

Complainant: Bastrop City Council, per motion passed at 12/18/23 Special City Council Meeting

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Summary of Actions and Findings

Actions

In August 2023, Visit Bastrop staff members made verbal and written allegations of mismanagement and financial wrongdoing on the part of Susan Smith, the CEO of Visit Bastrop. Visit Bastrop is a nonprofit corporation funded primarily by Hotel Occupancy Tax public funds which are allocated by the City pursuant to a contract between the parties and which may only be legally spent on narrowly defined expenses consistent with state law. In addition to their substantive complaints, the employees also alleged they had concerns about the Mayor's relationship with the CEO, which appeared to be romantic.

Because public funds almost entirely fund Visit Bastrop's operations, the City Council determined it had a legal obligation to evaluate the situation to ensure public funds are being used appropriately. On August 10, 2023, City Council passed resolution R-2023-129, authorizing an investigation under the city charter into the financial mismanagement allegations made against Visit Bastrop and "certain interactions between particular leaders of the City and of Visit Bastrop."¹ Forensic accounting services and Investigative Special Council legal services were secured to perform the investigation.

¹ RESOLUTION NO. R-2023-129 CITY COUNCIL INVESTIGATION OF VISIT BASTROP.pdf

Findings

As the organization contracted with the City of Bastrop to manage Hotel Occupancy Tax spending, state law places a fiduciary duty upon Visit Bastrop². The forensic audit of Visit Bastrop revealed a Breach of Fiduciary Duty. From 2021 – 2023, approximately \$70,000 in public funds from the city of Bastrop were spent on Visit Bastrop credit cards and approved by CEO Smith without itemized receipts or other required documentation per the rules of the Texas Comptroller, IRS, and the City of Bastrop. Some amount of the misreported public funds have been identified to have been used in pursuit of a romantic relationship with Lyle Nelson while he was a City Official.

During the investigation, Mayor Nelson violated the City of Bastrop’s Code of Ethics, specifically:

1.15.009(h)(2) *Interference*. Interfere with any criminal or administrative investigation alleging the violation of any provision of this article, the city Charter, administrative policy or executive order in any manner, including, but not limited to, seeking to persuade or coerce city employees or others to withhold their cooperation in such investigation is a violation of this article.

Mayor Nelson knowingly and actively interfered with the investigation by refusing to provide records between him and CEO Smith that are likely to identify dates, times, and locations of misreported public fund expenditures over approximately 8.5 months of time (10/3/22 to 3/23/23 and 6/5/23 to 8/11/23) that are not currently available in the Visit Bastrop text message records and making false statements to the Investigative Special Council about his interactions with CEO Smith, including whether he discussed Visit Bastrop financial matters with her and the nature of his relationship with CEO Smith.

The Special Council Investigator told City Council in her verbal report that if the CEO of a public company had done what Mayor Nelson had done, that individual would be terminated for their actions.

Chronological Sequence of Events

2021 – 2023	In a Breach of Fiduciary Duty, approximately \$70,000 in public funds ³ are spent and approved by the CEO of Visit Bastrop without itemized receipts or other required documentation per the rules the Texas Comptroller, IRS, and the City of Bastrop. Some meal and entertainment expenses appear to be improper use of public funds.
March 28, 2022	Lyle Nelson is sworn into the Bastrop Economic Development Board, making him a “city official”, per the Bastrop Code of Ethics. ⁴

² § 351.101(c).

³ December 2023 Investigation Report – Bastrop.pdf, p 4.

⁴ Bastrop Code of Ordinances, 1.15.005.

About August, 2022	Lyle Nelson begins an inappropriate relationship with the CEO of Visit Bastrop, Susan Smith. ⁵
January 18, 2023	Lyle Nelson files for candidacy for the position of mayor of the city of Bastrop, making him a “public servant” under Texas Law. ⁶
May, 12, 2023	City Manager Sylvia Carrillo begins conversations with CEO Smith, about a need to cap the formula that is used to fund Visit Bastrop so that new Hotel Occupancy Taxes, above the prior year’s amount, can be used for other purposes in the city. ⁷
May, 13-14, 2023	CEO Smith seeks insider advice via text message from City Official Nelson regarding the capping of her organization’s funding. ⁸
June 5, 2023	CEO Smith gets a second, personal phone. According to verbal statements made by Visit Bastrop employees, this phone was so CEO Smith could get around Open Records Requests of her Visit Bastrop phone that was paid for by public funds. [Note: As Visit Bastrop is subject to the Public Information Act ⁹ , her alleged belief that messages on her personal phone are not subject to Open Records Requests is inconsistent with the Attorney General’s position. ¹⁰] (The text messages provided by Visit Bastrop between City Official Nelson and CEO Smith end at this point.)
June 10, 2023	City Official Lyle Nelson elected as mayor of the city of Bastrop.
July 27, 2023	Mayor Lyle Nelson participates in internal budget meetings with the board of Visit Bastrop where the funding amount for FY2024 is discussed & determined.
August 4, 2023	All 4 employees of Visit Bastrop make verbal and written complaints to HR Directory Tanya Cantrell, City Manager Carrillo and MPT Kirkland regarding the actions and behavior of CEO Smith. The allegations include: 1. CEO Smith created a hostile and retaliatory work environment. 2. CEO Smith made disturbing comments about a member of her board of directors. 3. CEO Smith misused public funds in her role with Visit Bastrop. 4. CEO Smith was involved in an inappropriate romantic relationship with Mayor Lyle Nelson which could impact their funding. 5. CEO Smith misused public funds in pursuance of an inappropriate relationship with Lyle Nelson.

