

The Bandera PROPHEET

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Texas Ranger investigates comment made by mayor
Bandera City administrator submits resignation

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The Bandera Prophet

Authorities have investigated a comment made last month by City of Bandera Mayor Suzanne Schauman. In the last 30 seconds of a recording made Oct. 3 by City Secretary Jill Shelton, Schauman can be heard asking former interim City Council Member Don Clark how he felt about an “assassination.”

After hearing the comment in the audio recording, City Council Member Jerry Russe said he contacted local law enforcement.

“I initially turned it over to the Sheriff’s Office, and they turned it over to the Texas Rangers. Based upon the fact that there was no name associated with that part of the recording, the investigation did not go further,” Russe said.

Shelton said Texas Ranger Daniel McMillon spoke with her, and did not deem a criminal act had taken place.

“Clearly it was a joke, they both laughed about it,” Shelton said, adding she thought the mayor may have been arbitrarily referring to whomever was stealing her campaign signs.

Schauman said she was speaking with Clark about her political signs that were missing, and jokingly asked how he felt about an assassination.

“There was no malicious intent. There was nobody I was going to shoot. Perhaps it was an inappropriate comment, but it wasn’t aimed at anybody,” Schauman said. “It was totally taken out of context and it’s being blown up into something huge. But it’s done, and we need to move on.”

Russe said regardless of the outcome of the investigation, McMillon told him he did the right thing.

“Whether it was a joke or not, it was said in front of at least one employee, and they were within earshot of other employees and the public,” Russe said. “It was totally inappropriate, especially in their position.”

Recording made, complaint filed

On Oct. 3, Shelton recorded a private meeting between Schauman, Clark and City Council Member Jerry Russe, which was held in the mayor’s office. Shelton said the mayor asked her to attend and record the meeting because previous interactions had been heated. The recording was entered into public record during the Oct. 15 City Council meeting, when Shelton transcribed and recited part of the transcript in which she said Russe was rude, unprofessional, abusive and bullying.

“I have never had anyone talk to me as harshly as Russe,” Shelton said.

“Overall it is his temperament, his behavior, the way he treats me and my staff. I am asking council to get him under control. He has overstepped his boundaries and he has to be stopped.”

Shelton filed a formal complaint against Russe, claiming he had disrupted an otherwise positive working environment.

“He thrives in making turmoil. I have instructed employees to not tolerate profanity or less than civil behaviors,” Shelton said, adding she felt Russe had exhibited the poor behaviors city staff was cautioned about two months earlier.

Civil Workplace Training

In August, all city employees participated in a virtual Civil Treatment Workplace for Leaders and Employees workshop.

“It was a training we felt would be beneficial...to make sure all of our employees understood the correct behaviors in the workplace,” City Administrator J Horry said.

He added this was the first time the city invested in workplace training, and some disciplinary action against staff had precipitated the decision to participate.

“We had some concerns for some employees,” Horry said. “This way everybody knows their boundaries - they know the limits of what they could say and not say, proper appearance and appropriate language.”

The cost for the Civil Treatment Workplace for Leaders course was \$3,125, plus \$100 per participant, which included five employees plus Schauman, Mayor Pro Tem Rebeca Gibson and Russe. The Civil Treatment Workplace for Employees course, which had 15 participants, cost \$2,450, plus \$45 per person. The total expense for the courses, which Horry said took about three hours during one day, was \$7,050.

Overtime

Russe said the controversy began while he was researching employee overtime. Every department has a line item for overtime usage, and each department head is responsible for his or her own budget.

“Not everything is approved beforehand,” Horry said, adding to his knowledge, no departments exceeded their council-approved overtime budgets.

“I questioned the overtime budget line item and wanted to know why it was never questioned before,” Russe said. “Some of the city positions should have been salaried positions since the start of their employment. It’s a red flag when employees make comments that they can’t get by without their overtime pay. The mayor, city administrator and former city council members put money in the overtime budget year after year without ever questioning why the overtime was being allowed.”

Sanctions

On Oct. 15, after a closed session, Gibson’s motion that evidence found Russe in violation of conduct of city officials and employees passed unanimously. Gibson’s second motion that Russe was in violation of a positive work place environment also passed unanimously. Gibson’s final motion that Russe, for six months, must coordinate his appearances

at City Hall and request documents he needs to fulfill his duty as a council member from the city administrator, passed unanimously.

Russe responds

“Shelton’s transcription had capital letters when she wanted people to think I was yelling but none when she and/or the mayor did. She added personal comments like ‘he left in haste’ ... things that would never be put in an authentic transcription by a city secretary. It was biased. The mayor and Gibson as mayor pro tem allowed it. Shelton, as the complainant, was allowed to transcribe the audio. Much was left out and she was allowed to pick and choose what to include,” Russe said.

“While legal, was it ethical that she recorded a meeting between the mayor and two council members without their knowledge?”

Concerned that the conversation extended onto Schauman’s campaign for mayor and her opponent Cindy Coffey, Russe said Shelton, as the city’s election official, should not have engaged.

“Shelton asked Clark if he was going to support the mayor on her re-election. She did this while on duty and while at City Hall. Shelton is an election official and violated election rules and her duties as well as city ordinances,” Russe said, adding he believed Shelton was in violation of City Ordinances No. 361, Sec. 1.03.066; 1.03.069; 1.03.065; 1.03.075 (a), (b), (c); 1.03.073 (e), (f); 1.03.080. “The mayor, Clark and Shelton discussed the election and the other candidate for mayor. She asked Shelton if more of her election signs had been ordered. What phone, computer and printer did Shelton use to order the mayor’s signs?”

Russe went on further to state Schauman’s and Clark’s comments during the meeting did not “support a positive workplace environment, yet I was accused of the same.”

“The mayor violated Ord. No. 361, Sec. 1.03.069 in her personal charge and verbal attack upon my character in her public Facebook posts. She also violated Ordinance No. 361 Sec. 1.03.073 (f); 1.03.075 (c), 1.03.077; 1.03.080; 1.03.082; 1.03.084...They all violated Ord. No. 361 Sec. 1.03.065, 1.03.067, 1.03.068, 1.03.077, 1.03.078, 1.03.079, 1.03.083 (a), 1.03.084 (a) and (b).”

"I have never used profanity or been vulgar towards any employee at City Hall, I don't talk that way. And I have never had any type of negative conversation with any employee at City Hall," Russe said. "The only person I have had any type of 'negative conversation' with has been with the city administrator and that was me expressing my concerns with his management style."

Recording

Via an open records request, the Bandera Prophet received a copy of the full audio recording Shelton made during the Oct. 3 meeting. Due to confidentiality concerns in which personnel matters are candidly discussed, the Prophet is publishing a redacted version.

City administrator resigns

Horry has announced his resignation, effective Dec. 15. Schauman said she expected the formal announcement to be made at tonight's City Council meeting. She said he has accepted an opportunity with Sunset Valley, a city near Austin.