

Public Reprimand of Vaughn Irons:

On December 15, 2022, the DeKalb County Board of Ethics conducted a final hearing on the matter of Rhea Johnson against Vaughn Irons. Upon conclusion of the evidence, the Board of Ethics voted by a preponderance of the evidence to find the following violations of the Ethics Code by Vaughn Irons:

Vaughn Irons served as the Chairman of the DeKalb County Development Authority (“Development Authority”), while, simultaneously serving as the founder and CEO of the for-profit, private corporation, APD Solutions, LLC. (“APD”). Per its website, APD is a “community and economic development firm” serving “public and private sector organizations who are seeking ways to revitalize neighborhoods or grow local industry that result in vibrant and competitive places.”

On April 10, 2012, the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners awarded a \$1 million contract to Mr. Iron’s company, APD. Then Commissioner Stan Watson seconded the motion to award the contract to APD and voted in favor of the award. After leaving public office, Commissioner Watson admitted in a separate ethics matter that in April 2012, he became a paid “consultant” for APD. At the time of the contract award, it was not disclosed that Commissioner Watson was a paid consultant for APD. The following are the payments to APD and Stan Watson:

- Per County records, APD received a total of \$972,000 for its contract with DeKalb County. APD paid Stan Watson’s consultant fees totaling \$19,800.
- 2012: APD received approximately \$650,000 from DeKalb County. APD paid Commissioner Stan Watson \$6,800 in 2012.
- 2013: APD received approximately \$250,000 from DeKalb County. APD paid Commissioner Stan Watson \$6,500 in 2013.
- 2014: APD received approximately \$60,000 from DeKalb County. APD paid Commissioner Stan Watson \$6,500 in 2014.
- On September 29, 2015, the Board of Ethics issued a public reprimand to Mr. Watson with regards to his undisclosed relationship with APD.

The actions of Vaughn Irons served as a clear violation of both Sections 22A(c)(2)(7) and 22A(d) of the Ethics Code. Section 22A(c)(2)(7) “prohibits any Dekalb official from engaging in any activity or transaction that is prohibited by law now existing or hereafter enacted which is applicable to him or her by virtue of his or her being an official or employee of DeKalb County.”

Section 22A(d) provides “every official... who has an interest that he or she has reason to believe may be affected ... by the official acts or actions of another official or employee of DeKalb County shall disclose the precise nature and value of such interest by sworn written statement to the Board of Ethics and ask for the board’s opinion as to the property (sic) of such interest... The information disclosed by such sworn statements, except for the valuation attributed to the disclosed interest, shall be made a matter of public record by the Board of Ethics.”

In light of the evidence presented and the violations found, the Board of Ethics is issuing this public reprimand pursuant to 22A(k)(B) of the Ethics Code and an indefinite suspension of Vaughn Irons or his company, APD, or all other businesses owned by Vaughn Irons, to contract with DeKalb County.

It is vital to the proper functioning of DeKalb County government that citizens have confidence in the integrity of their officials and employees and to attain this trust it is essential that the employees and officers do not impair public confidence in government.

As a DeKalb County employee, Vaughn Irons failed to uphold the ethical standards as required by the DeKalb Code and breached the trust of DeKalb citizens who rely on their government officials and employees. It is therefore necessary to reprimand and issue an indefinite suspension (pending approval from the executive officer and the commissioners) of Vaughn Irons or his company, APD, or all other businesses owned by Vaughn Irons' ability to contract with DeKalb County for his actions and violations of the DeKalb Ethics Code.

Elisa Murphy
Chief Ethics Officer
02/06/2023