⁵ Appendix A: Summary of Text Messages Between Smith and Nelson, Relationship Status.

⁶ § 1.0.7(41)(E).

⁷ Text messages.pdf, p. 202-203, 207, 208, 229.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ PUBLIC INFORMATION ACT Handbook 2022, Ken Paxton, Attorney General of Texas, p. 8.

¹⁰ Ibid., p 16.

Exhibit "E-1"

	6. The VB board of directors had been informed about one or more of these allegations, and the board took no action in response.
August 7, 2023	CEO Smith is placed on administrative leave during an internal Visit Bastrop HR investigation.
August 7, 2023	Mayor Nelson is given a notice to preserve records by the City Attorney, Alan Bojorquez, with regards to the financial management of Visit Bastrop and the nature of his relationship with CEO Smith. ¹¹
August 10, 2023	Bastrop City Council passed resolution R-2023-129, authorizing an investigation under the city charter into the financial mismanagement allegations made against Visit Bastrop and “certain interactions between particular leaders of the City and of Visit Bastrop.” ¹²
August 31, 2023	The city of Bastrop hires Haynie & Company to perform a forensic audit of Visit Bastrop and attorney Sarah Glaser of Lloyd Gosselink as Special Council to the City of Bastrop to investigate the allegations made by the Visit Bastrop Employees. The employees alleged Smith was engaged in financial misconduct by improperly using Visit Bastrop funds. Some of the employees also alleged they had observed interactions between Mayor Nelson and Smith which indicated they were in a romantic relationship. One employee alleged she overheard Mayor Nelson share information received from the City Attorney with Smith over the phone. Based on these allegations, the Special Council was instructed to investigate the following¹³: • Assess any knowledge Mayor Nelson held regarding misuse of public funds. • Did the Mayor share confidential or legally privileged information with CEO Smith? • Did Mayor Nelson participate in discussions regarding Visit Bastrop where he had a non-disclosed conflict of interest? • Has Mayor Nelson been involved in a romantic relationship with the leader of Visit Bastrop, and did he attempt to lie or conceal this relationship from the public or City Council during the election or after being sworn in?
September 26, 2023	Mayor Nelson is requested to turn over all messages between him and CEO Smith on both his city and personal devices. Mayor Nelson refuses to turn over messages between him and CEO Smith either on his personal devices or prior to his term as mayor, though both were proper requests and within the scope of the investigation. ¹⁴

¹¹ Preservation of Records.pdf, Alan Bojorquez

¹² RESOLUTION NO. R-2023-129 CITY COUNCIL INVESTIGATION OF VISIT BASTROP.pdf

¹³ December 2023 Investigation Report - Bastrop.pdf, p. 2.

¹⁴ December 2023 Investigation Report - Bastrop.pdf, p. 3.

October 24, 2023	CEO Smith falsely claims that she has no records between her and the mayor because she regularly deletes all her messages on her business phone ¹⁵ (in violation of the public information act ¹⁶) and tells the investigator that rumors regarding a relationship between her and the mayor are false. ¹⁷ In the exchange with the Special Council, CEO Smith refers to a lunch meeting with MPT Kirkland back in May where she falsely denied being in a relationship with City Official Lyle Nelson, which is also referenced in the text messages. ¹⁸
November 17, 2023	Visit Bastrop provided an unlock code for CEO Smith's publicly funded iPad which contained conversations with many people in Bastrop, including 232 pages of text messages with Lyle Nelson during the time he was a city official, impeaching the statement by CEO Smith that she regularly deletes her text messages and impeaching the statements by Mayor Nelson that he was not in a romantic relationship with her. ¹⁹
November 17 – December 10, 2023	Dates and times of rendezvous in the text messages between City Official Lyle Nelson & CEO Smith are used to identify transactions that are included in the ~\$70,000 undocumented spending by CEO Smith.
December 12, 2023	Special Council Sarah Glaser interviews Mayor Nelson, where he makes false statements about his relationship with CEO Smith, initially saying that it is just a friendship, not romantic, and not sexual in nature.
December 18, 2023	City Council is informed about the results of the forensic audit that shows \$70,000 of undocumented expenses on the part of former CEO Smith, the actions of Mayor Nelson to interfere with the official investigation of the City Council, and the existence of the previously denied relationship between Mayor Nelson / CEO Smith.
December 18, 2023	City Council moves to "file an ethics complaint under 1.15.009(h)(2) Interference with an investigation against Mayor Nelson and have Mayor Pro Tem John Kirkland prepare on behalf of Council". This ethics filing is consistent with that request.

