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IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON
AT TACOMA

DALE BROWN; BARBARA BROWN;
BRIAN COMFORT; WENDY
COMFORT; PATRICK YATES; LINDA
HEBISH; EARL IDDINGS; JOEL
KRAMER; ANGIE KRAMER;
MICHAEL KOVAR; PAT
MCCULLOUGH; and WILLIAM
ANSPACH,

Plaintiffs,

v.

MASON COUNTY; RANDY
NEATHERLIN in his individual capacity
and official capacity as a Mason County
Commissioner; and DAVID WINDOM in
his individual capacity and official
capacity as Director of Mason County
Community Services,

Defendants,

and

GRUMP VENTURES, LLC; and its
Principal RUSSELL SCOTT,

Other Necessary Parties

NO.

COMPLAINT—CLASS ACTION

1
2 **COMPLAINT FOR VIOLATION OF CIVIL RIGHTS**

3 **I. INTRODUCTION**

4 1. In this action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983, Mason County, County Commissioner Randy
5 Neatherlin, and the Director of Mason County Community Services David Windom deprived
6 plaintiffs of rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and federal laws.
7 Plaintiffs were deprived of property rights without due process of law. Defendants actions were
8 arbitrary, irrational, invidious and tainted by improper motive and violated plaintiffs’ substantive
9 due process rights. Defendants acted under color of Washington State's Surface Mining Act, RCW
10 78.44.010 et seq. and under color of Mason County's local zoning ordinance.
11

12 2. On June 30, 2017, Mason County and the named individual defendants gifted a
13 private company, Grump Ventures, LLC (“Grump”), with a valuable right to operate a 66.5-acre
14 surface mine in a residential zone where mining is prohibited.

15 3. Mason County and the named individual defendants disregarded the
16 recommendation of Mason County planning staffer Michael MacSems, who had written a
17 memorandum explaining that Grump only had a right to conduct mining operations on 1.87-acres.
18 The County and the named individual defendants then tried to cover up their unlawful and
19 unconstitutional act by hiding MacSem’s memorandum in County Commissioner Randy
20 Neatherlin’s basement, along with other documents relating to the unlawful gift.
21

22 4. While Grump’s application for the mining approval was pending before Mason
23 County, Commissioner Neatherlin traveled to Ireland with the man who was shepherding Grump’s
24 application through the local approval process: Jack Johnson of Peninsula Topsoil. Upon
25 Commissioner Neatherlin’s return from Ireland, he pressured Michael MacSems to withdraw his
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1 objection to the mine and repeatedly badgered county planning staff, including Director Windom,
2 to approve the application.

3 5. Mason County's approval of Grump's mine lacked any appearance of fairness and
4 deprived plaintiffs and members of the plaintiff class who live nearby of their use and enjoyment
5 of their property.
6

7 II. JURISDICTION AND VENUE

8 6. Plaintiffs' claims arise under the Constitution and laws of the United States and the
9 Constitution of laws of the State of Washington. This Court has jurisdiction over the claims arising
10 under the Constitution and laws of the United States under 28 U.S.C. §§ 1331, 1343(a). This Court
11 has supplemental jurisdiction over the claims arising under the Constitution and laws of the State
12 of Washington under 28 U.S.C. § 1367.
13

14 7. This Court has the authority to grant declaratory and injunctive relief under 28
15 U.S.C. § 2201–2202 and Fed. R. Civ. P. 57 and 65. The federal rights asserted by plaintiffs are
16 enforceable under 42 U.S.C. § 1983.

17 8. Venue is proper in this Court under 28 U.S.C. § 1391. All or a substantial part of
18 the events or omissions giving rise to the claims herein occurred within this judicial district and
19 defendants reside in this district.
20

21 III. PARTIES

22 9. Plaintiffs Dale Brown and Barbara Brown, husband and wife, own property located
23 at 4680 NE North Shore Road, in Belfair. The Browns' property is located adjacent to the proposed
24 Grump surface mine.
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1 10. Plaintiffs Brian Comfort and Wendy Comfort, husband and wife, own property
2 located at 190 NE Sundstrom Road, in Belfair. The Comforts' property is located less than a mile
3 from the proposed Grump surface mine.

