:4-13, authorized a nonpublic meeting on that date. A copy of that resolution is attached as Exhibit 3.
- 10. The Authority held a nonpublic meeting on October 27, 2010. A copy of the minutes of that nonpublic meeting is attached as Exhibit 4.
- 11. According to minutes on-line at the Authority's web site
 (http://summitnjha.org/) the Authority held a nonpublic meeting on September 17,
 2014. A copy of the first page of those minutes, which show that the Authority "went
 into Executive Session to discuss personnel and/or matters of litigation" is attached as
 Exhibit 5.

FIRST COUNT (Violation of N.J.S.A. 47:1A-5)

- 12. Given the existence of minutes of the Authority's October 27, 2010 nonpublic meeting, Billy violated the OPRA by informing Paff that no records could be disclosed in response to ¶ 1 of Paff's April 9, 2015 request.
- 13. Given the existence of a) a resolution authorizing the Authority's May 26, 2010 nonpublic meeting and b) a September 17, 2014 motion to go into a nonpublic meeting, Billy violated the OPRA by informing Paff that no records could be disclosed in response to ¶¶ 2 and 3 of Paff's April 9, 2015 request.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff Paff demands judgment:

- A. Declaring that Billy, by failing to disclose any nonpublic minutes and motions/resolutions in response to Paff's April 9, 2015 request violated N.J.S.A. 47:1A-5(i).
- B. Ordering Billy to promptly furnish Paff with the nonpublic minutes and motions/resolutions responsive to his April 9, 2015 request.
 - C. Awarding Paff a reasonable attorney fee and his costs of suit and
 - D. Such other relief as the Court deems equitable and just.

SECOND COUNT

(Requiring disclosure under common law)

14. Paff's and the public's interest in disclosure of the nonpublic minutes and motions/resolutions responsive to his April 9, 2015 request exceeds the governmental interest in keeping that information confidential.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiff Paff demands judgment:

- E. Declaring that Billy, by failing to disclose any nonpublic minutes and motions/resolutions in response to Paff's April 9, 2015 request violated Paff's rights under the common law right of access.
- F. Ordering Billy to promptly furnish Paff with the nonpublic minutes and motions/resolutions responsive to his April 9, 2015 request.
 - G. Awarding Paff a reasonable attorney fee and his costs of suit and
 - H. Such other relief as the Court deems equitable and just.

THIRD COUNT

(Insufficient nonpublic meeting motions/resolutions)

15. The motion passed at the Authority's September 17, 2014 meeting that purported to authorize a nonpublic session is not sufficiently specific to meet the

requirements of N.J.S.A. 10:4-13(a) and does not even attempt to meet the requirements of N.J.S.A. 10:4-13(b).

16. On information and belief, any other motions or resolutions that Billy, in accordance with the First and Second Counts of this Verified Complaint, will disclose in response to ¶¶ 2 and 3 of Paff's April 9, 2015 request will be similarly defective and noncompliant with N.J.S.A. 10:4-13.

WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs Foundation and Paff demand judgment:

- I. Declaring that the Authority violated N.J.S.A. 10:4-13 by failing to a) pass sufficiently specific resolutions prior to going into its nonpublic meetings and b) comply with the requirements of N.J.S.A. 10:4-13(b).
- J. Enjoining the Authority, going forward, from holding nonpublic meetings unless it first passes resolutions describing the topics to be privately discussed in as specifically and in as much detail as possible.
- K. Enjoining the Authority, going forward, from holding nonpublic meetings unless it first passes resolutions stating "as precisely as possible, the time when and the circumstances under which the discussion conducted in closed session of the public body can be disclosed to the public."
 - L. Awarding the Foundation and Paff their costs.
 - M. Such other relief as the Court deems equitable and just.

FOURTH COUNT

(Failure to record and maintain nonpublic meeting minutes.)

17. Billy's admission, in his April 17, 2015 letter, that "[m]inutes of Executive Sessions are not maintained and are therefore unavailable" constitutes the

Authority's violation of N.J.S.A. 10:4-14 which requires that "reasonably comprehensible minutes of all its meetings" be maintained. (Emphasis supplied.)

WHEREFORE, Plaintiffs Foundation and Paff demand judgment:

- N. Declaring that the Authority violated and is presently violating N.J.S.A.10:4-14 by failing to record and maintain minutes of its nonpublic meetings.
- O. Enjoining the Authority, going forward, from failing to record minutes of its future nonpublic meetings that are at least as comprehensible as the Authority's October 27, 2010 nonpublic meeting minutes.
 - P. Awarding the Foundation and Paff their costs.
 - Q. Such other relief as the Court deems equitable and just.