Primary Argument

Mayor Nelson has interfered with the investigation into financial mismanagement of Visit Bastrop through the following actions:

- Refusal to turn over records that Mayor Nelson was asked to preserve by 'spoliation letter' by the City Attorney regarding his communications with CEO Smith of Visit Bastrop.

¹⁵ December 2023 Investigation Report - Bastrop.pdf, p. 2, footnote 3.

¹⁶ PUBLIC INFORMATION ACT Handbook 2022, Ken Paxton, Attorney General of Texas, p. 8.

¹⁷ December 2023 Investigation Report - Bastrop.pdf, p. 3-4.

¹⁸ Text messages.pdf, p. 204.

¹⁹ Appendix A: Summary of Text Messages Between Smith and Nelson, Relationship Status.

- In page 3 of the December 2023 Investigative Report, Mayor Nelson is reported to have replied with the following when requested for records:
It is disturbing that you have again requested “all email and text message communications between Susan Smith and yourself in the past year and all phone numbers used within the past year”. Official correspondence has been provided to you as indicated in your recent email. The City’s Charter states, “The Council shall have the power to make investigations into City affairs and to inquire into City affairs and to inquire into the official conduct of any department, agency, office or employee of the City”. Prior to June 20, 2023, current Mayor Nelson held no official capacity with the City of Bastrop.
- Mayor Nelson interfered in the investigation by not producing the communications requested by the Investigative Special Council on behalf of the City Council²⁰. In addition to his status as a city official since March, 2022, as a member of the Bastrop Economic Development Corporation Board of Directors, the matter requested of him was regarding *city affairs*, as Visit Bastrop maintains a fiduciary duty to protect public funds for the City of Bastrop. The City of Bastrop had called an investigation into Visit Bastrop for matters that are known to be covered in records that he has in his possession if he has preserved records as requested by the City Attorney. The information request was consistent with the charge given to the Special Council in investigation of the allegations of mismanagement of public funds on the part of CEO Smith.
 - Expenses for rendezvous between CEO Smith and City Official Nelson are contained within the ~\$70,000 of misreported public funds.
 - The text message record contains approximately 51 different meals, hotels, or other activities where CEO Smith spent funds, some of which were public funds. The city is still in active investigation on the total amount of misuse of public funds.
 - The text message record is missing 5.5 months that overlapped with City Official Nelson’s run for mayor and several months during his mayoral term. It is reasonable to believe that the balance of communication between CEO Smith and Mayor Nelson would identify additional dates, places, and times of mismanagement of public funds, but Mayor Nelson “did not produce any additional responses to the original requests”²¹.
 - It’s reasonable to believe that there would be additional city business on Mayor Nelson and CEO Smith’s personal devices because:
 - They commonly texted regarding happenings at city council meetings, topics appearing on the council agenda, and funding for Visit Bastrop as part of the text message record. It’s highly improbable that they suddenly stopped texting about city

²⁰ December 2023 Investigation Report – Bastrop.pdf, p 3.

²¹ December 2023 Investigation Report – Bastrop.pdf, p 3.

- business when she switched to her private phone that she incorrectly believed was exempt from the Public Information Act.
- When City Council passed the resolution to begin the investigation into Visit Bastrop and Susan Smith, the nature of their personal relationship, whether he attempted to manipulate the levers of government to favor his girlfriend/mistress, whether he influenced her responses to the investigation, or if he was aware of financial mismanagement became an official topic of city business.
 - Making false and intentionally misleading statements to the Special Council Investigator who was hired to perform the investigation under Resolution R-2023-129 into Visit Bastrop and Mayor Nelson.
 - Claiming that he had no official capacity with the city of Bastrop prior to June 20, 2023, when he was in-fact a “City Official” as a member of the Bastrop Economic Development Corporation per Bastrop Ordinance Definition Section 1.15.005.
 - For the question, “What was the nature or what is the nature of your relationship with Miss Smith?” Mayor Nelson took over 10 minutes of back and forth where he refused to answer the question. He dodged this question repeatedly as he played games, questioned why that question was relevant, and refused to respond during the timeframe when he was a City Official, but not yet mayor.
 - The response as to why it mattered was answered by the investigator in these manners:
 - *Sarah Glaser • 3:32: From my perspective, if a public official is having a romantic relationship with a contractor of the city and there are allegations that that contractor has engaged in some kind of misconduct related to finances, there is a possibility that the public official could have involvement in that as well. That's why I'm asking.*
 - *Sarah Glaser • 6:22: I understand that you feel that this is not germane and relevant, but I've been asked to investigate whether you had a romantic relationship and whether your romantic relationship had any influence on the way you advocated for Visit Bastrop. Any representations you made about Visit Bastrop. I shared the scope of the investigation with you. I know that you understand why I'm asking these questions.*
 - *Sarah Glaser • 6:51: what anyone who receives the results of my investigations do is they can make inferences based on someone's cooperation or failure to cooperate in relation in an investigation. So I'm asking you these questions and I really understand that you, don't feel like you should have to answer them, but I disagree, and City Council disagrees, and they've asked me to ask you these questions. So, I'll ask you again. At any point in time in the last 2 years, did you have a romantic relationship with Susan Smith?*

