

Date: January 29, 2016

Present: Heather Lowe, HR Director
Martha Norberg, Seabold Group

Location: City Hall HR office

The purpose of the interview was to make introductions and to discuss the PRR process, and to determine what Ms. Lowe did to respond to the PRRs relating to Straub and Cotton.

Ms. Lowe has been the City of Spokane HR Director for five years.

Ms. Lowe said if the Clerk (either Terri Pfister or Laurie Farnsworth) thinks HR has responsive documents, will send an email, with the PRR attached. They will ask HR to search their files. Ms. Lowe said the Clerk has five days to respond with the responsive documents, or with an estimate of how long it will take to research and assemble the documents.

Ms. Lowe said she reviews the PRR and if it is for documents she will search the files maintained in HR. HR maintains files relating to FMLA, Benefits and similar things. The personnel files are maintained in the Civil Service department.

Ms. Lowe searches her documents on her computer, and asks any potentially involved staff to do the same. She said they look at their own computers, on the shared drive, in ex-employees' files on the shared drive, if applicable. They also look in file cabinets where FMLA, Benefits and Medical records are kept.

Ms. Lowe said she did not specifically recall what she searched for in response to the Straub/Cotton PRRs. She said she had no notes in that regard. She did not know of Terri Pfister keeps a log of responsive documents. She said they copy the responsive documents and send them to Ms. Pfister, but HR does not keep copies of what they sent to her.

In regards to the Seabold document requests, Ms. Lowe said she maintained a spreadsheet to track the owner, timeframe, and what was sent. She highlighted the items that she sent already. She is having her clerk print the things on the spreadsheet for her. She said she took care of the things she could do. There was nothing redactable in what she provided. She said she will send the organization charts Seabold requested. She said any emails will come from IT.

Ms. Lowe said she went through the list from Seabold to determine what she might have that was responsive. She said, for example, that Chief Straub's personnel file (re: the Schultz request) would be kept in Civil Service, not in HR. But she assumed she was copied on the email, or it came through her to Civil Service.

Ms. Lowe said she did not send policies in response to Seabold's request because she didn't know which policies we needed. She said maybe the Clerk sent the policies. When asked, Ms. Lowe said there is a policy specifically regarding hiring exempt positions, outside the civil service process.

She said they have policies on Harassment and Whistleblowers, which are typical complaints that they investigate. She said they do not have policies regarding conducting investigations, and she hoped for a recommendation from this investigation on whether they should have such a policy. She said investigations are all unique and all situations are different. They initially talk to the complaining employee to make sure they are comfortable with an investigation. But she said overall, things will be investigated and resolved. They try to resolve issues at the lowest level possible, and she said if they investigated everything the employees will stop coming to them. They will wait until it becomes a much bigger problem when they could have "headed it off at the pass."

The HR representative to the Spokane Police Dept. (SPD) is Meghann Steinolfson. She is a Senior HR Analyst who was hired in December 2015. Prior to Meghann, Gita George-Hatcher was the Sr. Analyst. Gita is now in the Civil Service Dept.

HR is centralized. There are three HR analysts at levels one, two and three. Meghann is a level three. Each analyst is assigned departments. The HR Analysts conduct HR investigations. Meghann Steinolfson would conduct investigations regarding SPD (if not investigated by IA). Ms. Lowe said if there is a conflict of interest, they will assign a different analyst to conduct the investigation.

HR had approximately 40 investigations from 2011 to 2015. They were mostly involving allegations of harassment and hostile workplace. The Analysts decide whether to investigate, and Ms. Lowe will "weigh in" as well.

The HR Analysts go through annual training through national seminars, and watch webinars through national organizations. All the Analysts have HR experience prior to coming to Spokane.

Ms. Lowe explained that the Director of Communications is Brian Coddington, and then there are Communication Managers in all of the different divisions. Parks, Public Safety, Utilities, etc, all have Communications Managers. She said that there were about 75 exempt mayoral-appointed positions, including Cabinet and Department head positions. She said she sent Seabold the job descriptions of the exempt positions.

Ms. Lowe further explained that there is a bargaining contract for Managerial and Professional (B) positions. The "A" positions are mayoral appointed, non-civil service positions. These are Exempt-Confidential positions and are not represented. She said this list includes Directors such as herself and Brian Coddington, the Chief of Police and the City Administrator and others.

Community Affairs, which was Ms. Goodspeed's position, is a Civil Service position. The Civil Service Rules are on the city's website.

Ms. Lowe was not involved in the interview of Monique Cotton for the Parks Dept. position. She did not know if the interviews took or kept notes.

Ms. Lowe mentioned a document that Seabold did not ask for, but which she wrote in December 2012 and which she was going to get to us via Eric Finch. Her husband had been sworn in as an SPD officer, so Ms. Lowe wrote the letter to recuse herself from any contract negotiations involving the police department. She turned that task over to Gita. She said she did not want there to be any perceived conflict of interest. She said it included not only the contract negotiations but all other HR activities regarding the PD. She said she later hired Meghann Steinolfson to be acting HR Director for the Police Department. She said that is why there are no emails or documents regarding the Police. Her husband is no longer with the Police Department, since April 2015, but she not put herself back in the position of dealing with the PD. She said Meghann still handles the day to day matters.