

January 14, 2024

Dear Council Members,

I am writing to bring to your attention some urgent concerns regarding the work environment within the City of Crystal River. As a department director, I have observed and experienced behavior that is deeply troubling and detrimental to the well-being of our staff and the state of our City.

It is with a heavy heart that I must express my concerns about the actions and conduct of City Manager Doug Baber and Assistant City Manager Michael Manning. The work environment they have created is, unfortunately, marked by abusive behavior, which is not conducive to a healthy and productive workplace. There are two levels of management in place that want what they want, when they want it with no regard for the human, financial, legal, or relationship repercussions that may come from it.

Instances of demeaning language, intimidation, and unrealistic demands have become increasingly prevalent. This behavior not only affects morale within the City but also hampers the overall effectiveness of our team. I have also seen these instances applied to employees of other organizations as well including the Citrus County Sheriff's Office and the Citrus County Board of County Commissioners. I am concerned about the professional relationships the City has with these and other organizations and how Doug and Michael's behavior will affect them and the City as a whole in the long run.

Personally, I am experiencing an excessively demanding work environment created by my supervisors. Although our organizational chart does not reflect it, I answer to both Doug and Michael daily. I understand and embrace the importance of meeting professional expectations; however, the persistent demands and unrealistic workload set by the City Manager and Assistant City Manager make it impossible to meet these expectations. There is a blatant disregard for my time, events, or any projects in my department. For example, the first week of December I received 21 tasks from Doug and Michael to complete with no explanation of the prioritization of these projects. As I am the only person in my department this was extremely overwhelming and led me to believe they may be trying to push me to leave my position.

Additionally, I have been instructed to double the number of events within the City without any conversation about how doing so is unrealistic and financially impossible with the current budget and staff. The consistent demand to start and finish a project immediately creates stress that significantly affects my well-being and job satisfaction. Decisions are made consistently regarding my projects, events, and department without any conversation with me and often behind my back.

There is an air of secrecy presented to employees when dealing with the Council and the public that makes me very uncomfortable. I have been told by the Assistant City Manager in front of the City Manager to "be careful what I put in writing via text or email that could make them look bad." This was highly alarming to me, as I was unaware I had any information that would make me or anyone else look bad. There have been several instances where Doug has reiterated the need for us to "drive the narrative in the public." While I agree with this statement, the further statement of "have them look over there while we do things over here" makes me question his motivations and what part I may be unknowingly playing in public deception.

The consistent intimidation and bullying from both Doug and Michael have created a very uncomfortable working environment for everyone. Statements such as "if you can't handle it get off the bus" regarding recovery efforts and the speed of moving projects forward have occurred more than once. Also, making it known that he has access to and has been into each employee's email. While we are all aware that this can happen with reason, it seemed to be an intimidation tactic and felt extremely unnecessarily invasive for the purpose it was serving.

I am also deeply concerned about the blatant disregard for budgeting practices and the prevalence of frivolous spending within our organization. I have witnessed instances where financial resources are allocated without proper consideration for fiscal responsibility. These instances not only undermine the integrity of our budgeting processes but also pose a significant risk to the financial health of our City. These instances have shown an irresponsible use of public funds and portray an effort to be deceitful by circumventing proper procedures. I have also been made aware of an effort to circumvent public knowledge of project funding being moved from one project to another.

I understand the importance of maintaining professionalism and confidentiality, but the severity of the situation necessitates that it be brought to the attention of the City Council. I hope I have painted a picture for you of the day-to-day challenges and bullying we have faced. I urge you to conduct a thorough and impartial investigation into these matters to ensure that the well-being of our staff is protected, and our beloved City stays intact.

I am willing to provide more detailed information, further instances of the concerns above or participate in any inquiry that may be initiated. Unfortunately, I do not see a way forward with the present, very toxic and abusive upper-level management within our City for myself.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "L.J. Bollin". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Leslie Bollin  
Community Engagement Director