Exhibit "E-1"

- *Sarah Glaser • 13:50: I get that you that that's your position, that anything that happened before you became mayor of Bastrop doesn't implicate this investigation. I hear you loud and clear. I disagree. I think that relationships you had before you became mayor, have an impact and can influence the relationships that you have afterwards and the things that you do afterwards.*
- The investigator had prior knowledge from the text messages retrieved from CEO Smith's Visit Bastrop between City Official Nelson and CEO Smith that they had a graphic, sexual relationship starting in about August, 2022. Upon repeated asking of the question as to the nature of his relationship with Miss Smith, Mayor Nelson provided these incomplete or false responses:
 - *Lyle Nelson • 2:06: Miss Smith's been a friend of mine for almost 5 years now. Over 5 years.*
 - *Lyle Nelson • 4:37: I have answered the question, miss Smith and I are friends.*
 - *Lyle Nelson • 5:10: Miss Glaser, I believe I've answered your question at least 4 times. Miss Smith and I are friends.*
 - *Lyle Nelson • 5:25: I'm not having a romantic relationship with Susan Smith.*
 - *Lyle Nelson • 10:10: It certainly didn't fall into sexual relationship. There was a friendly relationship that she and I had, and it there perhaps was romance involved in it. Again, that's not clear to definition, but I will say there was some romance in there. But to allude to the fact that that romantic relationship was a sexual relationship, I think, is Reaching. Overreaching.*
- For the questions related to discussions regarding the Visit Bastrop budget between Smith and Nelson, Mayor Nelson make false statements about not discussing the budget with Susan Smith as shown in the text messages retrieved from Susan Smith's Visit Bastrop iPad.
 - This was the interchange between Mayor Nelson and Special Council Sarah Glaser:
 - *Sarah Glaser • 31:54: You talked to Susan about visit Bastrop's budget?*
 - *Lyle Nelson • 32:06: She had sent an email to Sylvia and myself Right after I came into office, acknowledging conversations she had had with Sylvia*
 - *Sarah Glaser • 32:20: Okay.*
 - *Lyle Nelson • 32:22: Relative to baseline budget, no true ups and what all like that, and they had called a meeting. I don't believe I had a prior conversation with her except in reading that email at her office. And as well, if you send it to me, I don't know why in the world I'm reading it, but, we didn't have any discussions on Visit*

Exhibit "E-1"

Bastrop's budget. They've been in a budget negotiation prior to me being elected to office, and my election to office delayed from May to June because of a runoff. And so I didn't get involved in any kind of budget discussions, until after June 20th. And even then, that was limited. They had nothing to do with Visit Bastrop as I recall.

- *Sarah Glaser • 33:10: Okay. Let me make sure I understand. So, kind of right around the time you came into office, shortly after, Susan had emailed you and Sylvia about Visit Bastrop's budget.*
- *Lyle Nelson • 33:26: Acknowledging the conversations that she had had with Sylvia relative to the Visit Bastrop budget, which I had not been a part of that conversation.*
- Lyle had discussed Visit Bastrop's budget with Susan Smith according to the text message record from 5/12/23 through 5/18/23 while he was a city official. It was a major event in CEO Smith's tenure as CEO and she discussed it with urgency with Lyle. Lyle refused to provide records after 5/18/23, so we don't know how much additional he discussed this topic or further city business with CEO Smith.

Secondary Arguments

- Mayor Nelson's interference into the investigation through making false statements and failure to turn over documents has cost the taxpayers of Bastrop more than \$10,000 in additional investigative and legal costs and continues to drive those costs even higher. This could have all been avoided if he had turned over the records when requested by the investigator.

Ethics Ordinance Expectations

The Bastrop Code of Ethics lays out expectations of city officials. The first 5 are reproduced here to make a point. By carrying on an inappropriate relationship with the CEO of a city contractor who received \$1.8 million dollars in public funds last year, making false statements to the public and council about the inappropriate relationship, and obstructing efforts of Council to identify if public money was misappropriated, he has violated each of these aspirational expectations:

- (a) City officials are expected to conduct themselves in a manner that fosters public trust.
- (b) City officials are charged with performing their public duties in a way that projects a high level of personal integrity and upholds the integrity of the organization.
- (c) City officials must avoid behavior that calls their motives into question and erodes public confidence.
- (d) City officials shall place the municipality's interests and the concerns of those the city serves above private, personal interests.

- (e) Those who serve the city are expected to value honesty, trustworthiness, diligence, objectivity, fairness, due process, efficiency, and prudence as values the city professes.

