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CITY COUNCIL PERSONNEL COMMITTEE

Meeting Minutes

**January 9, 2025
2:00 pm**

Location: Lynwood Roberts Room, 1st floor, City Hall

In attendance: Committee Members White (CP), Carrico (CVP), Salem (Finance Chair), Howland (Rules Chair), and Johnson; Council Members Amaro, Boylan, Peluso, and Gaffney, Jr.

Also: Mary Staffopoulos, Office of General Counsel; Peggy Sidman, Council Secretary/Director; Yvonne Mitchell, Chief of Administrative Services; Merriane Lahmeur, Chief of Legislative Services; Kirby Oberdorfer, Ethics Director; Colleen Hampsey, Council Research

Meeting Convened: 2:00 pm

Council President White convened the meeting and called for introductions. He read a statement about staff participation in the meeting, indicating that they were there voluntarily and not being compelled to answer questions they were asked. Council Member Howland talked about the impetus for the meeting related to issues with the interception and detainment of several holiday gifts delivered for council members.

Discussion on issues related to Council management

Yvonne Mitchell, Chief of Administrative Services, shared her reasons for requesting this meeting of the Personnel Committee. Ms. Mitchell indicated that an accusation had been made that she had acted unilaterally with the gifts in question. She spoke about the chronology of events related to the halted distribution of certain holiday gifts to council members, her directive to inform the Council Secretary before delivering gifts, and the subsequent directive to consult with the Ethics Office for evaluation of the gifts before distribution. The full email chronology is included in the meeting handout.

There was a lengthy discussion as to the timeline of events, directives for the interception/holding of gifts, steps taken to identify gift donors, and the length of time to receive guidance about what actions to take.

Council Member Johnson talked about the ethics training all council members and their assistants receive that includes a review of gift policies, and about the expectation of privacy as it relates to mail. Council Vice President Carrico asked Ms. Mitchell how long she has worked for council, whether gifts were handled differently this year, and whether council members were informed about any new internal gift handling policy. Ms. Mitchell said she has worked for council for 11 years, 32 years with the City, that the gifts were handled differently this year, and the new policy was not conveyed to council members.

Council Member Salem said that this was his fifth Christmas on council and the first time he has had gifts intercepted awaiting an evaluation by the Ethics Office. He mentioned that if there is a new gift policy with a heightened focus upon gifts sent by entities with legislation pending before council, it was not adequately explained to council members. Council Member Howland mentioned mail tampering. Council Member Amaro said he was insulted that his integrity was questioned in that it was presumed that he and his assistant could not evaluate the ethical nature/value of a holiday gift. Council Member Boylan suggested that the Ethics Office staff come forward to speak about the chain of events.

Ms. Oberdorfer, Ethics Director, talked about her version of the events that took place, Ms. Johnston's "inartfully worded" email, and the role of the Ethics Office related to council member gift analysis.

Council Vice President Carrico asked why Ms. Sidman did not intervene over the course of days when the gifts were detained. Ms. Sidman expressed confidence in Ms. Mitchell's professionalism, and she indicated that she advised that questions about gifts be referred to the Ethics Office. Ms. Sidman said that the email from Ms. Johnston, Ethics Office, could have been interpreted as a directive to open the gifts to identify the origin of gifts. Council Member Howland said that the gift issue should have been solved before it escalated past gift #1.

CM Salem asked Ms. Mitchell about feeling fear in the workplace. Council Member Amaro asked Ms. Sidman if Ms. Mitchell would have opted to implement a new gift policy without direction. Council Vice President Carrico shared appreciation for Ms. Sidman's service when she worked in the Office of General Counsel, but questioned her performance as Council Secretary.

The discussion transitioned into one about the overall council staff working environment, previous anonymous and formal staff complaints about the office climate, Ms. Sidman's leadership style in the role of Council Secretary, the impact of work stress on staff, and a directive to change staff evaluation scores.

Council Member Peluso criticized the lack of written reprimands, and he noted that he has received staff complaints about office leadership and culture. He noted that the upcoming staff survey was intended to provide more information about office dynamics.

Council Member Johnson said the survey is coming out Monday, with results provided by the vendor by end of the month. Council Member Johnson talked about an anonymous emailed complaint last year. He asked Ms. Sidman if she was counseled before about staff relations. She indicated she had conversations with council presidents about the topic. Council Member Johnson asked further questions about Ms. Sidman directing Ms. Mitchell to change scores on staff annual performance reviews.

Council Vice President Carrico said that at the end of the day, the Personnel Committee is responsible for the staff's work climate. He inquired about the council secretary's salary. He posed a question to Ms. Staffopoulos about what the path forward looks like if the committee agrees that a change in leadership is needed.

Council Member Johnson shared written and signed statements from two previous council staff members about why they left their positions. Ms. Lahmeur, Chief of Legislative Services, interjected with her explanation about the dismissal of one of those former staff members.

Mary Staffopoulos, OGC, spoke about Chapter 11, *Ordinance Code*, and the prescribed procedures for the appointment and discharge of the Council Secretary. She explained that per *Ordinance Code*, a simple majority is required to approve a council resolution for discharge, if recommended by the Personnel Committee. Ms. Staffopoulos said that any other measures, such as discipline or administrative leave, are not addressed in the Code and therefore the Personnel Committee could determine the appropriate action.

There was discussion about methods for an amicable negotiation of terms, the end goal and date for resolving the terms, and handling the negotiations privately if possible. Ms. Sidman distributed a handout with her assessment of her yearly performance since being appointed, and she said regrets falling short of council's expectations.

Motion/2nd CMs Salem/Howland to proceed with authorizing the Council President to meet with Ms. Sidman to discuss administrative leave terms and/or resignation, and work with OGC to memorialize the agreement.

Motion/2nd CMs White/Carrico to amend the Salem motion to allow the council president to delegate the responsibility of administrative leave discussions with Ms. Sidman to the Rules Chair, CM Howland.
Approved unanimously (5-0) by voice vote.

Motion/2nd CMs Carrico/White to amend the amended motion to reflect that the administrative leave is paid, commences immediately to a date to be determined, with no duties performed.
Approved unanimously (5-0) by voice vote.

The Original motion, as amended: to proceed with authorizing the Rules Chair, CM Howland, to meet with Ms. Sidman to discuss immediate, paid administrative leave terms, to a date to be determined, with no duties performed, to work with OGC to memorialize the agreement, and to reconvene the Personnel Committee if there is a need further discussion.
Approved unanimously (5-0) by voice vote.

Motion/2nd CMs Howland/Carrico to authorize the council president to execute the agreement reached by Ms. Sidman and Chair Howland.
Approved unanimously (5-0) by voice vote.

Council Member Boylan asked about the timeline and setting a date certain for concluding the negotiations. Council Member Salem asked about interim leadership. Ms. Staffopoulos explained why this meeting was open to the public due to Sunshine Law.

With no further business, Council President White adjourned the meeting.

Meeting adjourned: 3:39 pm

Minutes: Colleen Hampsey, Council Research
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1.15.25 Posted 5:00 p.m.