

NEW HAVEN INDEPENDENT

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CitySeed Boots Kerekes From Public Park

BY PAUL BASS

August 9, 2011 7:33 am



Mayoral candidate Jeffrey Kerekes sought to cultivate some signatures on a ballot petition amid the organic tomatoes and squash at Wooster Square's farmer market. Instead, he found himself kicked off the premises.

The ejection occurred Saturday morning during the weekly CitySeed farmers market at the DePalma Court plaza across Chapel Street from Wooster Square Park.

Monday afternoon CitySeed's chief said the organization meant to stop candidates from "campaigning" but not from "petitioning." In an interview she said she "would apologize" for any "miscommunication."

That communication—mis- or otherwise—took place before noon at the [weekly Wooster Square market](#).

Kerekes said he and campaign supporters came to the market armed with petitions for registered Democrats to sign so he can win a place on the Sept. 13 Democratic primary ballot. He and other Democratic mayoral candidates not endorsed by the party's town committee have [two weeks to collect 2,092 certified signatures](#) in order to qualify. (By contrast, candidates seeking to obtain an independent mayoral spot on the general election ballot need to [collect just 104](#) signatures; they have

months to do it.)

Kerekes said CitySeed's market manager, Keren Kurti Alexander, approached him. "You can't petition" within the market, he said she told him.

He said she told him that several times, after seeing other supporters circulate petitions inside the market.

"Can you tell me why we can't do that?" he said he asked Alexander.

"We were threatened by an alderman to remove our funding if we allow you to petition here," he said she replied. He said Alexander had also told him he couldn't petition at the downtown market on Church Street.

Alexander was reached by phone for comment Monday afternoon. She said she needed to put the call on hold while she went to another room. She came back on the line by speaker phone with CitySeed Executive Director Nicole Berube.

Berube said CitySeed does allow "petitioning" at its markets, including by candidates. She said it forbids "campaigning."

"I don't believe petitioning to get on the ballot is campaigning," Berube said.

Berube was asked whether people should be able to campaign in public parks.

"That's a good question," she responded. "This is the first year that we've really undergone this with being asked to have people at the farmers market campaigning. It would be easily construed that we were supporting the candidate if we do that. We do probably need to talk to some legal entity" about the issue.

"We don't have anything written down," Berube said. "We can't hold people from having a political discourse at our market. I'm sure that it happens. But it's a space to buy and sell food. I still am uncomfortable that CitySeed [would be accused of] associating with one candidate or another. We're a 501(c)3 [not-for-profit corporation]. We're in a public space on a farmers market on city property. We

would like to be as neutral as possible. With that in mind, I have no issue with the petitioning.”

Alexander was asked about Kerekes’ claim that he was overtly petitioning and that she repeatedly said he couldn’t petition.

“I specifically said he cannot ‘campaign,’” Alexander replied.

“If that was the case, it was a misunderstanding,” Berube said of Kerekes’ version. “We’re fine with him petitioning in the open space. We have reservations about him campaigning.”

“Aldermanic” Threat?

During the conference call, Alexander was asked about Kerekes’ claim that she mentioned an aldermanic threat to cut CitySeed’s funding. Berube said Alexander had left the room. “I cannot corroborate that at this point,” Berube said.

She subsequently called the Independent back. She reported that she had discussed the matter with Alexander.

“There was a case in Chicago that I told her about, of an alderman wanting to pull money from a farmers market because it was construed as campaigning,” Berube explained. “She apologizes. But that’s how that came to be. I think she thought that had happened to us. It had only happened in Chicago as far as I know. No one has threatened CitySeed with taking away the money.”

CitySeed is scheduled to receive \$18,000 from the city this fiscal year in the form of Community Development Block Grant money. The city receives a pot of block-grant money from the federal government. The mayor’s office draws up a proposal for how to divide it among local community groups and community agencies. The Board of Aldermen then discusses, amends, and votes on the distribution.

“We would have to apologize for that miscommunication between me and Keren on a day that a market was happening,” Berube said.

Kerekes said Monday that he’s confident CitySeed has nothing against him or his candidacy.

He argued, rather, that the incident reflects the “fear” people have of retribution in New Haven’s political climate. He called [his exclusion from public spaces](#) “one more layer for preventing democracy” in New Haven.

“They’re on public property. It’s a traditional place to meet people in a public space,” Kerekes argued. “I don’t think they were saying they don’t want me to be successful. I don’t think it was personal. By giving in to the fear, they’re validating politicians keeping people out of elections.”



anonymous

August 8, 2011 7:23 pm at 7:23 pm

Thanks for covering this. The farmer’s markets are held in public parks. Your coverage makes these types of ridiculous episodes less likely to happen again. Did you try getting a comment from the Parks Department?



OMGHELP

August 8, 2011 7:39 pm at 7:39 pm

It is certainly silly season now isn’t it. It also is amazing that anyone could think they can oust someone from a public space. Bothers me that such a thing would even come to someones mind to think they had a right to ask Jeffrey K. or anyone else to leave. Maybe not intentional or personal but not appropriate. This administration has the fear of G_d in so many folks that it is ridiculous.

Jeffrey you really have a lot of fortitude and that counts and is just one more thing you bring to the table as a candidate.



jt75

August 8, 2011 8:11 pm at 8:11 pm

I love how on the phone CitySeed staff seems to be very clear about the difference between “petitioning” and “campaigning,” yet their rules seem very unclear when they’re put into play out in the real world.