Other Points

- Investigative Special Council Sarah Glaser is a specialist in employment investigations. While providing a verbal report on her findings to council, she stated that **a public CEO would be terminated for their actions if they had done what Mayor Nelson has done**. While Council has lost faith in Mayor Nelson's ability to do his job, Council does not have the authority to fire Mayor Nelson. Council does have the ability to hold Mayor Nelson accountable for his obstruction of the investigation, false statements, and behavior unbecoming the mayor. Council has elected to start that process by making an official ethics complaint.
- Mayor Nelson continues as of the filing of this complaint to blame the employees at Visit Bastrop for him being in this situation and failing to own his part in it.
- During the investigation by the City of Bastrop, CEO Smith told the investigative Special Council that she did not have any text messages with Lyle Nelson in her possession because she routinely deleted her text messages. The presence of the text message chain and many others on the Visit Bastrop iPad demonstrates that she made false statements when she made the claim regarding regularly deleting messages.
- Mayor Nelson asserted several claims in his interview with the investigator regarding his refusal to provide records. Mayor Nelson wants to only provide information since becoming mayor saying that the city has no power over him as a private citizen.
 - First, Mayor Nelson was not a private citizen, he was a City Official as a member of the EDC Board.
 - Second, the city has deep interest in making sure money was spent in accordance with laws and policies of the city of Bastrop. Council now knows that it wasn't, and we know some of that from the text messages between Susan and Lyle produced by Visit Bastrop.
- Mayor Nelson's refusal to cooperate with the investigation can be held against him because Council's investigation is done in a civil context. The mayor is allowed 5th Amendment protections against self-incrimination, but different from a criminal investigation, the failure to provide information can be held against him and forces Council to have to guess what he is hiding and his motivations for hiding it. Some of the potential things that one could reasonably assume would be present in the documents that Mayor Nelson failed to provide include:
 - Mayor Nelson has benefited from misuse of public funds.
 - Mayor Nelson was aware of the misuse of public funds.
 - Mayor Nelson promised CEO Smith that he would use his position as mayor to protect her funding or from the investigation.
 - Mayor Nelson coordinated responses with CEO Smith regarding the investigation, seeking to persuade her to withhold cooperation.
 - Additional dates/times/locations of misuse of public funds.

Exhibit "E-1"

- Mayor Nelson is in an inappropriate relationship with a city contractor and made false statements about it.
- A reasonable person might assume that Mayor Nelson should have recused himself in executive sessions where the investigation against him was discussed or for votes over the investigation, but he elected not to. The ethics rules of the city of Bastrop create a conflict of interest if a council person, including the mayor, is participating in debate regarding a financial position held by themselves, their spouse, or a blood relative. The rules do not extend this conflict-of-interest provision to romantic or fiduciary relationships. While Mayor Nelson was not technically in violation of the “conflict of interest” part of Bastrop’s ethics rules, a reasonable person would have realized there was an appearance of a conflict of interest and recused themselves.

Appendix A: Summary of Text Messages Between Smith and Nelson

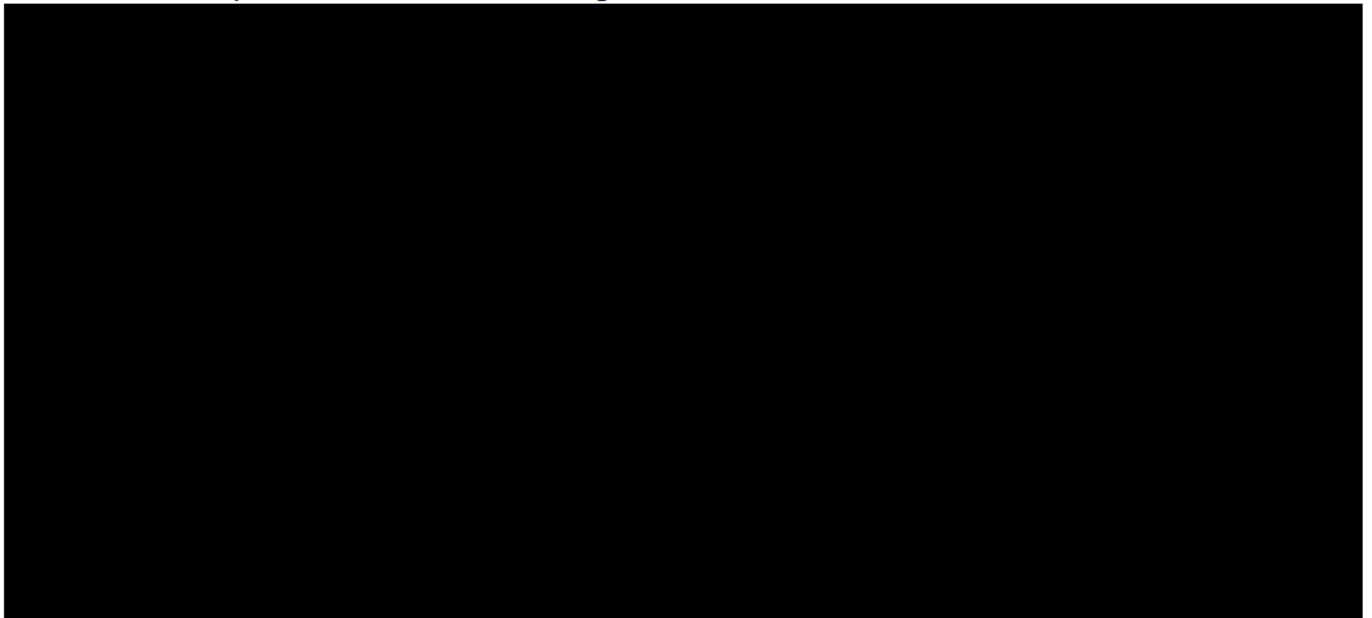
The text messages are between Lyle Nelson and Susan Smith from the dates of 6/7/2022 through 10/3/22 and 3/23/23 through 6/4/2023, and they span 232 pages.

