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From: **M Cobb** <[REDACTED]>
Date: Fri, Jul 14, 2023 at 9:24 PM
Subject: Re: Candia Agricultural Committee Letter
To: Midnight Soapworks <[REDACTED]>

Thank you for your letter Sophia, I will distribute it to the commission members and put the matter on our agenda for August 3.

Matthew Cobb

On Fri, Jul 14, 2023 at 2:25 PM Midnight Soapworks <[REDACTED]> wrote:

To the Candia Agricultural Committee-

A little about who I am- I'm a 28 year old mother of 3. I'm a stay at home mom and a homeschooling mom, with my business being my sole income. I started my business around 3 years ago, born from a love of creating pretty much anything but with a focus on bath and body products, paired with the desire to continue being a stay at home mom while still financially contributing to my family.

I've been featured in magazines and articles for my soap art and I have worked with many organizations, such as the National Cherry Blossom Festival in Washington, D.C., who purchased hundreds of our cherry blossom soaps to sell at their festival. My shop is well known and well respected not only in the community, but across the U.S.

Eventually, I expanded into acquiring artisanal handmade, curated items in an effort to be able to offer my customers a wide variety of items. I find it really fun to peruse the worldwide web and find interesting and unique items to add to my inventory.

All my curated items are clearly listed as curated on my website, and are part of the boutique section of my shop. I post about them on social media and they are all over my business page. I did not ask to join the CFM, I was contacted by Melissa Madden through my website's contact form and agreed to participate. She reached out to me.

The first market in June was great and everyone was super nice. I believe that Melissa both came to my table during the event and greeted me and my family at the end and it was a positive interaction. Nothing was ever said about my items and no inquiries were made at any point about their origin until three weeks after that first market.

Three weeks after the first market Melissa Madden emailed me asking if my accessories were made in New England. I don't know what prompted this inquiry three weeks after the event, and I don't know why it wasn't addressed in person at the first market, or even why it wasn't addressed when she asked me to join the market. In any case, I said no because that's the truth, some of my products are curated from out of state. As previously mentioned, this is not hidden information. It's worth mentioning that despite Melissa saying I never added these items to my application, I did in fact put our LippyClips on my application, Melissa reiterated that I would be bringing the LippyClips in the welcome email, and at the time I was invited to the market the LippyClips were

all over my website and social media pages which the CFM consistently interacted with in the weeks leading up to the first market. For those that don't know, LippyClips are a brand of hand-sewn keychains from a small business in Florida.

Melissa expressed that she was very "surprised" to see many of my items, claiming they weren't on my application. As stated, our keychains were actually on our application. That said, I did have other items that had not yet been acquired during the time we submitted the application. People tend to grow their businesses and their inventory over time, so it's not unusual as a store to add more products to your shop.. it's normally seen as a positive thing that you are growing. I've never had any market coordinator react negatively to my expanding my business.

Melissa said I had to put all items not made in New England into boxes on my table or under my table- which meant I couldn't use my displays for the entire market season with the CFM. My displays bring attention to my booth and offer additional signage. This is my setup, it works really well for me, and ensures my success at markets and fairs.

I gave Melissa my own suggestion, which is what she asked me to do if I was unhappy with the arrangement of putting merchandise into boxes on top of my table, which would not be easily visible by passerby's. Also, taking down these displays would remove part of my signage that gets me noticed.

This was my counter suggestion: I will respect the policy of not bringing items that are made outside of New England. I will not bring those items at all. Instead, I will make my own keychains and design my own greeting cards so that I can continue to use my displays and keep my market setup intact, while also respecting your policy since all items will be made in New England now. I said I wouldn't bring any of the other items such as our scrunchies or wallets, since I can't make those myself. I can make keychains and I'm pretty good at graphic design, so I could make some greeting cards too and have my designs professionally printed. This is a reasonable suggestion that complies with your policy, while also allowing me to continue using my displays as normal. This is called a compromise. If her issue was truly about policy compliance and if she was actually willing to compromise like she had stated, my suggestion would have sufficed. Since this issue arose, I have added my own line of keychains to my store.