Either way, I also don’t see how you could bar them from a city park that’s a public space.



cedarhillresident!

August 8, 2011 8:15 pm at 8:15 pm

berude said about the same thing to me...but I did say several times I was petitioning...on the side walk not in the market. With that said..I to feel her.

Throughout the past two weeks of talking to so many New Haveners I was stunned at the real fear that is out there. REAL FEAR! My cousin, my uncle, my wife, my job, my community, my program, all the little crumbs people get..to allow all the injustices. Instead of standing up for what is right. These very people that fear him are the very people that chewed my ear off about how he has to go. So I get it. They are really out there trying to stifle us. When a government gets so out of control that they put fear in the people that it governs there is something very WRONG! That is not what America is all about!!! And I in no way am saying that all are partaking in the madness..it only takes a few.



anonymous

August 8, 2011 8:24 pm at 8:24 pm

It is Cityseed's official position that "campaigning" is not allowed at their markets on public property?

Could they clarify what this means?

I can understand if the parks department has its own regulations, but think people will begin boycotting Cityseed markets if they really feel that their mission is to muzzle campaigns on public property.



Mister Jones

August 8, 2011 8:26 pm at 8:26 pm

It's the height of silliness to blame this on the government, whether the aldermen or the mayor. This is about the market manager not wanting any interference with her shoppers [and so she made up a dumb excuse...]. Free speech advocates lost the battle years ago to allow similar activities at WestFarms Mall because it's private property. But DePalma Court is not the same kind of controlled shopping environment on public property.

Backpeddling for this article, CitySeed now says that they "meant to stop candidates from 'campaigning' but not from 'petitioning.'" Really? That's a distinction without a difference under these circumstances. The real question is: what's wrong with campaigning in a public square?

The town square is the quintessential public forum for free speech activities, which is why we continue to see protests on the Green and in front of City Hall. Wooster Square is no different. Now, in theory, free speech activity — even political speech like petitioning or campaigning — could be restricted somewhat while a public park is temporarily designated for a specialized use. For example, you wouldn't want something truly disrupted like an amplified protest rally interfering with a concert on the Green or Shakespeare in the park. But that's not the case here. But fellow citizens walking around with flyers or petitions? Lighten up, folks!



bs

August 8, 2011 8:38 pm at 8:38 pm

The market has just as much right to be on that piece of land as Jeffrey K. and all other candidates. The farmers do not own the land, the tax payers do. City Seed has zero ownership of that land. They have an agreement from the city to use the space. Our

space. Let the candidates, the clowns, the farmers, the drunks, the homeless, the home owners, the taxpayers, do what ever they want to do.

City Seed had NO right to kick anyone out of that sliver of land.



Mike

August 8, 2011 8:45 pm at 8:45 pm

I remember when city-seed was given tax-exempt status. If they pulled that...city-seed dies. I am very amused by what I see. I am an old city-hallite



Anstress Farwell

August 8, 2011 8:47 pm at 8:47 pm

Not only does CitySeed use the city park land, it uses the public sidewalk. I don't think they can even exclude campaigning.

CitySeed has successfully captured the public's imagination and affection, not because it sells vegetables, but because it fosters a civic, civil and cheerful "happening" place. For the city to interfere with the community of people and ideas that continuously evolves around the markets undermines their public value.

It's too bad this administration puts such pressure on non-profits – CitySeed is not alone. A few years ago, I attended an event at a non-profit which received city funds. The Mayor didn't like the event. He walked in and said to the director, in front of everyone there, "Don't you get money from the city?" If the administration wants to have New Haven become a dull, craven, spiritless place without a future, keep this stuff up. Thanks NHI for reporting this.



apell81

August 8, 2011 10:59 pm at 10:59 pm

I'm no lawyer, but I think this is pretty clear.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Amendment_to_the_United_States_Constitution



cedarhillresident!

August 8, 2011 11:24 pm at 11:24 pm

I have to agree with anon's last comment. Most of the markets welcome the candidates. Westvilles was fantastic...we at the most part stayed on the out side just as we did at the wooster one. State streets even allowed the candidates to give speeches. As Mr Jones stated they have been quintessential public forums through out history! That is the beauty of going to the market. to have these things happening. To meet the people who are running. To meet neighbors and see non profits set ups. Ect. They should be welcoming to this type of interaction for there visitors it makes it even more interesting. oh well.. I am hoping this was just a

knee jerk reaction.

PS the milk ladies milk is the BOMB!!! Does she set up at any other markets?



Mississippi Burning

August 9, 2011 12:28 am at 12:28 am

Cool it, Jeffery, just buy them a slice, and it will all work out.



jpwestfall@gmail.com

August 9, 2011 1:06 am at 1:06 am

I wonder if Adam Joseph was hiding behind a tree photographing the whole event?



messoregroup@gmail.com

August 9, 2011 1:25 am at 1:25 am

Hey Mayor—

Nice Suit.

Drew



citoyen

August 9, 2011 1:32 am at 1:32 am

The obvious answer to Ms. Alexander would be that ALL candidates should be welcome to petition on city land at the market. It sounds as if Jeffrey was the only one to think to do so, but that was no reason to interpret his appearance as an endorsement by the market. If two candidates had shown up, would she have worried that CitySeed was expressing support for TWO candidates?