The text messages were recovered from the iPad of Susan Smith, the former CEO of Visit Bastrop by City of Bastrop IT staff. The iPad was purchased with public funds and the cellular account Susan used to send these messages were purchased with public funds from the City of Bastrop.

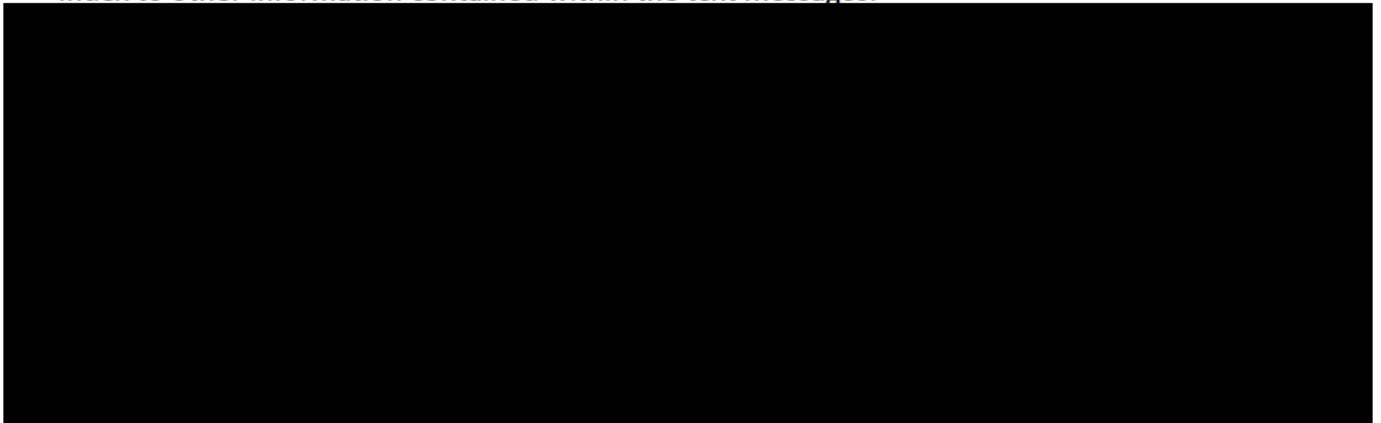
Lyle and Susan use code names for each other – **Jett** for Lyle and **D. Springs** (Dripping Springs) for Susan so that the names Lyle and Susan do not pop up on each other's phone notifications in a way that might alert others to their relationship. Lyle's wife's code name is, **The Warden**.

Relationship Status

The relationship forms around the following dates:



Index to other information contained within the text messages:



- Meal & Entertainment Expense references, many with Lyle Nelson in attendance (p. 2x1, 3-4, 6, 5-6, 7, 10, 12, 14-18, 24, 25, 26, 30, 31-47, 31, 33, 35, 42, 55, 57, 61, 62-64, 2x69, 71-75, 78, 2x82, 92, 94, 99, 101, 111, 113-114, 123, 126, 133-145, 166, 171, 174, 177, 178, 183-184, 187, 191-192, 196, 201, 216, 220, 230)

Appendix B: Attached Documents

Document	Description
1_Backup Summary_Ethics Complaint against Lyle Nelson.docx	This document.
2_12/20/23 Investigation Report - Bastrop.pdf	6-page Investigative Report from Special Council Investigator, Sarah Glaser.
3_12/12/23_Investigation_interview_lyle_transcript from audio.docx	Software-created transcription of 4_12/12/23_Investigation_interview_audio recording.m4a, Mayor Nelson's interview with the Investigative Special Council.
4_12/12/23_Investigation_interview_audio recording.m4a	Mayor Nelson's interview with the Investigative Special Council.
5_08/10/23_RESOLUTION NO. R-2023-129 CITY COUNCIL INVESTIGATION OF VISIT BASTROP.pdf	2-page Resolution of the City Council of Bastrop, Texas, calling for the investigations into Visit Bastrop and Mayor Nelson.
6_08/07/23_Preservation of Records Notice to Mayor.pdf	2-page Preservation of Records letter sent to Mayor Nelson from City Attorney Alan Bojorquez.
7_08/04/23_Visit Bastrop_Employee statement #1.docx 8_08/04/23_Visit Bastrop_Employee statement #2.docx 9_08/04/23_Visit Bastrop_Employee statement #3.docx 10_08/04/23_Visit Bastrop_Employee statement #4.docx	Each of the Visit Bastrop Staff Complaints that were originally submitted to the city manager and originated the City Council investigation.
11_06/07/22-06/04/23_Text Messages between Mayor & VB-CEO.pdf	232 pages of text messages between Susan Smith and Lyle Nelson.
12_03/28/22_BEDC_Meeting Agenda appointing LN as Board Member.pdf	BEDC meeting minutes that show that Lyle Nelson was added to the BEDC board on March 28, 2022, making him a "city official" per the Bastrop Code of Ethics, Section: 1.15.005 – Definitions.

