



Statement from Dr. Marie Peoples, City Manager:

Recently, an anonymous email has been distributed in the community from webstercitizen411@gmail.com. The agent, or agents behind this cowardly and inaccurate email have resorted to personal attacks upon staff within City Hall in order to further their political interests. These unscrupulous cowards have gone so far as to hire private investigators to do background checks and surveillance on staff members. Their anonymous purported findings included a google drive link which has now been removed. The timing and clear language of the email allows one to reasonably conclude that the purpose behind the claims is purely political. Ask yourself who would benefit by these cowardly claims?

The claims, like previous attempts to attack Council, are intended to draw City staff into the election conversation. They claim that the City Manager was negligent in hiring the Assistant City Manager, Eric Peterson. Therefore, the City Council was negligent in hiring the City Manager. The dark agents have focused most of their claims on Mr. Peterson even though Council does not participate in the hiring of staff.

Mr. Peterson is well suited for the positions to which he was appointed. He has the skills, aptitude, and credentials for the duties he performs. To those who have attended Council meetings over the last year, it is clear that Mr. Peterson is a dedicated public servant who excels in his position. Based on my personal knowledge of his work ethic, work experience, knowledge and ability it was, and still is, clear to me that Mr. Peterson is more than qualified for the positions he fills.

As to Mr. Peterson's history, his personal history was known and fully disclosed. His personal life experiences, including contacts with law enforcement more than 20 years ago were self-reported by Mr. Peterson. A full multi state background check and an interview of references was conducted by the City Attorney. That review found that Mr. Peterson was capable of performing duties required, was demonstrably trustworthy, and met the Charter requirements. The only "complaint" that was raised by his references was that Mr. Peterson worked too hard.

The anonymous snipers who have questioned the qualifications of Mr. Peterson have clearly never attended a City Council meeting where he has demonstrated, time and again, the depth of his knowledge and abilities on matters involving budgets, fiscal policy, and accounting principles. The financial position of the City is open and transparent. The idea that Council is not fully informed on the fiscal position of the City is patently false which even a cursory examination of the meetings or the minutes would show.

The agents of darkness hiding behind anonymity have made several false claims. Contrary to their claims, Mr. Peterson is fully bonded as required by the Charter and the City Code. He does not sign checks not because he is somehow ineligible but because this is part of the duties of the Finance Manager. Mr. Peterson provides oversight on these matters pursuant to acceptable accounting policies. Ironically, the anonymous claimants assert that the City is keeping these things secret while they hide behind the curtain of secrecy.

As to the Comprehensive Audit, the claim that it was delayed because of some misfeasance or malfeasance by Mr. Peterson is false. The Audit is complete and online. The opinion of the Audit is that the City is in compliance with acceptable accounting standards and the opinion is "Unqualified", which is what every governmental entity desires. The audit revealed no deficiencies for the Fiscal Year 2021. The delays in the finalizing the audit had nothing to do with Eric Peterson and were fully disclosed to Council as the audit proceeded.

As to the motives of those who operate in the shadows we can only guess. When a speaker is anonymous it is impossible to ask why they have made such claims or what the source of his or her information might be. The spectres of false information want it that way. I speak from personal experience in this because I too have been the subject of such malicious behavior. While I have chosen not to speak publicly of my experiences it has been my hope that this behavior was not representative of the character of Webster Groves. But standing silent while someone or something engages in such personal attacks and behavior which shocks the conscience like hiring private investigators to follow staff is no longer an option. Eric Peterson, a dedicated public servant doesn't deserve this. No one deserves this.

Upon my start with the city a year ago, I stepped into matters like Proposition P, A-4 housing, Douglass Hill, diversity efforts, and a difficult budgetary reality eagerly. I fully anticipated challenges. I did not anticipate a climate in the community and the workplace that has been unreceptive to evolution or change, and has at times been embedded with racism and sexism. These hard truths are evidenced by many of my personal interactions, the frequent voice messages, and emails left for me, many of them anonymous.

The messengers of suspicion and fear will not deter me or staff. The excellent work being done will continue. I remain steadfast and enthusiastic about the work that the city staff, community, and council does. The Community that is Webster Groves has expressed repeatedly that they are not interested in an environment of negativity and suspicion and that diversity is held as a value. I remain hopeful that these sentiments will prevail.

