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City worker files \$80 million lawsuit

Alleges abuse and harassment

By **KIMBERLY ACEVEDO**

Democratic committeeman James Hodge filed an \$80 million lawsuit alleging that former and current city officials conspired to demote and harass him to such an extent that he suffered emotional distress, damage to his reputation, humiliation, loss of employment, income and employee benefits after he backed a Republican-led coalition during last year's City Council race.

The city has not yet been served the lawsuit, which was filed Nov. 4, said Corporation Counsel William Holst, so he is unable to comment.

After placing coalition signs on his lawn and talking about candidates on his nightly WGBB-AM radio show, Hodge said he was ostracized by the Democratic leader

and former city director of operations, Eugene Cammarato, and the former city manager, Edwin Eaton. Hodge also contends that Long Beach Animal Commissioner Lawrence Wallach harassed and discriminated against him while Hodge worked at the Long Beach Animal Shelter.

According to the lawsuit, filed in U.S. District Court by Hodge's lawyer, Frederick K. Brewington of Hempstead, Hodge filed an incident report with police after an animal shelter supervisor followed him into the street and yelled at him. Prior to the incident, Hodge said that he had heard the supervisor talking about him and proceeded to question the supervisor.

Eaton and Cammarato were called by the supervisor, and when they arrived at the animal shelter, they "immediately started abusing and cursing" at Hodge, according to court documents. As a result of the argument, Hodge began to feel weak, experienced heart palpitations and weakness in his knees, and was taken to the Long Beach Medical Center.

Two days after an election swept by Democrats, Hodge was demoted from assistant animal warden to animal control officer and his pay was cut. Currently, Hodge is on sick leave and cannot return to work until he provides proper medical documentation, one source said.

In the lawsuit, Hodge claims his constitutional, state civil and civil-service rights were violated and that he suffered injury to his mental health, his concept of self-worth, his business property and his professional future.

One of the defendants, Cammarato, said that since he has not been served or seen the lawsuit, he could not comment. Cammarato has worked for Nassau Downs OTB (Off-Track Betting) since late June.

The two other defendants could not be reached for comment.

Sources who are familiar with the case said there were at least two investigations alleging misconduct on Hodge's part. However, charges were not filed by the city in either case.