

Town Councilor Jane MacDonald loves football. When fellow Councilor JJ Thomas offered Jane a ticket to the game against a fierce division rival, Jane couldn't pass up the opportunity. JJ told Jane the ticket was free, and that JJ knew Jane would be excited at the prospect of attending. JJ was right. They agreed to meet at the stadium where Thomas would have the ticket.

When Jane arrived, they saw JJ talking to Lance Landis, president of the local cable company. Jane assumed they had bumped into each other in the lobby and was surprised when Jane realized the ticket was in the luxury box Landis' company had at the stadium. Jane was concerned as the city was beginning to negotiate a new cable contract and felt especially uncomfortable when Landis sat in the seat next to Jane. Jane decided the situation needed clarifying so there would be no misunderstanding now or later. Jane told Lance and JJ that this was a social event, that Jane did not know that the ticket JJ had offered was in the cable company's luxury box, and that no city business would be discussed, especially anything related to the upcoming cable contract.

Despite Jane's statement, the casual conversation soon shifted to talk about cable, the telecommunications industry, and where Landis' company's future endeavors may lead, including in the city and elsewhere. Although Jane enjoyed the game, Jane was troubled by the optics of being in the cable company's box.

The next day, Jane sent an email to Lance Landis and copied JJ Thomas and the president of the City Council. Jane asked how much the face value of the ticket was so that Jane could reimburse Landis and the cable company. Landis responded that there was no cost of the ticket as it was included with the luxury box package that the cable company purchased for the season. Jane was upset that JJ had put Jane in an ethically compromising position and felt frustrated that attempts to pay for the ticket went nowhere.

Questions for discussion:

Should Councilor Jane MacDonald have left the game as soon as they found out where they were sitting?

Should Jane have included the president of the City Council on the email?

What responsibility, if any, did JJ Thomas have in the situation?

Should MacDonald recuse themselves from any cable contract negotiations? Should Thomas? What about Lance Landis?

What should Jane do if questioned at a public meeting about being in the box by a citizen who saw Jane?