Designation of Trial Counsel

Plaintiffs designate Anthony H. Ogozalek, Jr. as trial counsel

Certification Pursuant to R.1:38-7(b)

I certify that confidential personal identifiers have been redacted from documents now submitted to the Court, and will be redacted from all documents submitted in the future

Certification Of No Other Actions

Pursuant to R.4:5-1, it is hereby stated that the matter in controversy is not the subject of any other action pending in any other court or of a pending arbitration proceeding to the best of my knowledge and belief. Also, to the best of my belief, no other action or arbitration proceeding is contemplated. Further, other than the parties set forth in this pleading, I know of no other parties that should be joined in the above action. In addition, I recognize the continuing obligation of each party to file and serve

on all parties and the Court an amended certification if there is a change in the facts stated in this original certification.

Dated: May ______ 2015

Anthony H. Ogozalek, Jr., Esquire Attorney ID 03/022006 Beckman Ogozalek Londar

Verification

John Paff, of full age, certifies as follows:

- 1. I am the Plaintiff who filed the records requests in this matter with the Summit Housing Authority and Joseph M. Billy, Jr. All of the facts stated in this Verified Complaint to which this Verification is attached are true, and as to those facts that are alleged on information and belief, I believe them to be true.
- I further certify that the Exhibits attached to this Verified
 Complaint are exact copies of the originals and have not been altered.

I certify that the foregoing statements made by me are true. I am aware that if any of the foregoing statements made by me are willfully false, I am subject to punishment.

Dated: May 26 2015

John Paff



John Paff <opengovtissues@gmail.com>

Record Request to the Summit Housing Authority

1 message

John Paff <paff@pobox.com>
To: jmbillyjr@summitnjha.org

Thu, Apr 9, 2015 at 5:24 PM

Please accept this e-mail as my request under the Open Public Records Act (OPRA) and the common law right of access. Please send all responses and responsive records to me via e-mail to paff@pobox.com. Thank you.

Requested Records:

- 1. The minutes of the Summit Housing Authority's three most recent non-public (i.e. executive or closed) sessions for which minutes are available either in full or in a redacted version.
- 2. The motions or resolutions, as required by N.J.S.A. 10:4-13, that authorized each nonpublic session for which minutes were furnished in response to #1 above.
- 3. The motions or resolutions, as required by N.J.S.A. 10:4-13, that authorized all nonpublic sessions that were held after the date of most recent of the nonpublic sessions for which minutes were furnished in response to #1 above.

John Paff P.O. Box 5424 Somerset, NJ 08875 Voice: 732-873-1251 Fax: 908-325-0129

e-mail: paff@pobox.com



John Paff <opengovtissues@gmail.com>

RE: Record Request to the Summit Housing Authority

1 message

Joseph <jmbillyjr@summitnjha.org> To: John Paff <paff@pobox.com> Fri, Apr 17, 2015 at 12:04 PM

Mr. Paff,

Attached please find our response to your recent request.

Sincerely,

JOSEPH M. BILLY, JR.

Executive Director

Housing Authority of the City of Summit

512 Springfield Avenue

Summit, N.J. 07901

(908) 273-6413

(908) 273-3618 fax

From: opengovtissues@gmail.com [mailto:opengovtissues@gmail.com] On Behalf Of John Paff

Sent: Thursday, April 09, 2015 5:24 PM

To: jmbillyjr@summitnjha.org

Subject: Record Request to the Summit Housing Authority

Please accept this e-mail as my request under the Open Public Records Act (OPRA) and the common law right of access. Please send all responses and responsive records to me via e-mail to paff@pobox.com. Thank you.

April 17, 2015

Dear Mr. Paff,

In response to your recent request for documents under OPRA and the Common Law Right to Access Requests, please be advised that the regular monthly agenda for meetings of the Board of Commissioners of the Summit Housing Authority provides time for an Executive Session. The Board will motion and vote to enter into Executive Session, if needed, to discuss matters of ligation or personnel. Those sessions do not occur at each meeting, only when situations warrant. There are no pre-prepared resolutions authorizing entering into Executive Session.

Minutes of Executive Sessions are not maintained and therefore are unavailable.

I hope this satisfies your request.

