

CITIZEN SUBMITTED TESTIMONY

December 14, 2022

TO: City of Rockaway Beach

FROM: Rockaway Beach Merchants Association

RE: Confusion on Duplication of Christmas Decorating Contests.

Based on the recent post on Facebook by the Chamber of Commerce along with the comments made that followed the post, we are seeing some confusion in our community as to why there are two business entities in Rockaway. As members of the Rockaway Beach Merchants Association, we thought it was important to clarify the purpose of our focus.

The Rockaway Beach Chamber of Commerce purpose is to support ALL BUSINESSES in the community. Our Rockaway Beach Merchant's Association was originally started in 2014, to create synergy between the retail stores on Hwy 101 to work together on joint advertising for their annual Black Friday sales. In conjunction with the city's tree lighting event, the stores also offered sales discounts and late-night shopping after the tree lighting event was over.

In 2017, we expanded our community support, by jointly working with the city on the annual tree lighting event. The railroad worked with us to create Santa arriving to our event aboard the Rockaway Beach Tree Lighting Excursion train. We have continued to expand it over the years with musical entertainment, visits and photo opportunities with Santa in his own tent at the wayside and supporting the North County Food Bank with our annual canned food drive at the event. This event has continued to grow to the wonderful community celebration it is today.

In 2018, we started a great new family activity in our annual Scavenger Hunt which follows the community Easter egg hunt. Individuals and Families follow the clues found in participating businesses to complete the hunt and be entered into a drawing for fun prizes.

During the first year of covid in 2020, we stepped up to the plate to ensure the Easter Bunny made personal visits in Rockaway to wave to children through the window as the bunny dropped off easter baskets on their porch for them to enjoy. The second year we had a drive by visit to see the Easter Bunny at the wayside & receive treats. This year we worked with the RB Fire Department to restart the community Easter Egg Hunt at Phyllis Baker Park.

We also have supported the Fire Department for the last several years in their annual Trunk or Treat event.

Also in 2020, in conjunction with Robin McDonald of the Rockaway Beach Community Page, we brought back the Annual Christmas decorating contest. This year, it appears there is some confusion as the Chamber also posted a similar Christmas Decorating Contest. Looking on the bright side, you get an opportunity to enter both.

To resolve this going forward, we are proposing a meeting with the Rockaway Beach Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors to set in motion better ways to work together for our

community. We are hoping that we will receive a response from the Chamber of Commerce soon so we can coordinate further events for the years to come and avoid this confusion.

DECEMBER 14, 2022

TO: CITY OF ROCKAWAY BEACH
FROM: ROCKAWAY BEACH MERCHANTS ASSOCIATION
RE: Counselor Kristine Hayes impact on our Tree Lighting Event

The RB Merchants Association would like to address the difficulties we and the City faced because of the direct actions by Council Member Hayes at the this years annual tree lighting. Counselor Hayes is also the President of the Chamber of Commerce. Whatever capacity she is acting as, per city ordinance #07-403, section 3.7 (Councilor Decorum) the last sentence states: *“Council members shall at all times conduct themselves in a manner appropriate to the dignity of their office.”* We feel her actions were unethical, and disrespectful to the city, Merchants, and the families with young children attending our event this year.

By not communicating to anyone Councilor Hayes on behalf of the Chamber of Commerce, **BLINDSIDED** both the city & the merchants who had spent countless hours planning our annual festival. She announced the week of the tree lighting that she was holding her own event the same night at the Depot and bringing in her own Santa knowing that we already had a Santa as we'd always had since 2017

We question the judgment of someone who represents the city and would do this without consideration to the impact this had on young children that “BELIEVE IN SANTA”.

There was also no consideration to the PARENTS of these young children that found themselves now having to explain why there were 2 SANTA’S at our event.

