



News Release

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 9, 2024

City Completes Investigation Regarding Councilmember

An independent investigation concludes behavior violated training and traditional workplace decorum.

Spokane Valley, WA – The City of Spokane Valley concluded its investigation into the behavior of Councilmember Al Merkel. After interviewing 22 individuals, the independent investigator's report states that Councilmember Merkel engaged in a pattern of disrespectful and intimidating behavior toward city staff.

"The investigation's intent was to ensure a safe working environment for city staff," said Spokane Valley City Manager John Hohman. "We followed standard procedure to ensure an independent, unbiased investigation into Councilmember Merkel's interactions. This report validated many of the staff concerns."

The independent investigation and subsequent report were the results of a formal complaint submitted by a City of Spokane Valley employee alleging improper communications and behavior by Councilmember Merkel and safety concerns raised by city employees during a routine meeting.

The City retained an outside, independent investigator to review the claims against Merkel. The investigation included interviews with city staff, Councilmembers and a consultant, as well as a review of city policy, memos, emails and other communications.

Multiple staff reported that Councilmember Merkel has made them feel fearful and intimidated working at City Hall. According to the report, witnesses described interactions with Merkel in which he belittled or berated them. While the investigation found the instances credible, the report concluded that Merkel's actions did not constitute gender discrimination because his interactions with both male and female staff were similar. The investigator concluded that Councilmember Merkel violated the city's Governance Manual through a pattern of behavior that was disrespectful and hostile toward city staff.

When the initial complaint arose, City Manager Hohman limited interactions between Merkel and city staff. Merkel's work area was relocated to a more private part of the building, away from most staff. These measures will continue. Like other Councilmembers, Merkel will continue to have direct access to the city's senior administration, as well as continued access to all city resources necessary to conduct Council business.

MEDIA CONTACT

Jill Smith, Communications Manager

jsmith@SpokaneValleyWA.gov

d: 509-720-5411, c: 509-953-6695

###