December 30, 2020

Lathrup Village City Councilperson –

I really wanted the opportunity to present this information in person, but who knows when anything will be back to the "normal" routine. I expected to hear from Scott Baker months ago regarding the terrible things that the city administrator was saying about me, but I never did. Rather than wait any longer, I felt it was important to attempt to clear my name before the end of the year.

I am not sure how my search and questions regarding the financial health of the City resulted in the city administrator telling other residents that I am "against everything Black", but in these very challenging times, I felt it was important to take the opportunity to defend my reputation. I believe that it is extremely dangerous to declare that valid concerns about fiscal responsibility and personal integrity are based on race. Making false claims regarding racism dilutes the very real issues that African Americans face on a daily basis. I have been a champion for this majority minority community for many years and I will continue to fight against anyone that puts themselves before it.

The reason I started examining the City's budget and asking questions has nothing to do with race. It has everything to do with the barriers I encountered when I tried to resurrect the Lathrup Village Supper Club. In the almost 75 year existence of Supper Club, the city leadership had always been supportive and considered the organization to be a benefit to the City and its' residents. We were given a discount on the use of the community room; we were included in the City's newsletter; we had a cabinet at City Hall; and we were considered a community organization. That all changed under the current city council and administration. I was met with roadblock after roadblock – from multiple parks and recreation directors giving me conflicting rate information to the city administrator blowing me off for months to city council members and the city attorney declaring that Supper Club is a private club and therefore not worthy of a discount on the use of the community room. We were declared unworthy even though all members of Supper Club are tax-paying residents – tax-paying residents that provide the funding to run the City, not just the community room.

I started looking at the budget after a conversation with Ian Ferguson where he told me that the City was in terrible financial shape and "couldn't afford" to give the Lathrup Village Supper Club a discount to use the LV Community Room. Since I have lived in Lathrup Village for over 30 years and the City has always been fiscally strong, I found the fact that the City could not afford a discount that amounted to about $1200 for the season to be quite disturbing. As I combed through the city budgets and council minutes, I discovered that the City paid almost $700,000 for the Evergreen Road project when the city council hadn't budgeted for such an enormous expense. When I attempted to ask questions about this expenditure while serving on the Planning Commission, I was rudely ignored and then shut down when I wasn't re-appointed. I found that the city administrator is being paid $400 per month for a car allowance. Our city is about one mile square – why is there a need for a car allowance? I found that the city administrator was given 6 weeks of vacation – something that would be unheard of for a new employee in the business world. You hired a DDA/Parks and Recreation Specialist and have posted for another administrative assistant position – when the City and activities have been shut down for months. Over $54,000 was spent on a van. How many people can even safely ride in the van when following the CDC Covid-19 guidelines? I found many inconsistencies in the planning and funding of the Caribbean Fest. All of these things raised red flags if we are truly struggling financially. My concern led to further investigation.

While finding a multitude of questionable expenditures in the budget, most disturbing was the information I uncovered regarding the Caribbean Festival held in September of 2019. Even though $15,000 was budgeted for this event, over

$18,000 was actually spent. Much of this money was given to friends of city leadership – with a note on an invoice indicating that the city administrator was going to be given at least one of the checks. I have outlined my major concerns below:

1. Contracts

The contracts that were marked "Confidential" were between the **City of Lathrup Village** and **L & M LLC** and **Caribbean Mardi Gras Productions.** Tax IDs for the vendors were provided yet the payment checks were written to individuals – **Sophia L. Chue** and **Ralph Taylor** – rather than to the entities denoted in the contract with the City.

The contract states that proceeds will be shared 50/50. Why would the City take on this liability along with the additional costs and then share proceeds with the vendors who are already being paid for their designated work? If they were going to share in the proceeds why weren't they held accountable for going over the budget they submitted?

Was **Article V – Finance; Sec 2-171 Transactions $5000 or over** of the City's Municipal Code followed? Were other bids solicited or accepted since this expenditure was far above the $5000 limit? Even if no codes were violated, at the very least, the personal interests of city leadership certainly seem to have driven this event.

2. Relationships

What are the rules regarding personal relationships and the awarding of city contracts and funds?

What is the relationship between **Ian Ferguson** and **Sophia Chue**? Ms. Chue has many, many pictures of Ian Ferguson on her Facebook (FB) page and it appears that he has presented for at least one of her organizations. There are lots of mutual likes and interaction between the two that lead one to believe that their relationship is personal. Sophia Chue, rather than L & M LLC, was personally paid $7700.

What is the relationship between **Sheryl Mitchell** and **Louis Theriot** and **Ralph Taylor**? Sheryl Mitchell's fiancé' (now husband), Louis Theriot, produced a very similar event in Detroit a few years before the LV Caribbean Fest. The same people were involved and the same costumes were used. It would be hard to miss the costume worn by the LV mayor, which frequently appears in many of Louis Theriot's posts on FB and other social media accounts.