4 11. Plaintiffs Patrick Yates and Linda Hebish, husband and wife, own property located
5 at 171 N.E. Wagon Wheel Road, in Belfair. Mr. Yates' and Ms. Hebish's property is located less
6 than a mile from the proposed Grump surface mine.

7 12. Plaintiff Earl Iddings owns property located at 4790, 4791, and 4821 NE Northshore
8 Road, in Belfair. Mr. Iddings' properties are all located adjacent to the proposed Grump surface
9 mine.
10

11 13. Plaintiffs Joel Kramer and Angie Kramer, husband and wife, own property located
12 at 4731 NE North Shore Road, in Belfair. The Kramers' property is located across the street from
13 the proposed Grump surface mine.
14

15 14. Plaintiff Michael Kovar, MD, owns property located at 4731 NE North Shore Road,
16 in Belfair. Mr. Kovar's property is located across the street from the proposed Grump surface
17 mine.

18 15. Plaintiff Pat McCullough, PE, owns property located at 210 NE Cherokee Beach
19 Road NE, in Belfair. Mr. McCullough's property is located less than a mile from the proposed
20 Grump surface mine.
21

22 16. Plaintiff William Anspach owns property located at 4123 NE North Shore Road, in
23 Belfair. Mr. Anspach's property is located less than a mile from the proposed Grump surface mine.

24 17. Defendant Mason County is a county in the State of Washington with offices located
25 at 411 N 5th St., Shelton WA 98584.
26

1 members have suffered the same deprivation of federal rights under color of state law, caused by
2 the same acts of defendants. The class representatives are highly motivated to prosecute this
3 action.

4 24. The questions of law and fact to be determined in this case are common to the named
5 plaintiffs and the class members. The claims of the named plaintiffs are typical of the claims of
6 the class. The relief sought is common to the named plaintiffs and class members.

7 25. The named plaintiffs and their counsel will fairly and adequately protect the
8 interests of the class they represent. Named plaintiffs have no interest adverse to or in conflict
9 with those of other class members.

10 26. The proposed class action is appropriate under the second and third of the three
11 types of class action set out at Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(b)(1–3).

12 27. Under Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(b)(2), defendants acted on grounds that apply generally to
13 the class, so that final injunctive relief or corresponding declaratory relief is appropriate respecting
14 the class as a whole.

15 28. Under Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(b)(3), questions of law and fact relating to the defendants'
16 liability are the same for all class members and predominate over any questions affecting only
17 individual members (such as the amount of damages suffered by each class member). A class
18 action is superior to other available methods for fairly and efficiently adjudicating the controversy.
19

20 29. In support of the findings required by Fed. R. Civ. P. 23(b)(3), plaintiffs allege that
21 (A) class members have communicated no interest in individually controlling the prosecution of
22 separate actions; (B) except for a tangentially-related (and already resolved) case under
23 Washington's Public Records Act, no class member has commenced litigation concerning this
24 controversy; (C) it is desirable to concentrate the litigation of the claims of plaintiffs and class
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1 members in this forum; and (D) there are not likely to be any unusual difficulties in managing this
2 class action.

3
4 **V. FACTS**

5 30. Grump Ventures, LLC owns property in Mason County. Grump seeks to use its
6 property for surface mining. Grump's property is zoned for rural residential use.

7 31. On June 26, 1996, Mason County adopted a zoning ordinance that prohibits surface
8 mines in the rural residential zoning district. The zoning ordinance prohibits surface mining on
9 the parcels owned by Grump, which are the subject of this lawsuit.

10 32. On February 17, 2017, Grump applied to Mason County for approval of a 66.5-acre
11 surface mine extending over multiple parcels, all of them within the rural residential zoning district
12 where surface mining is illegal. The sought-after approval was the "Form SM-6" county approval
13 of surface mining, a form provided to the county by the State of Washington pursuant to
14 Washington's Surface Mining Act, RCW 78.44.010 et seq.

15 33. Grump and its principal, Russelwl Scott, were assisted in the application by Mr.
16 Scott's business associate, Jack Johnson, the principal of Peninsula Topsoil.