The city and our community need to be aware that we were asked constantly that evening **“WHY DID THE “CITY” bring two Santa’s to the Tree Lighting Event. We had to explain the city did not. We feel our community deserves to know who did!**

In advance of this year’s event, our liaison had a conversation with Kristine when she was decorating the Caboose. Christine mentioned that the Chamber was having an event that night too. When asked what they were doing, she wouldn’t say, just that she had to get back to decorating. That would have been the perfect time to get a conversation going. Instead, she deliberately chose to leave everyone involved in the dark.

The week of the event we saw a post from the Chamber regarding decorating sand dollar ornaments. (Which we thought was a great idea.) The poster also stated: *“Don’t forget to visit with Santa, get your photo taken, and share your Christmas wish!”* Originally, we thought that she was promoting the city event, only to discover at the last minute she had hired her own Santa and was planning her own Chamber event.

Victor Troxel messaged Kristine on Thanksgiving to offer a compromise by having the Chamber's Santa stop about five minutes before the train arrived. Her response was no.

We recognize that Santa visits shops & malls all holiday season. Our point is, you don't see two Santa's at Macy's or any other venue for obvious reasons. The Chamber could have chosen other options, like joining our event or holding their own event separate of the tree lighting--mid-December like they used to do. This was totally uncalled for!

To give a better perspective, this is not the first time we have addressed issues with Counselor Hayes conduct. Here is some background on what we have had to deal with.

Counselor Hayes is fully aware of the City of Rockaway Beach Annual Tree Lighting event that goes back decades. She is also very much aware that Santa started making his appearance at our event via the train starting back in 2017. We communicated that year how important it was for safety reasons, that the train station be lit up as Santa and passengers would be deboarding in the dark. She mentioned that the high school Leo's were scheduled to decorate the first of December. She was concerned that they might not be able to accomplish this due to Thanksgiving plans, but she would check. We asked that she let us know as we had volunteers that would be willing to do it if they weren't able. She did not decorate, nor did she communicate that she needed our help, so the train arrived in the dark our very first year.

In 2018, we asked again if the caboose and depot could be decorated on time for the event. Her response to us was that Chamber had decided to decorate on November 30th, which once again, would be after the city event. We offered an option to have our volunteers decorate if she provided the Chamber's decorations. She accepted. She required that the city provide an insurance rider, which they did. At one point, she wanted to charge us for letting Santa sit at the depot. We declined and got Santa a separate tent at the wayside.

Because she agreed, our volunteer contacted Counselor Hayes to coordinate getting the Chamber's decorations. Kristine sent our volunteer on a wild goose chase to see if Public Works had the Chambers decorations. They did not. She was then directed to check with city beautification committee. Same answer. The next suggestion was to go over to the caboose & see if the volunteers could find the decorations. (In the winter, the chamber is closed that day so sending her there was pointless.) We found this totally disrespectful of our volunteers time and effort. Realizing we were not going to get cooperation, we purchased decorations on our own and still managed to get the train station decorated for the event.

For the purpose of seeking cooperation for events going forward, January of 2019, we asked for a meeting with Luke Shepard (City Manager), counselor Hayes, RB merchant members Victor Troxel, Patti Swain & Nancy Albro. The resolution of that meeting was that she committed to cooperation. For the tree lighting of 2019 the train station was still not lit and once again met with her resistance with no cooperation.

Because of her failure to live up to her commitment in 2019 the merchant's association stopped asking. The first time that Kristine did decorate on time for the annual tree lighting was 2021.

We find Counselor Hayes conduct in the past, as well as the problems created at this year's event to be totally unacceptable! There was no excuse for this very deliberate attempt to undermine and/or upstage the "Santa portion" of the city event. We find her actions unethical, unprofessional and conduct unbecoming a city council member.

Enough is enough! We cannot keep having these challenges every year. Our city deserves better, we deserve better, our chamber deserves better and so does our community.

While we recognize you have no jurisdiction regarding the Chamber you do have control over your council members. We respectfully request the city consider the actions of Counselor Hayes regarding her conduct and if it's in the manner appropriate to the dignity of her office.