She and Ms. Berube might backtrack now, but the damage is done. That time cannot be recouped. The petitions are due this Wednesday.

Thanks for promoting democracy in this one-party town where the mayor usually has NO meaningful competition, CitySeed!



One City Dump

August 9, 2011 2:25 pm at 2:25 pm

Public land and public buildings are all owned by the public and are there, because we paid for them with our hard earned money. They are there for our use and enjoyment. The very idea that an elite group of people whether the mayor and his coterie

or Cityseed would abdicate our ownership for their benefit alone is unacceptable. This is especially true on open space. The only reason I will continue going to these markets is because of the vendors and small business people who populate them. Normally, I would refuse to spend any more money with an organization who has such a low view of our rights and treats any of our citizens, campaigners/petitioners or others, with equally low regard.



Anonymous

August 9, 2011 2:45 pm at 2:45 pm

Everyone needs to chill out here. City Seed is a Non profit that provides a great service to the city. They're not the enemy, it's the nature of the system. It's not in City Seed's best interest to have anyone campaign or petitioning within their markets least they be perceived to be endorsing that candidate. Do you really think it's their responsibility to make sure everyone's first amendment rights are respected? No, they just want to sell you Organic Kale. What happens when a candidate hits up City Seed Market shoppers, that candidate then loses and whoever is elected to the post now sees City Seed as an enemy (and it appears they've made an enemy in Kerekes) and is less willing to cooperate with them with funding and so on; something completely within the realm of possibility in my opinion and probably one of their big fears given the events in Chicago.

Now this Kerekes fellow, going to the press and starting this whole City Seed smear to get in the paper and bolster his own support doesn't exactly endear him to me. This is where I get my produce and I much prefer it to Stop and Shop.

He should just respect what City Seed is and the fact that they don't want to get involved in politics. Stand off to the side and get all the foot traffic in and out of the market.



cedarhillresident!

August 9, 2011 3:19 pm at 3:19 pm

@Anonymous

We were off to the side getting people coming in! We were on the SIDEWALK! There was one of 2 occasions were we were walking and talking with a person and maybe one time I was walking to the other side of the side walk were I asked someone passing through. BUT we were not in the market!



Browntown

August 9, 2011 3:41 pm at 3:41 pm

Anonymous: if the current mayor was spotted at the market shaking hands and saying things like "I hope you support me", it is completely implausible that he would be asked to leave.

City Seed doesn't mind being associated with politicians, as long as they are the front runners. I understand the organization needs to look out for itself, but it is disingenuous for the E.D. to say that they are a politically neutral organization. I do believe they'd like to be, however.

**Shaggybob**

August 9, 2011 4:25 pm at 4:25 pm

Lets get a comment from the Corporation Counsel or does someone need to sue the City in Federal Court for limiting our rights of free speech and the right to petition our own government in a PUBLIC SPACE.

I understand the market's concerns but PLEASE be Sensible. Where are you allowed to "campaign" these days ???

**streever**

August 9, 2011 6:00 pm at 6:00 pm

I am really disappointed in CitySeed, which I know is staffed by good, decent people.

I think CitySeed owes a public apology for their misstep. I know the people there are good people, with great intentions. This is a screw-up which they can rectify with a public apology.

If an Alderman did threaten them, they need to let that out. The reality is that there is enough oversight and enough active citizens to prevent any real harm from being done to CitySeed. What would they do? Pull your permit? Send a health inspector every 20 minutes? Shut you down?

The people of New Haven wouldn't let that happen.

**pstone**

August 9, 2011 7:58 pm at 7:58 pm

I think the CitySeed staff reacted appropriately. 501(c)(3) organizations (presuming this is how CitySeed is organized, their site doesn't indicate) are prohibited from being involved, directly or indirectly, in most types of political activity. They risk losing their tax-exempt status if they become, or give the appearance of becoming, involved in campaigning or giving support for one candidate over another. I suspect even petitioning to get on a ballot would fall under this prohibition as the difference between campaigning and petitioning in this instance seems rather specious.

In the current political, anti-government, climate I'm sure there are groups out there which would love to see CitySeed lose its tax-exempt status and, therefore, much of its funding.

**Stev**

August 9, 2011 8:08 pm at 8:08 pm

Sounds like someone might be getting a little antsy with Jeffrey's growing popularity. Hahaha...I love it

**streever**

August 9, 2011 8:38 pm at 8:38 pm

Craig:

How does CitySeed have the right to remove an individual from a public space? How is that appropriate?

I obtain permits to use College Woods for events. Do I have the right to tell private citizens to leave College Woods? Jeffrey was on the sidewalk. How did CitySeed have the right to remove him?



pstone

August 9, 2011 9:39 pm at 9:39 pm

Streever:

It sounds like they asked him and his supporters not to petition in the market, not that they removed him from the park. I have a similar right to ask the person smoking on the sidewalk outside the door to my apartment building to move down the sidewalk to smoke and they have the right to tell me to stuff it.

I have never seen the language for the usage permits, but Jeffrey probably would have been well within his rights to say no and continue campaigning. At which point CitySeed would have had been put in the position of possibly telling its vendors to pack up their stands and go home. Putting a group in that sort of position is a selfish move and I expected better from Kerekes.