On Twitter, Louis Theriot states that he does the following: **"Manage/book Caribbean DJ's Live Bands, Steel Drum, Provide Costume Design and Event Decoration Services. Producer of the Detroit Caribbean Street Beat!!!!. Detroit, MI."** That sounds like it pretty much covers the Caribbean Festival. Was Mr. Theriot involved with booking any of the entertainment for the LV Caribbean Fest since that appears to be his trade? If so, how much money did he receive? How much of the money that Sheryl Mitchell appears to have personally delivered did she receive or benefit from? Has Louis Theriot provided opportunities for Ian Ferguson, the musician?

On FB, Louis Theriot lists his address as 6911 E. Lafayette in Detroit. This is the same address used by Caribbean Mardi Gras Productions and Ralph Taylor. This is the same address on the checks written to Ralph Taylor with a note to give the check to Sheryl Mitchell. Again, what benefits did she receive?

On FB, Sheryl Mitchell commented that she wants to "bring this" – referring to the Caribbean Festival – to Albion. Why would she be involved in bringing this to Albion?

3. “Free” Events for Non-Residents

I was told by Sheryl Mitchell that the costume workshop was a “free” event so there was no requirement to know whether or not attendees were residents. The City paid Ralph Taylor to put on this “free” event. It therefore was not “free” and LV tax dollars were used. If there isn’t $1200 available in the budget to be able to give 100 tax-paying residents a slight discount to use the Community Room, our tax dollars certainly shouldn’t be used to subsidize activities for non-residents (from as far away as Maryland per the Southfield Sun.)

I have been working on this communication for quite some time. If I had any question about the relationships referenced above, a Facebook post that appeared in October tied everything up in a neat little package. **Sophia L. Chue** posted about the wedding of **Sheryl Mitchell** and **Louis Theriot.** She congratulated **Ralph Taylor** on his impeccable touch and told **Ian Ferguson** how great it was to see him. The Caribbean Fest costumes also attended the wedding. This leads to some additional questions as the ceremony was held at the City’s gazebo. I can’t find any information in the financial reports. Did the couple pay to use the space? Were they forced to rent a port-a-potty for their guests like residents must do because we are unable to use the restrooms in City Hall? There seems to be a double standard here – city leadership and friends get perks and benefits while the city “can’t afford” to support a 75 year-old community organization with a minor in-kind donation.

I served on the LV Planning Commission for 5 years – taking most of the heat for the Michigan First expansion - before this current leadership team decided that I did not warrant re-appointment because of my concerns and questions about the Evergreen Road project; Michigan First’s fence; a condo development; a gas station; and per Bruce Kantor, my “negative attitude.” My objections regarding these projects were centered on making sure that the City and its’ residents weren’t being taken advantage of or lied to. I was not “putting the city at risk” per Scott Baker. I voted against the gas station because I believed it would negatively affect the property values of Lathrup Village residents. That project was approved over a year and a half ago. An active business was shut down and one of the better looking buildings on Southfield Road was torn down yet the lot and building still sit empty. The apartments that were supposed to be condos did not provide affordable housing for people that otherwise couldn’t come to Lathrup Village. The over $1800/month rental rates are far above what the monthly mortgage payment would have been for condo owners. I was not against renters or “people that don’t look like me.” I was for a new housing development in a City that hasn’t seen one in over 20 years. Michigan First – Michael Poulos and Victor Saroki – promised the Planning Commission that they would erect a decorative fence that followed the City’s requirements. I was merely trying to hold them accountable to the promise that they made. Funny thing is that I never voted no on anything in the 5 years I served on the Planning Commission until all of those items were on the same agenda.

I am appalled by the cronyism; the lack of transparency; the wasting of tax-payer dollars; and the cavalier attitudes of the entire city leadership “team.” I am disgusted by the ugly rumors that have been spread about me and my concerns. I have not decided yet whether I will share this on the Villagers Facebook page or elsewhere. I have spent my entire adult life fighting for equity and justice. I spent 14 years on the Southfield Board of Education fighting for equal opportunities for all of our children. I have lived in Lathrup Village for over 30 years – choosing to move here from Southfield rather than going to Rochester Hills - and I have been dedicated to this community. I will not allow someone that doesn’t know me; that doesn’t live in our community; and that has only been here for 2 ½ years to soil my reputation. My questions and concerns are about the fiscal viability and future of the community I love. Don’t get that twisted!

It was also brought to my attention that my name was maligned during the first road millage campaign. People said that I was against the millage because it would impact my livelihood. I was against the millage because it was too much for

too long; I don't trust your fiscal decision making; and I believe money is being wasted. That is the first time I have ever voted against a millage in my life!

On another note, the lack of leadership during the pandemic is deafening. Other than the things Chris Clough is doing; the re-sharing of information regarding what Oakland County is doing; and the food boxes that were part of a political campaign; nothing has been done to help support Lathrup Village residents. Rather than spending your time trashing a long-time resident committed to the LV Community, you might want to step it up as community leaders. As I told Scott several months ago, I will sue if the slandering of my name continues and I will expose any future fiscal irresponsibility.

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