With best regards, I remain,

Sincerely yours,

Joseph M. Billy, Jr., Executive Director

Summit Housing Authority

RESOLUTION

Board Meeting Date

05-26-10

of the SUMMIT HOUSING AUTHORITY

Date	Submitted
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RESOLUTION NO. <u>10-26-05-3</u>

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RESOLUTION TO GO INTO CLOSED SESSION TO DISCUSS PO	OTENTIAL LITIGATION Factual Contents Certified to by:
	Budget Authorization Certified to by:
Commissioner <u>Poole</u> Submitted the following Resolution:	
WHEREAS, there is a need from time to time for the Housing Authority Board	to go into closed session; and
WHEREAS, the Open Public Meetings Act allows a board to go into closed sessand	sion to discuss potential litigation;
WHEREAS, minutes of closed session business are taken and maintained separa open public board meeting.	ate from the minutes of the regular
NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE BOARD OF COMMISSION AUTHORITY OF THE CITY OF SUMMIT:	NERS OF THE HOUSING
1. That the minutes of the closed session shall become available to the publ the matter is no longer deemed confidential or two years from the date or	
2. That this resolution shall be effective immediately.	
Commissioner Halverstadt seconded the motion.	

Commissioner	Halverstadt	seconded the motion.

X – Indicates Vote				A.B. –	Absent	N.V. – Not Voting				
RE	CORD	OF COM	MISSI	ONER	S VOTE ON FINA	L PASS	SAGE			
COMMISSIONER	AYE	NAY	N.V.	A.B.	COMMISSIONER	AYE	NAY	N.V.	A.B.	
Halverstadt	Х				White	Х				
Kuhn	Х				Zazzera	Х				
Poole	Х				Zimmermann				Х	
Shung	Х									

I Hereby Certify that the above Resolution was adopted at a Commissioners Meeting of the Housing Authority on

Secretary/ Executive Director	

CLOSED SESSION OCTOBER 27, 2010

<u>CLOSED SESSION</u>: Mr. Riccio reported that as a result of Mr. Dang's appeal to Civil Service regarding his termination, he and Mr. Harrington met with a judge for mediation on Oct. 13, 2010. Mr. Riccio and Mr. Harrington first met with the judge alone, and later together with Mr. Dang and his attorney Mr. Katz. She recommended working together to come to an agreement. A settlement has been proposed by Mr. Katz including:

- Payment of \$50,000 to Mr. Dang
- Attorney fees of approximately \$10,000
- A neutral reference for Mr. Dang
- A reason for termination that will not compromise Mr. Dang's ability to collect unemployment
- Deferred pension
- Dismissal of the civil suit for back rent

Mr. Harrington advised that the Civil Service system is designed to protect the employee. Civil Service requires progressive discipline and termination is the Civil Service equivalent of the death penalty and should be avoided if at all possible. Mr. Harrington believes the judge is very pro-employee and would hold us to a very high standard for upholding Mr. Dang's termination. He also believes there is a sympathy factor when it comes to Mr. Dang's history. Mr. Harrington advised that agreeing to a settlement will be the only way for us to control the outcome and the timeline of the case. He also noted that he believed our odds for winning the case should it go to court would be 50/50.

The Board of Commissioners took a vote to decide if they would agree to a settlement. Commissioners Zimmerman, Poole, Halverstadt, and Kuhn voted in favor of a settlement and Commissioner Zazzera voted against it.

The Board of Commissioners would like Mr. Riccio and Mr. Harrington to try negotiating a settlement for less than \$50,000. Mr. Riccio noted that even if we come to an agreement on a settlement with Mr. Dang, HUD will still have to approve it.

A resolution was created to authorize Mr. Riccio and Mr. Harrington to negotiate a settlement with Mr. Dang.

MINUTES SUMMIT HOUSING AUTHORITY September 17, 2014

Commissioner Steven Spurr served as Acting Chairperson and called the meeting to order at 7:04 pm in the Janet Whitman Room in the Summit City Hall. The following Commissioners were present:

Commissioner Jeffrey Halverstadt, Commissioner Richard Poole, Commissioner Steven Spurr, and Commissioner Mary Zimmermann. Chairman Dennis White, Commissioner Pamela Kuhn, and Commissioner Coalter Pollock were absent. Also present were Joseph M. Billy, Jr., Executive Director, Michelle Salazar, Office Administrator and SHA Legal Counsel William Connelly.

Mr. Billy read the Open Public Meetings Act Notice, "Adequate notice of this of this meeting has been provided by the Secretary of the Housing Authority of the City of Summit by preparing an Annual Notice dated <u>December 11, 2013</u>, setting forth the date, time and place of this meeting. Said notice was filed with the Clerk of the City of Summit, and forwarded to newspapers of local circulation.

Mr. Billy led those in attendance in a salute to the flag.

<u>THE MINUTES OF THE July 23, 2014 REGULAR BOARD MEETING:</u> were tabled since there were not enough commissioners present to approve the minutes.