Shaggybob

August 9, 2011 10:51 pm at 10:51 pm

The Parks department is under influence of the current administration and 360 State Street. Their opinion is going to be what's on the Mayor's agenda. Bob Levine is playing politics and his opinions are not those of legalities or of his own.



OMG

August 10, 2011 12:28 am at 12:28 am

The real question here is why should an up market organization get an \$18,000 subsidy from the city to sell expensive organic fruit and vegetables in a very affluent area to the city's wealthy and politically connected. Is this a way of subsidizing the nearby pizza joints and Italian restaurants on Wooster Street? Please, oh please, alders, take a look at this. It stinks. With all the poverty and hunger in town this money should be going somewhere different.

Sure, Kerekes got a bad deal out of this in his mayoral campaign. He's a big boy and can look after himself. I'd suggest that Ferraros and Stop & Shop look very carefully at who they give their campaign contributions to. The present administration is undermining their businesses.



streever

August 10, 2011 12:31 am at 12:31 am

Craig:

So Kerekes would be well within his rights to exercise his first amendment rights, although, you'd be disappointed in him if he did so?

What?



Anonymous

August 10, 2011 1:40 am at 1:40 am

@Cedarhillresident

Okay so you're a campaigner for this fellow. Sounds like most of the commenters are. That's fine. Come knock on my door and ask me to sign a petition, I'd gladly do it. Throwing City Seed under the bus for publicity is low and I can't say I agree with your tactics. And I do sympathize with those who believe their candidates speech is being gagged; but I don't agree with your assessment of City Seed having some shady agenda against your man.

@VD

What evidence do you have that City Seed backs candidates in power? Your situation is hypothetical anyway, an incumbent Mayor making a public appearance and shaking some hands at some venue and another candidate asking votes or signatures for their campaigns is really apples to oranges man. Look, my point is, I don't see any sort of hidden agenda or conspiracy on City Seed's part. I recommend you two spend more time getting signatures for your boy, walk down Orange street, knock on my door and I will gladly sign your petition and listen to what you've got to say. See me on the street I'd do the same, but I'd also respect the wishes of City Seed for asking (did they try to forcibly remove or threaten to call the police? Cause I doubt took much action) you to chill outside of their markets.

@ Charlie O'Keefe

Do you know what City Seed does? I don't think you do but I appreciate your anti-Bourgeois angst.

@Steven Guerrero

Are you suggesting City Seed is some sort of SS arm of the current regime? Wow, yes I suppose the brown shirts are mobilizing on Olive, snatching up petitioners and pouring castor oil down their throats...

@Streever

I don't think City Seed does have the right to remove and individual from a public space (did they claim they did?), they certainly have the right to ask them to leave and explain their concerns about their presence; how that was communicated by a City Seed employee and how that was construed by petitioners, I don't rightly know.

Look, my issue here is with what I see as the suggestion that City Seed is some sort of group of Agrarian Revolutionaries bent on stifling democracy and destroying the first amendment in our country as we know it. They're a non profit who try to get you guys some fresh though sometimes overpriced produce. Some person, probably a volunteer, miscommunicated a request and you guys cry Bolshevism. You guys sound like Tea Partiers and Conspiracy nuts. I like living in New Haven because we generally lack those types. I'll reiterate my initial request, just chill out a bit.

**Anonymous**

August 10, 2011 1:43 am at 1:43 am

@Craig

Yes, that's what I believe happened. Completely agree. Think some Kerekes staff are just getting a bit too fired up and lighting up this board. But hey, more power to them, best of luck guys. I'd hate to be accused of violating first amendment rights here...

**pstone**

August 10, 2011 2:03 am at 2:03 am

Streever:

Just because you the right to do something doesn't mean you should it. Just because you have a right to do something doesn't mean your actions are free of consequences.

I have the right to tell next person I see on the street that I believe he or she is an ugly, fat slob. It doesn't mean I should. The Westboro Baptist Church has the right to demonstrate at military funerals and tell all of the funeral goers that they're damned. It doesn't mean their actions aren't incredibly distasteful or that they're "right."

As long as he wasn't violating the permit given to CitySeed, he very likely had the right to be there campaigning since it was a public park. One of the consequences of him exercising this right is that he put CitySeed at risk to lose their non-profit status. While it may be a perfectly "legal" thing to do, it doesn't change the fact that it's selfish, jacka** behavior.

**Anonymous**

August 10, 2011 2:07 am at 2:07 am

@Streever

Answering for my friend Craig, yes.

While I have to admit that I cringe when I hear it put this way, "exercise my first amendment rights," (for me it conjures up images of Fred Phelps's gang or some equally hateful speech and that's not to equate Mr. Kerekes with anything like that, its just...phrasing it like that makes me shudder).

I don't believe that City Seed tried to physically stop anyone from saying anything, someone asked him not to campaign in their market as they were a Non Profit who didn't want to be construed as political. At this point it was and is a bit of a jerk thing to make a big deal of it in what I see as nothing but a means to drum up publicity when they could have petitioned anywhere else, including around the market. So yes, I am disappointed.

In addition, it seems someone messed up and petitioning should have been allowed just not campaigning. So it was a misunderstanding or it's a Fascist plot to turn New Haven into a dictatorship? If it's a misunderstanding, why involve the press?

