

Vrana cleared by ethics committee

Alderman has right to opinions, members say

By **DAVE RANK**
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West Bend Alderman Terry Vrana did not violate the city's ethics code when he made comments regarding the local library and the city's Library Board in April.

The West Bend Ethics Committee made that determination Wednesday afternoon in a brief meeting at City Hall held to decide if a citizen's complaint against the long-term city alderman rose to the level of a potential ethics violation.

The three attending members of the Ethics Committee ruled unanimously that the four comments made by Vrana listed in the complaint filed by Kristina Smithers did not violate the city's Ethics Code.

All three committee members, William Alderson, a retired West Bend attorney, Lawrence Hoffman, a former county board supervisor, and Lonny Born, agreed that an alderman was in his right to state his opinion on an issue.

"If he makes a statement, it's his prerogative under the First Amendment," Hoffman said. "If someone is unhappy with that, the relief we have is the ballot box."

Alderson, who said he helped draft the city's ethics code, said the intent of the code is to ensure that a city official did not gain unfair benefit from holding the position over other citizens. "I'm not sure it applies for someone to express an opinion," he said.

Vrana did not attend the meeting.

Smithers, who did, said after the Ethics Committee adjourned, "Am I happy (with the decision)? Not particularly. It is what it is. I exercised my right as a citizen of the city, I received due process. I will move on, as this chapter is closed."

Smithers complaint rose from comments Vrana made during an April 21 meeting of the Common Council in which the council voted not to reappoint four members to the West Bend Library Board.

Smithers complaint cited Vrana's comments comparing the library to a porn shop, that he would only vote for Library Board candidates who held the same philosophy as he did, the morality of the city, and a later comment quoted in the Daily News, "I don't care what policy is I want those books out of there."