



Written by [Mary McHugh](#) on July 27, 2010

In Elmhurst, Illinois, the “Rolling Eyes” Have It

What started as an ordinary meeting of the Elmhurst, Illinois Finance, Council Affairs and Administrative Service Committee on the evening of May 17 to discuss a proposed \$30,000 lobbyist contract, had turned into an event of nationwide proportions at the June 14 follow-up, owing to the mannerisms of one citizen present.



Darlene Heslop, a 47-year-old registered nurse, is the kind of resident who attends many such functions at City Hall. She felt not only that the results of hiring a lobbyist would be in vain, but also objected to the lobbyist firm that was chosen. However, at the June meeting in question, there was not going to be a designated public comment period on the agenda. She nevertheless attended with a memo that she hoped to somehow present to the committee with her concerns. When this was not given the attention she hoped, Heslop began to show her displeasure as the meeting transpired by yawning, sighing out loud, and “rolling her eyes.” She was finally asked to leave by the exasperated Committee Chairman. And this was inevitably followed up by cries of First Amendment violations.

According to the [Chicago Tribune](#):

Alderman Stephen Hipskind, chairman of the Finance, Council Affairs and Administrative Services Committee, said that he doesn’t believe Heslop’s rights were violated, because he was trying to curb her mannerisms and not her opinion, and that it was done only to prevent her from impeding the meeting. He added that she wasn’t expressing herself in a designated public comment period.

“Making faces behind the mayor’s back is disruptive, in my opinion,” Hipskind said.

But Heslop, who denies doing more than shaking her head in disapproval, said her ejection was unfair.

She was later vindicated by other members of the committee, who voted to overturn the chairman’s actions, saying they were too harsh. After the vote, two committee members abruptly left, and the meeting was adjourned for a lack of quorum. Heslop was at the next meeting and says she intends to continue attending meetings and addressing city issues that cause her concern.

“(Hipskind’s) allegations were clearly false. There was no way he could sustain them,” Heslop said. “That’s not the way government should be run. It should be run with respect.”



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Though at first denying she had done anything, Heslop was later on Fox News demonstrating the faces — and sighs — to which the Chairman objected. As a follow up to the incident, the committee did direct Don Storino, the City Attorney, to come up with a draft for a “non-verbal outburst” ordinance. It was recommended that he “look at various sources including the book Robert’s Rules of Order, Illinois state statutes, and policies adopted by other municipalities for a legal definition of disorderly conduct and disruptive behavior.” Said Heslop, “I’d like for them (city officials) to have a better understanding of the open meetings act and its meaning and to understand what disorderly conduct is.” Attorney Storino was quoted as saying that he did not think rude behavior at a city council meeting should be a law-enforcement issue. “It’s not in any way a punishable offense by a fine. It’s a matter of decorum,” he said.

Storino was expected to report his findings to the committee July 26 — but this meeting was cancelled.

There does seem to be “a little history” between Heslop and the Elmhurst city government. [The Independent](#) interviewed Chairman Hipskind later, following his “unprecedented action” of asking a citizen to leave a Finance Committee meeting. As part of his explanation he stated:

“First of all, I would like to apologize for how I handled the situation,” he said in an exclusive interview. “I am sorry that my fellow Committee members felt the need to leave the meeting, because then there was no quorum, so no further business could be discussed. I also apologize to the citizens of Elmhurst because the regular business of the Finance Committee will now have to wait two weeks until we reconvene. We are elected to conduct the business of the people and now that business has to be postponed.”

Hipskind said in hindsight ... that he likely should have offered resident Darlene Heslop a warning.

Asked why he dismissed her without warning, Hipskind continued:

“First of all, I knew we had a big agenda that evening,” Hipskind said. “We had seven things on the Finance Committee agenda, which is twice as many items as we usually have. I knew the Committee was looking at a late evening, staying at City Hall until 10:30 or 11 p.m., so I planned to limit comments from the public to keep the agenda moving forward.

“Committee meetings are not really the place the public is supposed to make comments, that is what public forum [at City Council meetings] is for. Not that the public can’t make comments, but according to Robert’s Rules, it is up to the Chair. I was not about to sit there for three hours watching her disruptive behavior.”

... Hipskind said his attempt to be “pre-emptive” stemmed from past dealings with Heslop.... He also indicated other times when Heslop had been, in his opinion, out of control, including losing her temper, making demands and screaming at him in a public place.

“She has attended at least 24 meetings during the course of the past year and I have observed her behavior and her lack of respect for the elected officials,” he said. “Someone being rude and obnoxious is one thing, but being out-and-out abusive is uncalled for. And where do we draw the line?

As a Norman Rockwell portrait, the *Citizen Heslop* of June 14 would have been interesting indeed.



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