



November 18, 2025

To: Keith Bales, Director of Public Works
Department of Public Works

Subject: Written Reprimand

Keith:

In my role as City Manager, I must evaluate the performance of our department heads and take appropriate steps if expectations are not met. The most recent series of personnel issues in the Department of Public Works has demonstrated a severe lack in leadership. Below is my evaluation of the situation.

1. COMMUNICATION

Notification of personnel issues: I first became aware of the time clock issue at DPW from another department head. As the Department Head, it is your responsibility to promptly notify me and Human Resources when significant personnel issues arise. You have previously indicated that City Hall may not fully understand the challenges faced by DPW; however, effective communication and collaboration are essential for us to address these challenges together. When HR is not informed of personnel matters, we are unable to provide guidance or ensure that issues are handled appropriately and consistently across departments.

Process of handling personnel issues: There is serious concern about the lack of documentation regarding personnel matters that have been brought to your attention. You have shared that there have been instances of employees bullying others, yet no documentation or investigation records exist to demonstrate that these issues were addressed or that corrective action was taken. Similarly, the rehiring of an employee with a prior assault charge was done without proper documentation or review, exposing the city to unnecessary risk. As a department head, you are expected to maintain accurate and complete records of personnel issues and to ensure that investigations and follow-up actions are appropriately documented in coordination with HR.

Ability to assess issues comprehensively: Throughout the recent time clock investigation, your focus remained solely on the termination of two employees. Even after additional evidence

surfaced suggesting broader involvement, you did not recognize or address the larger organizational implications of the issue. As a member of the leadership team, you are expected to view issues through a citywide lens and to evaluate how departmental actions may affect City operations, policies, and risk exposure. This broader perspective is critical in ensuring that decisions are sound, consistent, and defensible.

2. PROFESSIONAL INTERACTION AND COMPLIANCE WITH HR PRACTICES

The Human Resources Department's role is to assist senior leadership in managing personnel matters objectively while protecting the best interests of all parties involved and, most importantly, safeguarding the City. It is critical that HR be allowed to investigate claims and provide guidance to department heads in a professional and collaborative manner.

Despite multiple discussions regarding the recent disciplinary actions, your interactions with the HR Director during these proceedings were inappropriate. On several occasions, you placed the HR Director in a defensive position while she was present to support you in delivering disciplinary actions. Doing so in front of others, including union representatives, is both unprofessional and unacceptable.

It is not the HR Director's role to issue or explain employee reprimands; that responsibility lies with you as the Department Head. HR's function is to guide and support you through the process. If you have questions about the procedure or disagree with an aspect of it, those discussions should occur privately with HR or with me prior to the hearing, not in front of staff or other parties.

3. LEADERSHIP

There have been multiple instances demonstrating a failure in leadership regarding the handling of personnel and HR-related issues. Despite repeated discussions with me, you did not address the situation comprehensively in a timely manner or consider the broader implications for the department and the city.

Your actions contributed to a culture of "department vs. City Hall," which was evident during meetings with union representatives where it appeared that no support was provided for the City's position. Additionally, you undermined decisions regarding disciplinary actions, as demonstrated during the first disciplinary hearing when the HR Director had to intervene to clarify the process and guide you through the proceedings.

Further, critical information was not consistently shared with HR or me, including an independent written investigation conducted by the Assistant Public Works Director. Omitting such information impedes effective decision-making and creates unnecessary risk for the City. The written reprimands were not provided in a timely manner which was evidenced with the last one for the supervisor administered three days after I asked for it to be completed.

The concerns outlined above are serious. However, your management experience and deep knowledge of the city are valuable assets, along with your unwavering dedication to the City of Covington. We want to ensure those strengths can be leveraged moving forward. This may be possible if your role is focused on handling projects and does not require employee supervision. That said, I am considering bringing you to City Hall to assist with many projects that can use your other strengths.

I remain optimistic that you can continue to make meaningful contributions to the organization if you demonstrate a renewed commitment to the expectations of a new role, we will need to define. Your institutional knowledge, long-standing dedication to the City, and ability to manage complex operational issues are strengths that we value and hope to retain. Should you move into a role at City Hall, it will be essential that you approach this transition with professionalism, openness to guidance, and a willingness to rebuild trust through consistent, collaborative engagement with HR, City leadership, and our employees. With genuine effort, this next chapter can serve as an opportunity for you to reestablish yourself as a reliable and constructive member of the leadership team and continue serving the City of Covington in a positive capacity.

Sincerely,

Sharmili Reddy
City Manager