Things only got worse after I made this suggestion. She then switched things up, and brought up child-vendors selling things "similar". So now we've moved on from the made-in-new-England policy. Now she is stating the issue is competition within the market. This would be fine & a valid point, except for a few inconsistencies:

1. I had put keychains on my application and they had been confirmed. I was now offering to make them myself, & no policy was being further broken, so why is this still an issue since they were already confirmed when I signed up for the market? If someone forgot I had them and then overbooked like-vendors, then that's on them not on me.
2. On the vendor roster it shows that another vendor at the market has cards & keychains which competes with the kids - why can that vendor compete with the kids but I can't?
3. One of the kid vendors has bath bombs, which competes with me. Why is it okay for the

kids to compete with me but not the other way around?

4. Also on the roster it says another vendor at the market has vegan soap (same as mine) and bath/body products which competes with me. Again- why is that "competition" okay? If you don't want competition within the market then there should be no competition across the board, period.

None of the hypocrisies I just listed were ever addressed by Melissa, instead I was called aggressive and uncooperative for questioning her and pointing these things out.

At one point I even asked Melissa if we could just speak in person because clearly something was getting lost in translation. Since I don't know this woman personally, and there is nothing to go on other than emails (no body language or tone to observe), I err on the side that somehow she perceived my responses and questions as being combative or challenging to her position & she felt threatened or felt like it was taking a turn that she didn't want to take the time to "manage" so she just kicked me out. At the end of the day, she's a grown woman & (I'm assuming) a business person. She should have taken the time to meet with me & discuss it like professionals, which would have ensured there were no false assumptions about anyone's meanings or intentions. Or, at the very least, handed the situation off to a different manager in an effort to get back on solid ground and resolve this. Instead, I was removed from the market & now feel like I have bad blood with people in my community, which is not what I had wanted nor was that ever my intended or desired outcome. I think both Melissa and myself got annoyed because of simple miscommunication, and I believe this matter could have been handled by both of us far better, but especially by her. I also believe it absolutely could have been resolved amicably if she had purer intentions. However, due to the turn this whole situation eventually took & where we have ended up, I find it hard to believe her intentions were ever as they would seem at face value.

This is my livelihood and I rely on the fact that I'll be generating income on those dates where I schedule markets. The only cited policy by the board to defend my removal was the fact that they can do so. There was no broken rule or anything that I did wrong, it was simply an answer of "because we can". I had agreed to everything else, there was nothing left to criticize me for. When you whittle this down to its most basic form, the reason I was kicked out was simply because someone didn't like me. That's it. The committee needs to add some checks & balances to this system; at the very least make it so it needs to be voted on before removing a vendor that's already been committed to. If you do that, hopefully it can prevent some other vendor's income from being messed with unnecessarily.

There was no valid or logical reason to remove me as a vendor. I was even refunded the booth fees as a way to avoid "acting putatively", which tells me that the committee knows if this was fought out in court, I would have won- which should tell you I was removed for no good reason at all.

I was willing to remedy the original problem & respect the CFM's policies by only bringing items I've made here in New England. Sadly, I don't believe that was ever the true issue. I think there was something going on behind the scenes and that there was a lot more to this story. My table got a lot of attention at the first market, so the only conclusion I could draw with the limited

information I had and by putting together context clues, was that Melissa Madden wanted to minimize my set up so that attention would be less on me and more evenly spread throughout the market. If that is the case, it is so wrong of someone to do to a vendor. The entire situation gave me vibes of nepotism; I believe that Melissa is friendly with another vendor selling similar items and after seeing the attention I got at the first market she tried to get me to remove what people were interested in so the focus of the patrons would go elsewhere. Also, Melissa said my soap trays (bathroom decor that people can put our soap bars on) that are not made in New England were fine to continue selling despite them being against the policy. With so many little inconsistencies, it was very confusing, and truly left me wondering if the issue was the items themselves, and not where they were made.

Just as you wouldn't want a vendor leaving you high and dry after already committing to a season with you, vendors should also get that same respect and courtesy. Once they make a commitment to you and block off that time in their schedule and give you the booth fees, to remove them for something such as this comes off as unreliable, ill-mannered, and unprofessional.

Signed,
Sophia L.

Soap Artist & Owner; Midnight Soapworks
Midnightsoapworks.com