

# Duggan: Election watchdog keeps a close eye on Fort Collins

**Kevin Duggan**, kevinduggan@coloradoan.com Published 6:26 p.m. MT Oct. 5, 2017 | Updated 7:35 p.m. MT Oct. 5, 2017



(Photo: Kevin Duggan/The Coloradoan)

Marge Norskog took a look at some of the finer details of the Fort Collins municipal election in April and didn't like what she saw.

Something was off. The numbers in a campaign finance report filed by the committee supporting then-City Council candidate Ken Summers didn't add up.

She made an inquiry with the City Clerk's Office, which quickly deduced that a page was missing from the report. It was a simple mistake.

The report was amended, as is allowed under city code, and life went on. Still, it was a mistake that might have gone unnoticed if it weren't for a citizen scrutinizing paperwork and adding up the numbers.

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It turned out to be an inspirational moment for Norskog, who proceeded to dig deeper into reports on the city's website filed by political committees and people and organizations that made "independent expenditures" to support candidates and issues.

Again, things didn't look right. Committees that let the clerk's office know about their existence more than a year before the election did not file expenditure reports.

That was because they wound up not participating in the election and had no expenses. Nevertheless, a report should have been filed under city code.

Norskog made many trips to the clerk's office and asked a lot of questions. She filed 11 complaints on election-related matters, mostly to formally raise issues she felt needed to be addressed.

She devoted countless hours to research. Norskog said her single-minded activism was prompted by last November's general election and frustration with the results.

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Even after years of interest in politics, she didn't understand the intricacies of the election process, Norskog said.

"I thought, I can't do much about what's happening at the national level and I can't do much about what's happening at the state level, but I can surely understand what's happening here in Fort Collins," she said.

Her complaints were reviewed by the City Attorney's Office, which declined to pursue legal action on any of them. Proving that a technical violation actually resulted in harm is difficult, said City Attorney Carrie Daggett.

On Thursday, Norskog aired her concerns to the city's Election Code Committee, which is made up of three City Council members. The committee meets from time to time to review state election laws, rules and policies with an eye toward improving elections in Fort Collins.

The committee works closely with staff from the City Clerk and City Attorney offices in weighing potential changes to city code or the charter regarding

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Committee members seemed open to Norskog's ideas, such as requiring registered political committees to report and penalizing those that don't.

Members especially liked her idea of establishing a citizen's committee responsible for monitoring the thoroughness and accuracy of campaign reports.

Norskog felt encouraged by the reception. Her purpose in digging into the city's election process was not to find fault but to understand it and suggest improvements, she said. She wants transparency and accountability.

"Let's get our elections straight and clean," she said. "Let's make sure our little nonpartisan elections stay in the spirit of making Fort Collins great."

*Kevin Duggan is a Coloradoan senior reporter covering local government. Follow him on Twitter, @coloradoan\_dugg and on Facebooks at Coloradoan Kevin Duggan.*

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