

Attn:

JAN 13th 2024

Mayor Joe Meek and City Council

From:

Troy Slattery, Public Works Director

It is with a heavy heart and firm hand; I write this letter to our City Council.

The current state of our city, although on the surface appears to be strong, secured and moving forward, it is my honest opinion that we are hemorrhaging from the inside out. My main areas of concern begin with questionable financial activities, moral integrity, and most importantly, the rapid turnover in employees as the result of these conditions. I will attempt to do my best in describing what the many concerns are and I want the council to understand this letter was written from my personal perspective. However, I feel many others will agree, and will be willing to support my statements below.

The foundation of my concerns begins with our current City Manager, Doug Baber's constant and deliberate disregard and micromanaging of our directors' and staff's ability to perform professionally and efficiently. While doing so, I, as a director, have been pressured into submissive behavior and prompted to conduct business in a manner of which I feel is unethical and unsustainable for the future of our city. In the following, I will attempt to detail my concerns, one category at a time.

Financial concerns

Over the past several months, there have been changes in the way we select contractors, or solicit for services for day-to-day operations, as well as storm related recovery. It requires a fair or reasonable amount of time to receive quotes, bids, etc. to meet the legal requirements of the purchasing policy. When Doug Baber wants a task completed, he applies pressure to have it done in an unreasonable, rapid manor and gives direction to make it appear as though the policy is being adhered to. We are directed to use certain vendors or contractors. When attempting to get quotes, we are directed to only allow a day or two and then document unresponsive requests. When funds are not available, we are told to use it from areas within our budget with disregard for the needs of day-to-day operations. The selection process for services acquired by Atkins is an example where I feel I was left out of the selection committee because of my conversations about proper and fair selection. Doug Baber and Michael Manning both had conversations with me, prior to bids being received, informing me a selection had already been made, but only doing bids to make it appear proper or legal.

Other examples of this are the construction for the Three sisters' current location where public works was required to contribute to offset the shortfall of funds. I personally do not have supporting documents about the procurement for this particular project, but it appears to be as it was proportioned out to circumvent the bidding process. And this type of activity relates to many other projects going on over the past several months. I suggest the council preform an audit of procurement used for many similar projects. A most recent example is a service agreement, I was directed to enter into for mowing and maintenance of the city cemeteries, where I was informed of a contractor and directed to make it

happen, which is a \$30,000 annual contract, that did not go out for sealed bid. This contractor also preforms work with Doug on a personal level.

Hostile work environment

Dating back to when Hurricane Idalia impacted our city and to current, Directors and employees have been pushed beyond a reasonable expectation, with the motivation that if performance is not maintained to the expectations of the city manager and asst city manager, changes will be made. There have been conversations, in my presence with the city manager and assistant city manager, how they are pressuring employees to encourage their resignation or create conditions to justify termination. I feel that I am not the only director that have been in these conversations, as I feel it is a way to let me know they have no fear in replacing me if I don't submit to the constant micromanaging and belittling to my ability to direct my own department. Most recently they have been ending text messages and or emails" this is not up to debate or discussion".

When I personally have witnessed senior staff members, directors and some of our entry level employees crying and stressed in fear of losing their jobs if they don't do exactly what they are told to do, regardless of their moral or ethical conviction. Statements are made during director agenda meetings that we are not to engage with conversation with our council or anyone outside without first bringing our concerns to our city manager, where their office door is constantly closed and 90% of times, they will not answer their telephones. In addition, we are restricted in what we say or reply in text messages. Which is complete in contradiction to the "not up for debate or discussion" statement.

They constantly ride around the city, directing me and my team to accomplish tasks immediately, or expecting to be completed by the end of the day, then attack the integrity or ability of my employees to perform their jobs through verbal communications or text messages. I have made several attempts to speak directly with city manager Doug Baber, asst city manager Michael Manning that with our staff levels low, the fatigue and stress we have been under since the hurricane, followed with additional impact of a tornado, that by not allowing us to have a regular maintenance and operations schedule we are constantly falling further behind, which in turn is an unsustainable environment. As I attempt to convey my concerns, I am then impacted with a more aggressive approach of micromanagement. There is a text message where "if I can't get my team to perform, then maybe we need a new team". On the surface, it appears they have respect for the employees. They want to have an employee of the month program, they constantly give the impression, in public, that city staff members are great or wonderful but, behind closed doors we are constantly forced into submissive compliance.