I'd like to mention at this point that I agree to an extent with Kerekes quotes at the bottom of the article. However I think he's

unfair to drag City Seed through the mud to make a political statement and paint himself into a sort of victim. Furthermore it's unfair to ask a non profit bunch that run farmer's markets to make some sort of stand against New Haven's "fear" based political climate. They don't want to get political, that much is clear, they are just trying to sell some raw milk. Kerekes should get himself elected and take on that political climate, himself.



streever

August 10, 2011 3:43 am at 3:43 am

The anger being shown at CitySeed by anonymous commentators has nothing to do with Kerekes—and him petitioning does nothing to harm their non-profit status.

What you are referring to is that non-profits can not engage in active lobbying, which is very different, and is legally defined—call the Secretary of State's office and ask them.

CitySeed has allowed candidates for office to table at their markets.

Kerekes is actually being very reasonable about this—while some of the anonymous commentators who are pro him are not, neither are the pro CitySeed commentators.

Kerekes has a first amendment right to collect signatures at a public park—on a sidewalk no less—and it was inappropriate of CitySeed to ask him to leave. Enough said. CitySeed can apologize for that, and everyone can move on.

Craig, I'm sorry you don't understand how the lobbying / non-profit status works, but that doesn't make Kerekes any of the words you've called him (jack... selfish... etc). You should probably apologize too. That isn't really cool.

Civil discourse is an important thing to maintain—if you'd rather just hurl accusations at others, sure, but it makes your comments far less relevant and compelling.



streever

August 10, 2011 3:47 am at 3:47 am

and, actually, Craig, sorry. I just read the line "Just because you have a right to do something doesn't mean your actions are free of consequences."

Actually, that is totally wrong, a constitutional right is an "inalienable" right which is considered to be a basic right accessible to every living person.

The right to free speech specifically prohibits governments and other individuals from infringing on your right to exercise free speech. If someone tells Kerekes he has to leave a public sidewalk to prevent him from exercising his free speech rights, they are in the wrong.

Seriously, where do these platitudes and talking points come from? I think I hate the internet.

**Bill Saunders**

August 10, 2011 7:12 am at 7:12 am

Craig,

Your Right!

From The State of Connecticut Constitution, Section 4:

” Every citizen may freely speak, write and publish his sentiments on all subjects, being responsible for the abuse of that liberty.”

From the way I read the law, being a ... is a two-way street.

If local petitioning to participate in political primaries has gotten violates our declared rights, that is truly a sad testimony on our local process.

I do love the (anti)nexus between politics and non-profits, though.

Who knows, maybe you just helped crack the case...

**cedarhillresident!**

August 10, 2011 11:05 am at 11:05 am

@anonymous

Correctional I did not throw anyone under any bus! (I do not like that kind of attack!!! cause that is what that staement is) I said I believe this was a a REACTION that is common with many groups that have ties to city funding (FEAR)(I have seen it every day while I was out petitioning!). No one should (FEAR!) And again WE WERE NOT IN THE MARKET we were on the SIDEWALK at the entrances! Even ask A Destefano to sign our petition 😊 This is the ONLY market that gave us a hard time...If I was walking around the market (as some posters are trying to make it sound like)that would be one thing. But we were not. She was tiring to kick us off the sidewalk!(at least me and Jeffrey) Again we respected the market for what it was. And let people enjoy there shopping. We offered them the chance to be part of democracy and if they showed any sign of non interest we back right off because we did not want to interrupt there morning.

As I see it you are missing the point...

The right to petition is a WRITTEN amendment (the first!) We were not on Private property. We did do door to door..but you must remember most New Haveners are never home (unless you want me at your door at 9 at night) We wanted to make sure EVERYONE has the chance to be part of the election process in New Haven. Something that seems to be getting lost in this city. I personally think this story was not meant to bash the market... it was to show the stornng arms of the city...remember the women said to us and alderman said he will pull our grant if we let you stay??!!! Do we believe that she really meant a chicgo inedit or that maybe someone really said something to her? I belive we are fighting for her rights to! NO ONE SHOULD BE AFRAID of their grant being pulled for such a wonderful program! I will keep fight the fight! For my community, for the people of the city, and even for groups like her's to NEVER be afarid of people standing on a SIDEWALK! This boarderlines ternny are you a city worker? (directly or indirectly?)



Cove Mom

August 10, 2011 12:46 pm at 12:46 pm

So environmentalists can set up shop at CitySeed to encourage people to sign up for alternative energy sourcing, but Kerekes and his supporters can't stand on the corner and ask registered Dems to sign a petition to get him on the ballot?



Beach Short

August 10, 2011 5:50 pm at 5:50 pm

Just wanted to corroborate cederhillresident's version of events. I visited with my husband and we were approached on the sidewalk across from the market on the park side. We also noticed a few people with the campaign at the edge of the market on the sidewalk (on the sidewalk between the milk stand and the road on the park side if you are familiar with the setup). It was totally unobtrusive. At no point did I think they were associated with Cityseed. I saw it as part of the market experience... along with the farmers, vendors, kids playing guitar for spare change, neighbors, students, friends, families gathering... it is not just a shopping experience, it's a social experience too. I think it is a great place for candidates to reach out to people. Cityseed clearly made a mistake here, and they should apologize.



PlayStreets

August 11, 2011 1:46 pm at 1:46 pm

Campaigning or petitioning by candidates who don't have booths, tents or tables is not easily construed as being an activity of city seed per se.

city seed does not control the spaces, just itself, its vendors, its tables tents and booths.

if it does not cease from this policy I will definitely stop patronizing this market and urge other partners – public, private, nonprofit, to withdraw its partnerships as well.