17 34. Because surface mining was illegal, Grump, Scott and Johnson sought to obtain
18 approval for surface mining as the continuation of a surface mining operation that pre-dated the
19 1996 zoning ordinance (*i.e.*, as a "grandfathered" use, in the vernacular). On March 15, 2017,
20 county planning staffer Michael MacSems wrote a memo to defendant David Windom, notifying
21 Mr. Windom that any historic mining on the parcels was limited to a few small contiguous parcels
22 totaling 1.87 acres in area. Mr. MacSems' memo informed Mr. Windom that there was no
23 evidence of any mining beyond those 1.87 acres. Because of this, Mr. MacSems recommended
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1 that Mr. Windom not sign the Form SM-6 unless the acreage was changed from 66.5 acres to 1.87
2 acres.

3 35. In rendering a decision as to whether to grant the county's approval for Grump's
4 surface mine, defendants were required to follow articulable standards that constrained their
5 decision-making process, including whether or not the proposed mining use complied with the
6 county's zoning ordinance and whether or not "development occurs in such a way that it protects
7 private property rights and existing land uses while also protecting natural resources, promoting
8 economic growth and assuring the compatibility of proposed land uses with existing ones." MCC
9 17.01.010. In spite of Mr. MacSem's research showing that the proposed mine did not comply
10 with the county's zoning ordinance, defendants irrationally and invidiously granted approval for
11 the mine.
12

13 36. Plaintiffs were and are entitled to have the county's land use decision on Grump's
14 application for mining approval be based upon whether the proposed mine was an allowed use in
15 the rural residential zone, whether it would protect private property rights and existing land uses,
16 and whether it would be compatible with existing land uses, as required under the zoning
17 ordinance adopted and promulgated by the county.
18

19 37. In approving Grump's 66.5-acre surface mine, Mason County and its named
20 lawmaker (Commissioner Neatherlin) and employee (Director Windom) violated the Mason
21 County zoning code, which prohibits surface mines in residential zones. Through their official
22 positions and with authority conferred by the county, Defendants Neatherlin and Windom acted
23 with deliberate indifference to this prohibition and the rights of those affected by their decision.
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25 38. In effect, through Defendant Neatherlin's pressure on county staff and Defendant
26 Windom's final decision to approve the Form SM-6, the county established a policy that Grump's

1 surface mine should be exempt from the requirements of the county code, which would otherwise
2 prohibit such mines in residential zones. To date, Mason County has declined to petition the local
3 hearing examiner to revoke the Form SM-6 pursuant to SMC 15.13.075, effectively ratifying this
4 policy of exempting Grump's mine from the requirements and prohibitions of the local zoning
5 code.
6

7 39. From April 30, 2017 to May 2, 2017, defendant Randy Neatherlin, a member of the
8 county's Board of County Commissioners, took a trip to Ireland in the company of Jack Johnson.

9 40. Upon Commissioner Neatherlin's return from Ireland, he repeatedly pressured
10 Director Windom, Mr. MacSems, and county staff to approve the Form SM-6. According to Mr.
11 MacSems, Commissioner Neatherlin had never before advocated in favor of approval of a county
12 application.
13

14 41. Director Windom and Mr. MacSems serve at the pleasure of Commissioner
15 Neatherlin and the other county commissioners.

16 42. Upon his return from Ireland, Commissioner Neatherlin became a persistent
17 advocate for Grump's mining application, telling county staff at least five times "how do we get
18 to yes" or "get me to yes" on Grump's proposed 66.5 acre surface mine. Commissioner Neatherlin
19 told one neighbor, Bruce Carter, that he (Neatherlin) supported the Grump application because
20 Jack Johnson of Peninsula Topsoil asked him to support it.
21

22 43. Acting as a proponent of the proposed mining operation, Commissioner Neatherlin
23 brought an aerial photo taken in 1963, given to him by Grump's agent, Jack Johnson, into the
24 county offices and asserted to Director Windom and Mr. MacSems that it showed historical
25 mining activity beyond the 1.87 acres. Upon information and belief, this assertion was false. The
26 aerial did not show evidence of mining on the property. It showed downed trees from a windstorm.

1 44. Grump's and Neatherlin's deceptive misrepresentations of the 1963 aerial photo and
2 the extent of historical mining activity improperly caused the county planning staff to sign the
3 Form SM-6 approval.

4 45. On June 30, 2017, Director Windom signed the Form SM-6, approving Grump's
5 66.5-acre surface mine and exempting the mine from the requirements of the zoning ordinance,
6 which prohibits surface mines in residential zones.