I have been personally directed to apply pressure on my employees in the attempt to receive their resignations. I have not complied with this, and now feel they are using others, within my department, to do what I have failed to do. I have made many additional attempts to inform Doug and Michael that we are at a point of saturation or critical mass when it comes their expectations of work/projects and our staffing and resources. Again, this is met with "just make it happen, and if I tell you to do this, I will have your back."

The working conditions under this form of management could put the city in a state of liability for hostile work environment, wrongful terminations and it has become extremely apparent over the past few weeks, that they are attempting to replace, or add to staffing, with individuals, hand selected by them to ensure compliance of their directors or give the impression that their replacement has been selected. In addition to this, when originally hired by the City of Crystal River, I answered directly to the city manager. Which later was supported by Doug. However, I feel as a result of me challenging some management decisions, after my 6-month evaluation, I have been placed under the supervision of the assistant city manager. Please note, every director has been informed to hire an assistant director. I encourage the council to consider the necessity of these positions and the long-term impact of the city's financial status.

The organizational chart is not adhered to. The assistant city manager constantly intervenes with the role of public works by acting as their director. The city manager does not allow directors to have final authority without ensuring his own wishes. Directors are constantly asked to work in categories not directly assigned to them, causing confusion and animosity amongst staff members.

The public works team has had to endure unacceptable and unsanitary work conditions at their current facility. The impact of the hurricane has left the building with no running water, no functional restroom, and no controlled environment for breaks or relief from weather conditions, i.e.; air conditioning. we have made many attempts to reconstruct these areas at public works and have been denied the time and resources, as it is not a priority to Doug's personal plans. It wasn't until recently, when he had hazard lights, purchased by the city, and installed in his personal vehicle, when he directed us to get a contractor to perform the work needed. And as with many other projects, we were instructed to use service master. I am hearing he has a direct relationship with service master and they are being used for many projects, even though it appears their costs are above average.

Unethical/ misleading representation

As a result of hurricane Idalia, decisions have been made without excepting the professional impute or guidance of city directors, to accommodate ones' ego and personal expectations that may have a tremendous liability to the city. There are things being blamed on the hurricane that are not entirely factual.

An attempt is being made to bully FEMA reps to exaggerate the extent of damage or monetary values. There are preexisting conditions prior to the hurricane that are now being represented as a result of the hurricane, for example, the board walk by Kings Bay. It was in deteriorating conditions and scheduled for repair, prior to the hurricane. We are being told to repair as a result of hurricane, the extent of damage to the old city hall or materials lost. The storm water pie on 6th St. has been blamed primarily on the flood of hurricane when in fact it was showing signs of damage weeks before, I do agree the flood enhanced the deterioration.

I feel compelled to encourage the council to work directly with our finance department, to determine if any other similar activities have occurred.

Employee Retention and recruitment

As we are all aware, recently I have received 4 resignations, starting with Ray, tradesmen, Amy, service worker II, Jon, heavy equipment operator, and Kevin, Superintendent.

Ray's position was not filled and instead was filled with an arborist position. To fund this position, we have to eliminate a service worker I position within our budget. This is an unnecessary position as we are attempting to restore and maintain our city. It was a great concept for future endeavors. With the positions of Jon and Amy now vacant, I have been informed to start outsourcing more work. I am not sure how this becomes a financial benefit to our city, in fact, my knowledge of this type of management leads to higher taxes or rapid depletion of reserves. As we all know, outsourcing day to day operations costs way more than employee salaries and benefits. Kevin MacDonald, superintendent; we have been told this position is not anticipated to be filled in a timely manner and I now have to act as superintendent on top of my already expanded responsibilities, as I have recently taken on park ranger services. I feel this is an attempt to keep me restrained and not able to perform the necessary duties as a director. When I attempt to provide advice and guidance to ensure the services to the public through proper recruitment, I am met with opposition and disregard.

In closing, I have my reservations about the competency and professionalism of our city manager. I consider my self to be strong, loyal and dedicated to the service of our community. However, I am at a point where I can no longer, in good concise, perform my duties in these conditions. I am in no way indicating that I wish to resign, but I do feel that I am failing the expectations of my council and the city as a whole. As an equal participating director, I feel morally obligated to express my concerns to protect and support our team of directors and the city.

Respectfully Submitted:

 JAN 13th 2024
Troy Slattery

City of Crystal River

Public Works Director