

October 12, 2022

Dear Colleagues:

After much reflection, I am going on record about unethical and corrupt practices by Councilman Jonathan Schechter. In light of the fact that he may be re-elected, I want him to answer to these behaviors, comments, and actions and make assurances the misconduct and violations will cease.

When thoughtfully considered, his actions debase our roles as elected officials, undermine our staff, usurp the power of the folks who elected us to office, and when he speaks for the council without authorization, he misrepresents us as an elected body. Further, all elected officials, regardless of length of time in office, should have a clear understanding of basic separations of government and power. Rules matter.

There is a historical abuse and misuse of power by Schechter through his non-profit c-3 organization, the Charture Institute and its various spin-offs. His most recent “22 in 21” conference reveals a blurring of lines, whereas with five weeks to go before Election Day, he hosted numerous speakers in front of a packed house of attendees. This week, four weeks before Election Day, some of those speakers endorsed him, namely Dr. Susan Clark and Sandy Hessler. He essentially created a full-day-endorsement of his campaign via his non-profit, followed up by actual endorsements by presenters a week later.

In 2018, when we ran against each other alongside Arne Jorgensen and Don Frank, Schechter again blurred and actually crossed lines with his Charture Institute.

In the fall of the 2018 election season, he knew his Charture Institute publication entitled Mosaic<sup>1</sup> would be in every mailbox in the area. As the Charture Institute is effectively a one man organization, as are many of its spin-offs, Schechter wrote Mosaic’s intro, its foreword, and its afterword — all of which read like his campaign slogans and platform. In the middle of the publication is Schechter’s own campaign ad for his 2018 Town Council election bid.

As a non-profit c-3 organization, Charture is not allowed to be “political” and at a bare minimum he is expected to make sure *all* candidates and positions have an equal opportunity to participate in whatever *educational* event or publication his organization presents. No other candidates from the town council race were asked if they wanted to run ads.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup><https://online.publicationprinters.com/html5/reader/production/default.aspx?pubname=&edid=be8d960a-d005-47a4-bcd3-3d77c657c672>

<sup>2</sup> As a good example, during the 2020 campaign season, Councilman Jim Rooks hosted a women’s rights event for his organization We the People and he invited all female candidates to participate.

At every candidate forum, Schechter held a copy of Mosaic in his hand on stage, waved it around directing people to it, and placed stacks of them next to his campaign literature on the tables outside of candidate events.<sup>3</sup>

It needs noting that at the same time as all of this, his organization was a recipient of town funding, under the budget category of “community promotion”, and had been since at least 2016.<sup>4</sup> This means the Town of Jackson effectively funded part of Schechter’s efforts to exploit his non-profit for his political campaign.

Furthermore, his 2018 campaign finance reports did not detail any “in-kind” donations from Charture (which makes sense also from the standpoint that on principle it would be counter to c-3 rules). One might also wonder if his campaign newsletter email lists have also “co-mingled” with his non-profit email lists, also against political campaign rules.

In Mosaic’s afterword, Schechter cited the need for one of his proudest political accomplishments of his last term in office: an Ecosystem Stewardship Director.

This last year, when the Ecosystem Stewardship Director position and department came before the County Commission and Town Council it was not approved. Some of us preferred a different position. According to the Council’s working agreements, council members are not to relitigate a subject when it has been voted down. However, after the down vote, Schechter rallied his newsletter folks asking them to email us to approve the position.

We received an overabundance of emails on the matter, forcing the council to address it even after we had said no to that particular position. Some of us had spoken prior to that and we would have preferred, for instance, a climate or sustainability director. Instead, we were unfairly not given the opportunity to discuss it openly as a body due to Schechter’s actions. He later apologized but his preferred outcome was already achieved.

After the position was approved and applications for the position were opened, many applicants had used Schechter as a personal/professional reference. Knowing this, he approached staff

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<sup>3</sup>One other candidate in a different race, current state Representative Jim Roscoe, placed an ad in the publication. My guess is that no other candidate in Roscoe’s House race was asked either. Recently, Roscoe endorsed Schechter’s current campaign.

<sup>4</sup> 2018/2019 Adopted Budget Town of Jackson WY

<https://www.jacksonwy.gov/DocumentCenter/View/319/2018-Town-Budget-PDF?bidId=>

Mission Statement

Community Development is responsible for providing and facilitating opportunities for personal growth for residents and economic growth for businesses, encouraging individual, social, and environmental responsibility. These expenditures work to improve the “livability” of the Town of Jackson.

Statement of Function

Charture Institute helps the community understand the causes and consequences of rapid growth and how to harness its resources for sustaining important qualities for future generations.

saying if they would just give him those applications, he “could tell them who to keep and who to get rid of.” He reported this to me directly. Thankfully, staff explained to him that that was inappropriate. Without the staff firewall, who knows how far he would have entered the process.<sup>5</sup>

During the hiring of the interim town manager process, Schechter was lobbying to hire his “very dear friend,” the previous town manager, Bob McClaurin. Seemingly, Schechter is unable to remove the personal relationships from the hiring of government employees; he is unable to separate his role as an elected official with his individual agenda of appointing his friends and ideal candidates.