The parks and streets of New Haven are for everyone.

They are NOT a private market owned and run by city seed, it is a public location of a market– you own the market and its transactions, not your locations, plain and simple. And NO, not even the space between two rows of tents.



Anstress Farwell

August 11, 2011 4:47 pm at 4:47 pm

The attacks on CitySeed are missing the point. One employee, nervous because of a threat from an elected official, made a mistake. It would probably cause CitySeed even more trouble to name the Alderman who acted so inappropriately, but remember — this is a person who has taken an oath to protect public interests, and he/she has violated that trust by issuing a threat. If an apology is due, it is from this Alderman to CitySeed. It is not fair that a thuggish elected official is protected by anonymity, and CitySeed is hung out to dry. CitySeed has not interfered with other petitioning (I have happily signed a lot of petitions circulated

at CitySeed markets). Their mistake on this one occasion is notable only for being an exception to a stellar history of community support and involvement.



cedarhillresident!

August 11, 2011 6:09 pm at 6:09 pm

anon

I agree. this alderman should be held accountable! I am trying to review which ones I saw pre the asking us to leave.



Anon2

August 11, 2011 6:55 pm at 6:55 pm

There is a huge amount lack of knowledge and confusion expressed by city seed and many of the commenters.

1. If an alderman calls a farmer's market and threatens to pull funding if that market does not illegally drive visitors from public areas near its market on market day, and that market agrees to comply, the market has relinquished its political neutrality and is doing the dirty work of a political operative with definite interests in promoting his/her agenda over anothers.
2. to remain neutral — and I agree city seed should — you inform that alderman that you are staying out of it and you publicly expose that alderman as soon as possible. Know dirty politics when it knocks on your door.
3. The very low key people who have been visiting public places with petitions on clip boards are free to roam throughout the market, not just adjacent to it.
4. No one believes the market is promoting a candidate when petition-drivers roam this way, unless they are so foolish as to believe city seed does or should control such public places.
5. That there are people that foolish, including among city seed staff, is rather surprising and disappointing.
6. I think if city seed's policy is to stay out of politics, then city seed should and therefore, withdraw from taking a stand on this.
7. I think if an alderman is so low as to call a small nonprofit that provides farm produce to new haveners and twist its arm, take advantage of its political ignorance, smear it with the sooty tactics that make up the new haven machine, I think that alderman should just join the ton ton macoute, and strut around new haven with a machete, because that's basically who this alderman is. and I think city seed is morally reprehensible not identifying this alderman. City seed has by this complicit act, thrown itself into politics and given up its neutrality and on top of all that is doing it deceptively and secretly — keeping secrets for a political bully. Pretty nice pickle city seed got itself into. and not an organic pickle either but the most contaminated pickle there is.



Anon2

August 11, 2011 7:29 pm at 7:29 pm

Someone (craig?) said that city seed threatened its nonprofit status if it allowed protected activities such as petitioning and campaigning from the vicinity of its markets, or “in” its market, whatever the heck that means.

the contrary is true: city seed threatens its neutrality and nonprofit status by protecting the identity of a political operative and doing his or her bidding by violating people’s rights.

City seed has a Yale lawyer on its board, a lawyer who knows better. I, therefore, have NO sympathy for them. I DON’T believe them: DAYS later they are quoted about some secret alderman, or some chicago alderman and that they were intimidated or duped. Rubbish, not with that board of directors. N o W a y.

I think they are in bed with someone and until they ID this alderman, I am boycotting the market, which I go to almost every week.

I spend lots of money at this market. I could get the same produce for less by going to farmer stands in the countryside and will if that is what it takes to go to a market not made filthy by new haven’s invisible bullies.



maury48@live.com

August 11, 2011 11:19 pm at 11:19 pm

I don’t know how to cook vegetables but I do know how to google:

Go to: <http://www.gapersblock.com> and search for logan square farmers market. You will see an article about their market versus chicago alderman colon

Fact checking isnt that hard to do.



Nicole Berube

August 12, 2011 2:28 pm at 2:28 pm

Dear readers,

Please see CitySeed’s statement on the website here: http://www.cityseed.org/081211_statement.shtml

Thank you,

Nicole Berube, Executive Director

203.773.3736 x 307, nicole@cityseed.org



upwards

August 12, 2011 2:58 pm at 2:58 pm

We had some unfortunate experiences with City Seed when we were starting the Upper State Street Farmer’s market as well.

Requests to City Hall by City Seed were made to stop us from getting started.

This does not surprise me at all.



PlayStreets

August 12, 2011 3:01 pm at 3:01 pm

I read the chicago article, maury.

Here is the direct link: http://www.gapersblock.com/drivethru/2011/05/03/logan_square_farmers_market_vs_alderman_colon/

several things deserve mentioning.