Ms. Glaser's Direct Line: (512) 322-5881
sglaser@lglawfirm.com

CONFIDENTIAL ATTORNEY-CLIENT COMMUNICATION

December 20, 2023

Sylvia Carrillo, City Manager
City of Bastrop, Texas
1311 Chestnut Street
Bastrop, Texas 78602
Via Email: scarrillo@cityofbastrop.org

Re: Fact-Finding Report

Dear Sylvia:

You requested I assist your office in providing legal advice to the City, by gathering and analyzing facts surrounding complaints made by employees of Visit Bastrop, Inc., the City of Bastrop's nonprofit destination marketing organization. Specifically, you asked me to investigate whether there was a personal relationship between Mayor Lyle Nelson and Visit Bastrop's former Chief Executive Officer, Susan Smith, that affected City business or operations. This investigation was conducted pursuant to City of Bastrop Resolution No. R-2023-129. The following is a fact-finding report on these matters.

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Introduction and Background

In August 2023, Visit Bastrop employees complained to City Manager Sylvia Carrillo about their working conditions. Visit Bastrop is a nonprofit corporation funded primarily by public funds which are allocated by the City pursuant to a contract between the parties. In addition to their substantive complaints, the employees also alleged they had concerns about the Mayor's

relationship with the CEO, which appeared to be romantic. Because public funds primarily fund Visit Bastrop's operations, the City Council determined it had a legal obligation to evaluate the situation to ensure public funds are being used appropriately.

Our firm was engaged on August 31, 2023. On September 13, 2023, the investigation was temporarily paused until September 25, 2023, when it resumed.¹ Upon engagement, I reviewed relevant documents, developed an investigation plan, requested and reviewed documents, and interviewed the witnesses listed below before making the determinations listed at the bottom of this report.

Allegations²

Visit Bastrop employees alleged Smith was engaged in financial misconduct by improperly using Visit Bastrop funds. Some of the employees also alleged they had observed interactions between Mayor Nelson and Smith which indicated they were in a romantic relationship. One employee alleged she overheard Mayor Nelson share information received from the City Attorney with Smith over the phone.

Based on these allegations, I was instructed to investigate the following:

- Assess any knowledge the Mayor held regarding misuse of public funds.
- Did the Mayor share confidential or legally privileged information with the CEO?
- Did the Mayor participate in discussions regarding Visit Bastrop where he had a non-disclosed conflict of interest?
- Has the Mayor been involved in a romantic relationship with the leader of Visit Bastrop, and did he attempt to lie or conceal this relationship from the public or City Council during the election or after being sworn in?

The Fact-Finding Process

Documents Reviewed:

- August 4, 2023, written statements submitted to City Manager:
 - Ashton LaFuenta
 - Cherry Kay Abel
 - Stephanie Doradea
 - Megan Garcia
- August 11, 2023, City Manager notes from meeting with City employee Ben Williams
- Business phone records for Susan Smith received from Visit Bastrop³
- Business phone records for Mayor Lyle Nelson received from City of Bastrop

¹ It is my understanding that Visit Bastrop placed Smith on administrative leave shortly after it received the complaints. As of the date of this report, Smith is no longer employed by Visit Bastrop.

² This report is limited to concerns related to the relationship between the Mayor and CEO. The full scope of our representation was larger, and other matters are addressed separately from this report.

³ I did not receive copies of the substance of any text messages from Smith's phone. Visit Bastrop's attorney told me Smith "regularly" deleted her text messages on her business phone.

- Business email correspondence between Mayor Lyle Nelson and Susan Smith received from City of Bastrop
- Personal text message records between Mayor Lyle Nelson and Susan Smith received from City of Bastrop
- December 8, 2023, preliminary draft financial audit conducted by Haynie & Company

Investigation Findings

Document Requests:

On September 26, 2023, I requested the following from the City:

- All communications within the past year between Mayor Lyle Nelson and Susan Smith, President/CEO of Visit Bastrop, including email communications and text messages.
- Phone records for all phones used by Mayor Lyle Nelson within the past year, showing records of calls in and calls out.
- List of all phone numbers for all phones used by Mayor Lyle Nelson within the past year.

On October 19, 2023, I received documents from the City responsive to the request above from Mayor Nelson's City devices and accounts. On October 24, 2023, I emailed Mayor Nelson the following (in part):

I received copies of text messages from your City phone, but did not receive anything from any other device that you may have used, including your personal phone, which I understood you would also be providing to me. These phone records are important evidence that could quash allegations of a personal relationship. Can you please provide them to me, or confirm in writing that none exist *within the next seven days (October 31)*?

