

Fant pleads no contest in election fraud case

By Alex Breitler

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Former Manteca Unified trustee and Stockton City Council candidate Sam Fant pleaded no contest Tuesday to one felony count in an election fraud case that dates back more than a year, prosecutors said.

Fant was sentenced to 120 days in the San Joaquin County Jail and five years of probation, according to an announcement from the San Joaquin County District Attorney's Office. Fant may not serve any time in jail, however, because he is eligible to apply for various work programs or home detention, said Ralph Cingcon, his attorney.

Part of Tuesday's deal also allows Fant to petition to have his felony conviction reduced to a misdemeanor in three years' time. That could allow Fant, 29, to run for public office again someday.

"Certainly he's a young man that has a lot to offer to this community, and I'm sure that he will remain active in the community and fight for those things he believes in," Cingcon said Tuesday.



In a prepared statement, Fant said that upon the advice of his attorney he had “decided to resolve this case and put this matter behind me.” He hinted that his days of public involvement are not over.

“My actions and work that I’ve done and that I will continue to do to advance my community will speak volumes over the next few years,” Fant said. “Experiencing the San Joaquin County judicial system first hand is truly humbling and enlightening.”

Fant was accused of aiding two Manteca Unified candidates by providing them with false addresses to help get them onto the ballot in 2014. The two candidates whom Fant was alleged to have helped, Ashley Drain and Alexander Bronson, were both elected but later resigned and faced criminal charges of their own. Drain was convicted but is seeking a new trial; Bronson accepted a plea deal and was expected to be sentenced this month.

In the end, Fant pleaded no contest to a violation of Elections Code section 18100, which, among other things, forbids anyone from helping another person to be registered as a voter when they are not entitled to be.

This was not one of the original charges. The other charges — including filing a false declaration of candidacy, and conspiracy — were dropped and replaced with the single, “lesser” charge as a part of the deal, said Cingcon, who added that Fant does not admit any wrongdoing.

“I recommended to Sam he do this. It’s been going on too long,” Cingcon said.
“This, I think, is in his best interest.”

In a brief statement, the DA’s office said the other charges were “dismissed in the interest of justice in light of the plea.”

Tuesday’s deal marks the end of a long and winding road that dragged on for 16 months, during which time Fant lost his bid for election to the Stockton City Council. The road took many detours; at one point, Fant sought to have the entire District Attorney’s Office taken off the case, claiming prosecutors and law enforcement had a years-long “vendetta” against him.

Said Cingcon: “I’m glad for him to get this behind him.”

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