1. Anyone reading that article with even the simplest civics background would realize that it would not be the smart choice to give in and literally illegally harass political candidates.
2. Colon, the arm twisting alderman, lost his fight with the market, withdrew from it actually. He obviously just wanted to hassle them.
3. The course of action Colon promoted was illegal: “It is not legal to bestow government favors because of politics,” said Beth Milnikel, director of the Institute for Justice Clinic on Entrepreneurship at the University of Chicago Law School. “If [Colon] has a legitimate reason [for denying LSCC’s permit], he certainly hasn’t expressed it.”
4. In the case of Logon Market, the market director had been very politically active, formerly campaigning for Colon but personally backing another candidate in this new election. This made the market more vulnerable to political attack, but that attack was still illegal and the object of it — to get the market to violate rights — was illegal.
5. Chicago, notorious as one of the most corrupt political machines in the nation, is cleaner than New Haven, at least this example would suggest this. This is because we know Colon’s name. Here in New Haven, City Seed, with at least one Yale Law School lawyer on its board, if not two, is too chicken or dirty to say.

Until they speak up, they’ve lost my business and I hope the IRS combs them over the coals.



Mike D

August 12, 2011 10:05 pm at 10:05 pm

This is the first time I have ever commented on a story. I think it is time for Jeffrey Kerekes to call off his dogs who have decided that they want to punish City Seed and intend to destroy the organization if he ever becomes mayor. There are a lot of good people involved with this organization. Anyone who shops at this market knows it is a public market. It is not a campaign event. And trying to turn it in to one, and daring the organizers to stop him, is a pretty low tactic.

The attacks on City Seed and its volunteers have to stop. Why does Jeffrey want to run them out of town?



streever

August 13, 2011 4:05 am at 4:05 am

@Nicole

I respect and like you & the work you do, and I appreciate you trying to clear the air!

With that said, I hope you decide (and quickly) that CitySeed has no business dictating what others do on public space—regardless of which candidate anyone supports, it is true that all citizens have a constitutional right to use a public space.

If they wish to petition, share information (as I have done—by CitySeed invitation), or just pick their noses, our founding fathers granted us that right. In fact, it was the first right they gave us.

I really hope that an alderman didn't threaten you, and if one did, I hope you find a way to release their name. Trust me—they will lose their seat in a heart beat if they come after CitySeed.

CitySeed does so much for this city, and is so well-loved, that it is asinine that any individual thinks they can shut down your good works.

If someone threatened you, put it out there. What they did was wrong—criminal actually—and abhorrent.



Truth Avenger

August 13, 2011 9:53 am at 9:53 am

“KERfuffle”



streever

August 13, 2011 12:45 pm at 12:45 pm

Mike D:

Myself and the other Kerekes supporters using our names are neither attacking CitySeed nor trying to destroy it. I've been extremely reasonable, as has Kerekes.

Call of his dogs? You mean the anonymous commentators who clearly have axes to grind? Sorry, they are unrelated to Kerekes and myself.

I know—like—admire—and respect Nicole Berube, Keren, and the other employees of CitySeed that I've met—as I said before. I respect and admire their good works in our city.

They goofed! We all do it. This is one case where they made a bad call. End of story. Not a big deal—all they have to do is say “We're sorry” and move on. That's all I've said—as a Kerekes supporter and a private individual.

People, just because an anonymous commentator writes a vitriolic and hate-filled comment doesn't mean that they are an active Kerekes supporter or that the man shares any sympathies with them. This is really well beyond out of hand.



PlayStreets

August 13, 2011 12:53 pm at 12:53 pm

Dear Mike D.

I do not work for Kerekes. I do not personally know him.

I made comments above that called for City Seed to reveal the name of the candidate

I am a customer of the market only. I saw petitioners in the market gathering signatures. They were not there to destroy the market, disrupt it or anything else.

I am not Kerekes “dog” and he has no control over my speech. I will say what I like.

If City Seed’s intent is to get out of this by shaming petitioners to avoid the market so as not to be perceived as trying to destroy the market, I will redouble my efforts. I will not only boycott the market, which I already decided to do, but I will get others to.

But of course, you are not speaking for City Seed, correct? No more than I am speaking for Kerekes and everyone else who has approached people where the market is set up.

City Seed has knowledgeable lawyers on its board who know better. What City Seed is doing is wrong and until they fix it, I am not shopping there, period.



PlayStreets

August 13, 2011 12:56 pm at 12:56 pm

Dear Mike D.

Correction, I meant to say alderman, not candidate in the sentence below. I want them to reveal the name of the alderman who twisted their arm. Until they do that, the market is involved in partisan political pressuring.

“I made comments above that called for City Seed to reveal the name of the candidate”



cedarhillresident!

August 13, 2011 4:01 pm at 4:01 pm

Mike D

Really mike, it has nothing to do with city seed, it is about the strong arm tactics that we have seen year after year in this city. The women that runs it said an alderman threatens there funding. THAT IS WRONG! No group should be afraid in an city in the USA. We have seen many groups people and other entity’s express great fear in this city. The encounter with the city seed lady was just another story of many... she feared her funding being pulled, because of a statement a city leader made to her.



nannweer@gmail.com

August 14, 2011 2:24 am at 2:24 am

Civil Rights Violation = Punishment.



Ben Anderson

August 15, 2011 3:02 am at 3:02 am

I'm with Mike D. A first time comment from a longtime reader.

You guys are expecting City Seed to act like professional politicians. I wonder how many of the people on here actually go to these markets? It's about the farmers and the food and the stuff at the market. It's not a political event. Just because a lawyer is on the board does not make it a political organization. That's insane.

Trying to turn it into a campaign event by collecting signatures there places the organization in a difficult spot. What if every candidate did that? What if every candidate started walking around campaigning there?