This is illustrative as to why the council effectively hires only two people in the organization: the town manager and the attorney, and why the town manager hires everyone else. There is a very clear line between elected officials and the staff who do the hiring within a governmental office so as to prevent nepotism and corruption.

In the same vein of separation of roles and responsibilities of elected officials versus staff, elected officials are never to do staff’s job. However, under the former town manager, Larry Pardee, Schechter was able to do that. Schechter would supply him with resources, data, spreadsheets, sometimes even edited in real time during meetings.

At different points, some of Schechter’s work would simply be given right back to us as “staff reports” even though no vetting of that information had occurred via staff. We even made decisions based upon some of that information, to what extent though, we cannot really know. This is the problem with an elected official turning in data and charts of his own — decisions are being made by the council that are based on one person’s work; data and numbers can be manipulated to back-up a person’s objective, either knowingly or unknowingly. At least once, the council clearly made a decision that involved the commission, only to receive a memo from Schechter a week or so later stating that he had been wrong.

In addition to subverting the process of staff review, a council member ‘doing staff’s job’ has the added effect of diminishing staff morale, agency, and purpose. In Schechter’s defense, even though he should have been aware of his limitations as an elected official, ultimately, the responsibility to safeguard those governmental guard rails rested with Pardee. Like the staff noted above, he should have maintained those boundaries.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>It would be assumed that anyone who used him as a reference would be promptly removed from the pool. As one applicant said, she wouldn’t have used him because, “I don’t think it would have been appropriate.”

<sup>6</sup>When I discussed this with a friend who works in the finance department of another municipality, he was floored that this was even remotely occurring. In fact, he was in disbelief that council members could even speak directly to staff without managers or another council member present.

An extension of the above is Schechter's overstepping staff and councilor boundaries through his excessive requests of staff time, energy, and attention. Staff have reported that he takes hours of their time but that they're afraid to tell him they do not have the time nor the authority to act on his desires. First, this is an abuse of power in that he places staff in an impossible position of telling him no, but secondly, he is imposing an outsized impact of his personal agenda behind the scenes, sometimes even after a council decision has been made. As an example, he thought the Equity Task Force was a waste, even though the council had moved it forward. But, it was not his priority and he thought staff time and town funds would be better spent on something else.

At the end of the day, our council votes are what counts as far as what we can say we achieved, but the backdoor lobbying of staff is unacceptable in the lead up to a final vote. He's been described as a "rogue member of council" and his tactics have been described as "wildly inappropriate and dangerous". For context, no one else on the council has ever been described that way to me.

Another example of pushing his agenda instead of the council's is him speaking for the council without the authority to do so. Recently, he called the former mayor of Park City, who is foundational in the Mountain Towns 2030 Collective. Schechter told him that we would not be able to host the climate summit that we had committed ourselves to in 2023. The former mayor said that Schechter explained that we were in between town managers and could not host, but asked that they not "forget about us for the future."

He had zero authority to have such a conversation and the person who spoke to me about it was under the impression that Schechter had that authority and that he was speaking for the council. The fact that I discovered this by chance only by personally attending the Climate Summit begs the question of how many other times has Schechter spoken on the body's behalf when he was not authorized?

Finally, I am deeply concerned about his treatment of women, especially in his official capacity as a town council member at conferences. It has been reported to me twice that while representing us at outside functions, he has made women feel very uncomfortable by pressuring them via text messages during meetings to go to dinner with him. Additionally, we have all been present when he openly flirts with women staff, facilitators, or commenters in meetings, which makes me and at least some of the women in the room very uncomfortable.

Importantly, when I speak with people in the community, I'm told repeatedly that our jobs are to make sure things are fair for people — that everyone is getting a fair shake and equitable representation. They remind me that the unspoken rules to not do or say the above or hold each other accountable are not *their* rules. They want to know that we are working for them. To

suggest that the issues or misconduct I report are merely personal does a disservice to all of us and the residents of the community.

The more I have thought about all of this and reflected, the more I am angered and offended that my concerns are written off by some, including the newspaper, as personal disagreements with Schechter. They are not. In fact, I left out details about other concerning actions and words because neither those details nor my opinions about them are germane to a discussion about abuse of office. I addressed them directly with him. He knows what they are. That said, I have addressed most of what I've covered in this email with him directly. However, I have had no response, hence my email now.

Government *at any level* does not work if electeds disregard process to press their own agendas, especially at the cost of violating boundaries between elected officials and government staff. After reviewing all of these materials again, it really seems like our colleague has had a singular agenda and a long-term plan for achieving it. However, up until four years ago he had been a one man show in his quest. He cannot continue to act as though he's in a one man show and to finagle to get his way — representative government requires respect for the board, the processes, and for the separations of power.

Accordingly, I expect all of us to double down on our working agreements and determine how we will deal with abuses like those listed above in the future. For one, I will certainly be pushing for a “two by two” rule as soon as possible. But generally, expect that I will be firmly pushing on our rules, working agreements, and boundaries at our retreat.

I'm happy to speak more, but I have shared most of these concerns with all of you. Now it is in the public record, and your and Schechter's hands.

Best,  
Jessica