<u>EXECUTIVE SESSION:</u> Commissioner Poole moved and Commissioner Halverstadt seconded a motion to go into Executive Session to discuss personnel and/or matters of litigation that may or may not be acted upon.

Upon roll call, all members voted affirmative.

<u>RETURN TO PUBLIC SESSION:</u> Commissioner Poole moved and Commissioner Halverstadt seconded a motion to return to Public Session. Upon roll call all members voted in the affirmative.

CHAIRPERSON'S REPORT: None.

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:

Mr. Billy updated the Board on the following topics:

- The Summer Senior BBQ was held on August 14, 2014. It turned out to be a beautiful day with about 75 attendees.
- The Summit Housing Authority is currently putting together their 5 year plan to be submitted to HUD.
- There have been two recent episodes of bed bugs at 12 Chestnut. Our exterminator was called in and they checked the surrounding units. All units were prepped and treated.

Appendix XII-B1



CIVIL CASE INFORMATION STATEMENT (CIS)

FOR USE BY CLE	RK'S OFFICE ONLY
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CIVIL CASE INFORMATION STATEMENT

(CIS)
Use for initial pleadings (not motions) under *Rule* 4:5-1

COCCO	D.			
CASE	TYPES	(Choose one and enter number of case type in appropriate space	on the reverse side.)	
		- 150 days' discovery		
		NAME CHANGE FORFEITURE		
		TENANCY		
	399	REAL PROPERTY (other than Tenancy, Contract, Condemnation, Complex Comr	nercial or Construction)	
		BOOK ACCOUNT (debt collection matters only)		
		OTHER INSURANCE CLAIM (including declaratory judgment actions) PIP COVERAGE		
	510	UM or UIM CLAIM (coverage issues only)		
	511	ACTION ON NEGOTIABLE INSTRUMENT		
		LEMON LAW SUMMARY ACTION		
		OPEN PUBLIC RECORDS ACT (summary action)		
		OTHER (briefly describe nature of action)		
	Track II	- 300 days' discovery CONSTRUCTION		
		EMPLOYMENT (other than CEPA or LAD)		
	599	CONTRACT/COMMERCIAL TRANSACTION		
		N AUTO NEGLIGENCE – PERSONAL INJURY (non-verbal threshold) Y AUTO NEGLIGENCE – PERSONAL INJURY (verbal threshold)		
		PERSONAL INJURY		
	610	AUTO NEGLIGENCE PROPERTY DAMAGE		
		UM or UIM CLAIM (includes bodily injury)		
		TORT – OTHER		
		I - 450 days' discovery CIVIL RIGHTS		
		CONDEMNATION		
		ASSAULT AND BATTERY		
		MEDICAL MALPRACTICE		
		PRODUCT LIABILITY PROFESSIONAL MALPRACTICE		
		TOXIC TORT		
		DEFAMATION	CASES	
		WHISTLEBLOWER / CONSCIENTIOUS EMPLOYEE PROTECTION ACT (CEPA INVERSE CONDEMNATION	CASES	
		LAW AGAINST DISCRIMINATION (LAD) CASES		
	Track IV	/ - Active Case Management by Individual Judge / 450 days' discover	V	
	156	ENVIRONMENTAL/ENVIRONMENTAL COVERAGE LITIGATION		
		MT, LAUREL		
		COMPLEX COMMERCIAL COMPLEX CONSTRUCTION		
	514	INSURANCE FRAUD		
		FALSE CLAIMS ACT ACTIONS IN LIEU OF PREROGATIVE WRITS		
		unty Litigation (Track IV) ACCUTANE/ISOTRETINOIN 289 REGLAN		
		RISPERDAL/SEROQUEL/ZYPREXA 290 POMPTON LAKES ENVI	RONMENTAL LITIGATION	
		S ZOMETA/AREDIA 291 PELVIC MESH/GYNECA	RE	
) GADOLINIUM 292 PELVIC MESH/BARD BRISTOL-MYERS SQUIBB ENVIRONMENTAL 293 DEPUY ASR HIP IMPLAI	JT LITIGATION	
		P FOSAMAX 295 ALLODERM REGENERA		
			ABG II MODULAR HIP STEM COMP	ONENTS
		S LEVAQUIN 297 MIRENA CONTRACEPTI 7 YAZIYASMIN/OCELLA 601 ASBESTOS	VE DEVICE	
		PRUDENTIAL TORT LITIGATION 623 PROPECIA		
	If you be	elieve this case requires a track other than that provided above, please indicate bace under "Case Characteristics.	the reason on Side 1,	
		ease check off each applicable category	ction Title 59	