

February 20, 2015

Binghamton City Council
City of Binghamton
Binghamton, NY 13901

Dear City Council,

I am writing to remind you of the statements that now-former Planning Director Jennie Skeadas-Sherry made to City Council when she was advocating to cut my wife Leigh McCullen's former position (Senior Planner) in the Mayor's budget. Skeadas-Sherry stated in no uncertain terms that Leigh's very technical and necessary position was, in effect, an extra layer of "management" and that she, Skeadas-Sherry, could do the job of the entire Planning Division staff all on her own. The way that Skeadas-Sherry put it was something along the lines of "Believe it or not, yep!" Please review the audio of that meeting if you do not recall the details. It is my understanding that Councilwoman Rennie responded incredulously toward her assertion at the time. Nevertheless, the Republican members of Council, along with Councilman Bill Berg, saw fit to vote this plan into action. Now, we see the disastrous results of this vote on the Department of Planning, Housing, and Community Development. These results were entirely predictable and preventable.

From the beginning, Skeadas-Sherry commenced on a campaign of harassment, intimidation, and hostility toward the planners and Leigh in particular. The entire planning staff and others filed a complaint against her with the H.R. director Trish Keppler for sexual and general harassment. These complaints included valid and documented cases of inappropriate touching of staff, verbal sexual denigration of staff, open hostility, demeaning behavior and general harassment of staff. I urge you to review the signed statements that the entire planning staff submitted during the course of Keppler's investigation. The statements detail these incidents of harassment first hand. Coupled with Skeadas-Sherry's abject incompetence as a planner or a manager, this led to a completely toxic work environment for the entire Division. Trish Keppler, a mayoral appointee under our City's organizational structure, eventually came to the determination that while the incidents all actually happened, they did not, in her opinion (or the Mayor's), rise to the level of harassment. She then proceeded to issue Leigh a written reprimand for her role in bringing these accusations to light. Keppler's actions were in clear violation of sexual harassment law and also of the City's own sexual harassment policy, which both clearly state that no retaliation shall be taken against employees that raise harassment concerns regardless of the outcome of any investigation.

These policies and behaviors by Skeadas-Sherry and Keppler, facilitated by City Attorney Ken Frank, have now driven the entire veteran planning and grants administration staff right out of City Hall. In some cases these qualified young professionals have left the Binghamton area altogether. Let's recap all of the departures during Skeadas-Sherry's tenure. Long-term Grant Administrator ██████████ left to take a lower-paying job with the state (what does that tell you)? ██████████ (Historic Preservation Planner) left for Boise, Idaho following Skeadas-Sherry's abuse. ██████████ was bumped out of his position as Planner and took a job as Assistant Clerk as a result of Leigh's job being cut. After Leigh left, the Mayor offered ██████████ his old planning job back but ██████████ refused to accept it under Skeadas-Sherry. Again, what does that tell you? ██████████ (Sustainable Development Planner) will soon be leaving to start a new job she has been offered in another city. These were all dedicated and highly competent professionals. And then there is Leigh who simply could not take the abuse from Skeadas-Sherry and Keppler any longer, and walked out of her job one day after over 15 years in this career with

an impeccable record of achievement. In addition to the harassment, they were trying to force Leigh to work out of title, doing her exact same old job duties with a \$10,000 pay cut, because Skeadas-Sherry was incapable of doing the work.

Now, in the wake of this devastation wrought by Skeadas-Sherry, we learn that she has been dismissed. She told City Council that she could run the Division all on her own, and as it turns out she got the chance that she wished for. We see now that only a complete fool would have believed that she could do so in the first place, but City Council largely seems to have been of just this opinion. Now the residents and business owners of Binghamton will pay the price dearly for this massive loss of professional talent and experience. I hope that those of you who voted in favor of this "budget decision" will reflect on the essential role that you played in allowing this catastrophe to play out.

I also ask you to obtain and review Skeadas-Sherry's resume. You will note that this job is just one of many on her resume that have lasted for only one or two years. In fact, the jobs that have lasted longer are not actually planning jobs. I am of the sincere opinion that this is because she has legitimate mental disorders. Furthermore, the resume is largely unstructured and unprofessional. I ask you, who would hire someone to head a city division with an employment history like this? And then, who would vote to allow her to eliminate her competent and professional staff members?

Sincerely,
Dr. Thomas Kulp
Binghamton