Maybe Kerekes did this totally out of good faith, but I think he was putting the City Seed staff in an impossible position. Either they seemed to be tacitly endorsing his candidacy by letting him collect signatures right in front of their own table, or they'd ask him to move and he'd be able to use the same hardball tactics he accuses his opponents of using against him.

Once again, ordinary citizens doing ordinary things that don't conform to the demands of Kerekes and his supporters launches a dozen screeds.

I liked the Kerekes campaign more before I saw it go into action. There's a sign for him on one of the new public roundabouts in Westville. If it was a sign from the mayor's campaign, there'd probably be an uprising on here. But instead Jeff's people put a sign there, on a public improvement put in by John DeStefano.

...

Jeff, you definitely lost my signature and my wife's. And you absolutely lost our vote. Enough already.

If you take away one of these markets, I swear I'll spend every free hour I have in the next few months going door to door for whoever will beat you. And I know about a dozen people saying the same thing.



Bill Saunders

August 15, 2011 3:35 am at 3:35 am

Streever,

I am extremely unclear as to why you would consider anonymous poster's post 'hate-filled'.

Seems like a strong and needed stance.



Clarification

August 15, 2011 7:28 pm at 7:28 pm

It seems to me that the Kerekes campaign ought to take the high road and issue a statement saying that no harm was done to his campaign...he still appears to be picking up steam...and move on from this. Though the incident brings up interesting points

about democracy and public space, both organizations have important work to do...getting the harvest to New Haveners, and making a serious run for the long-unchallenged seat of mayor...and each should be allowed to get back to it.



JBC

August 15, 2011 8:05 pm at 8:05 pm

The attacks on City Seed are counterproductive and are making me hate living here even more. It's a nonprofit that runs farmer's markets. I doubt very much they are part of a conspiracy theory to silence free speech in New Haven. Clearly, someone at City Seed didn't know the correct policy, and mistakes were made. It does not automatically mean that there is some conspiracy to take away their funding if they "appear to support" any candidates. It's a crazy political climate, obviously – just look at this comment thread, where our fine citizens decide to boycott a farmer's market. I don't blame City Seed for being nervous. Let it go. Public lashings aren't really my cup of tea.

New Haven is all about conspiracy theories lately. And the very mistaken notion that the simple act of replacing the mayor will magically transform New Haven into Portland, OR. We clearly have a lot of problems. New leadership is imperative, but we have a long, long road ahead of us. Someone told me that "just 2 years with Kerekes and everything will be better". I don't care who the candidate is, that is wishful thinking that is sure to lead to disappointment and frustration when the city isn't magically transformed overnight.

BTW, I get the whole "public market as area for public discourse thing", and I agree with it on principle. But personally, I go to the market for one reason – to buy food. If you stop me to sign a petition, you will likely get the same reaction as if you stopped me outside of Stop n Shop with a car full of quickly melting frozen goods. I just want to buy some veggies and be on my way, thanks. Not everyone wants to be bombarded with political messages every public place they go.



Melissa Anderson

August 16, 2011 2:49 am at 2:49 am

I saw ... attempts by the Kerekes supporters to distance themselves from the comments they made only hours earlier.

They're demanding that a non-profit farmers market make a personal apology to Jeffrey or else, if he becomes mayor, they'll lose their markets and be investigated by his administration. As my husband mentioned, some of our friends in Westville – who aren't involved in politics at all – have heard that Kerekes supporters plan to boycott CitySeed markets and that emails have circulated calling for the removal of some members of its board of directors in favor of Kerekes-approved members as an "act of contrition."

We were mildly supportive of his campaign earlier this year, but it has gotten ugly. Jeffrey will not get our votes. And if the attacks on CitySeed continue I'm ready to put a DeStefano sign on my lawn. Kerekes supporters' behavior is outrageous. Anyone who isn't on their side is automatically called a supporter of the mayor, or corrupt. I don't want to raise my family in a town governed by such an entitled bunch ...



streever

August 16, 2011 12:48 pm at 12:48 pm

Are you guys seriously not voting for Kerekes because some people named “Anon” are threatening to boycott the market?

When did he EVER say he’d “investigate” their market?

Here is his quote, from the story:

“I don’t think they were saying they don’t want me to be successful. I don’t think it was personal. By giving in to the fear, they’re validating politicians keeping people out of elections.”

How do you make the leap from him saying it is sad they are afraid of political coercion to “He will coerce them”?

I think you should re-read the story, and re-read his position, before you decide who to vote for based purely on anonymous comments.



bs

August 16, 2011 3:38 pm at 3:38 pm

This entire political season is turning into a three-ring circus.

The funniest part is you have people from Westville posting on here they won’t vote for Kerekes now, simply based on some anonymous postings! I’ll bet those are the same folks in Westville who think Michael Slattery will actually be a good alderman simply based on what others are saying.

We can’t win. HOME FOR SALE!! We’re getting the hell out of this town. How about forming your own opinion after speaking with the candidates and stop this nonsense of making decisions off of a stupid, online newspaper article.



back in reality

August 16, 2011 8:48 pm at 8:48 pm

I stay out of these petty arguments because i know this city has bigger problems LIKE THE KIDS BEING KILLED EVERY WEEK. But hey lets make a big deal out of something small. As a life long new haven resident i think this city is becoming more distant from itself every passing day. We have bigger problems.

...

Comments are closed.