7 46. Director Windom has final decision-making authority for the county.

8 47. Director Windom derives his final decision-making authority from the county
9 legislature.

10 48. Mason County has a commission form of county government under Article 11,
11 section 5 of the Washington Constitution.

12 49. In the commission form of county government, the county's governing body
13 consists of a three-member board of commissioners, elected on a partisan basis, who serve as the
14 county's legislative body and also perform executive functions.

15 50. Commissioner Neatherlin is member of the county's legislature. In that role, he
16 directs the policy and custom of the county and his acts and edicts can fairly be said to the represent
17 official policy of the county.

18 51. After the Form SM-6 was signed, Commissioner Neatherlin removed the aerial
19 image and Mr. MacSems' March 15, 2017 memorandum from the county offices and hid them in
20 his garage. Because Commissioner Neatherlin absconded with these documents, the county failed
21 to produce them in response to a records request, resulting in a costly settlement in a subsequent
22 lawsuit under Washington's Public Records Act.
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1 52. The county gave no notice of its Form SM-6 approval of the Grump surface mine
2 until 2018, when the county issued a “mitigated determination of nonsignificance” pursuant to
3 Washington’s State Environmental Policy Act (“SEPA”).

4 53. By approving Grump’s surface mine through the Form SM-6, even though Grump
5 did not qualify for that approval, the county gifted a property right to Grump, *i.e.*, the right to
6 develop a valuable mine in a zone where surface mines are prohibited.

7 54. Grump’s proposed mine would introduce a massive industrial surface mine into a
8 peaceful residential area. Grump plans to remove more than 6 million cubic yards of material from
9 the currently wooded site. Plaintiffs currently enjoy quiet natural surroundings on and around their
10 properties. If the mine were to be developed and operated, it would destroy the current bucolic,
11 rural environment and replace it with loud noise and vibration from excavating, material
12 processing (including rock crushing), air pollution, and heavy traffic of approximately 100 dump
13 trucks and trailers per day for many years.

14 55. As a result of the county’s approval of Grump’s surface mine, plaintiffs will be
15 deprived of the use and enjoyment of their property.

16 56. As a result of the county’s approval of Grump’s surface mine, plaintiffs have
17 suffered and will suffer significant loss in the value of their property.

18 57. As a result of the county’s approval of Grump’s surface mine, plaintiffs are faced
19 with significant health threats from air pollution.

20 58. As a result of the county’s approval of Grump’s surface mine, plaintiffs have had to
21 spend money and time fighting the unlawful mine.

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VI. CLAIMS FOR RELIEF

FIRST CLAIM FOR RELIEF

Violation of United States Constitution Amendment XIV (Procedural Due Process)

59. Plaintiffs restate and incorporate by reference all preceding paragraphs.

60. A person's ability to use and enjoy land they own free from unreasonable interference is a property right.

61. Plaintiffs have a protected property interest in the use and enjoyment of their real property.

62. Defendant Neatherlin's actions to pressure county staff and Defendant Windom to approve Grump's surface mine represents an exercise of official authority conferred by Mason County. The decision by Defendant Windom represents a deliberate choice to approve the Gump mine, with deliberate indifference to the requirements and prohibitions of the Mason County Code—specifically, the prohibition on surface mines in residential zones.

63. Defendants actions denied plaintiffs their rights to use and enjoy their property without the process that was due under the circumstances.

64. Defendants, acting under color of state law, violated plaintiffs' federal constitutional right to procedural due process under the Fourteenth Amendment of the United States Constitution.

SECOND CLAIM FOR RELIEF

Violation of United States Constitution Amendment XIV (Substantive Due Process)

65. Plaintiffs restate and incorporate by reference all preceding paragraphs.

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G. Award the plaintiffs their costs, litigation expenses, expert witness fees, and reasonable attorneys' fees associated with this litigation pursuant to 42 U.S.C. 1988 and all other applicable authorities;

H. Grant plaintiffs and the plaintiff class any such further relief as may be just, proper, and equitable.

Dated this 29th day of June, 2020.

Respectfully submitted by:

BRICKLIN & NEWMAN, LLP

By: /s/ David A. Bricklin
/s/ Bryan Telegin
/s/ Zachary K. Griefen
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