On October 30, 2023, Mayor Nelson responded as follows (in part):

It is disturbing that you have again requested "all email and text message communications between Susan Smith and yourself in the past year and all phone numbers used within the past year". Official correspondence has been provided to you as indicated in your recent email. The City's Charter states, "The Council shall have the power to make investigations into City affairs and to inquire into City affairs and to inquire into the official conduct of any department, agency, office or employee of the City". Prior to June 20, 2023, current Mayor Nelson held no official capacity with the City of Bastrop.

Mayor Nelson did not produce any additional responses to the original requests. I made a similar request to Smith for records from her second, personal phone on October 24, 2023. Smith responded on October 25, 2023, as follows (in part):

May I remind you Mr. Nelson only became Mayor on June 20, 2023. I was placed on administrative leave on August 7, 2023. During that timeframe, I had limited business-related conversations, which can be found in the records provided.

Again, I have not been privy to any of the allegations about why my personal relationship with the mayor is of any concern. I have had a relationship with him for five years, as I have had with the former Mayor and Council Member Plunkett, and, most recently, a year-long personal relationship with Council Member Kirkland. It is interesting that the former Mayor, a woman, and I's personal relationship has never been questioned. Yet the relationship between a male Mayor and myself is a topic of conversation. Before the current sitting council, I also had personal relationships with past council members. My job is to communicate openly and regularly with the Council and the Mayor. After all, we are all working towards the same goal.

When Council Member Plunkett was our Board Chair for Visit Bastrop, he insisted on the CEO building a relationship with the Council, the City Manager, and the Mayor. It was and is an essential part of my role as the organization's leader. Those relationships often developed into a personal nature due to our close working goals. I.e., family barbecues, social gatherings, shared meals, etc.

I believe this is a witch hunt perpetuated by Council Member Kirlland [sic] that has no grounds whatsoever; this is about personal power and control and should be recognized as such. He has been perpetuating false rumors since May of this year when he shared those rumors with me during a lunch meeting.

On November 17, 2023, the City indicated it had access to Smith's business iPad. Upon a search for Mayor Nelson's phone number, a set of text messages was identified between Mayor Nelson and Smith. The text messages extracted on November 17, 2023, were one-sided, showing only Mayor Nelson's texts. On December 7, 2023, the City extracted both sides of the conversation. The messages spanned from June 7, 2022, through June 4, 2023. The substance of the messages included romantic and sexual exchanges.

Interview with Mayor Lyle Nelson:

On December 12, 2023, I interviewed Mayor Nelson at City Hall.⁴ The interview covered the four concerns listed in the section above under "Allegations." Both Mayor Nelson and I recorded the interview.

Assess any knowledge the Mayor held regarding misuse of public funds.

The financial audit conducted by Haynie & Company identified *potential* "out of compliance transactions" that totaled approximately \$70,000 over fiscal years 2021 through 2023.⁵ The vast majority of purchases were made by Smith. The Mayor denied any knowledge of misuse of public funds, and my investigation to date uncovered no evidence otherwise.

⁴ City Manager Sylvia Carrillo was present for approximately 10 minutes during the beginning of the interview, until Mayor Nelson asked her to step out.

⁵ It appeared that a number of the transactions were legitimate business expenses, which raised concern for a technical matter, such as business-related travel expenses which were missing a receipt. Therefore, further work would be required to conclusively identify the amount of problematic transactions.

Did the Mayor share confidential or legally privileged information with the CEO?

Former Visit Bastrop employee Stephanie Doredea alleged she overheard a phone call on July 11, 2023, between Smith and Mayor Nelson. Doredea said she heard Mayor Nelson tell Smith he had a conversation with the City Attorney regarding a record request for phone records and text messages for City Council members, including Councilmembers Jimmy Crouch and Kevin Plunkett. Doredea said she heard Smith tell Mayor Nelson, [REDACTED]

Mayor Nelson denied calling Smith on July 11, 2023, and telling her about the record request. Mayor Nelson further denied sharing confidential or legally privileged information with Smith at any time. Doredea's statement is evidence the Mayor called the CEO and told her about the record request; however, the City Attorney said that even if the conversation occurred, the information in his July 11, 2023, communication was neither confidential nor privileged.

There is no evidence to date that Mayor Nelson shared any other confidential or legally privileged information with Smith.

Did the Mayor participate in discussions regarding Visit Bastrop where he had a non-disclosed conflict of interest?

The City's Code of Ethics ordinance does not prohibit a friendship, a romantic or a sexual relationship with an employee of a City contractor and I did not identify any other rule or law which would have required Mayor Nelson to disclose such a relationship. Therefore, there is no discussion in which the Mayor participated in where he had Conflicting Interest, as that term is defined in the Code of Ethics.

The City's Code of Ethics ordinance does prohibit a City Official from "represent[ing] any person, group, or entity before the City" and it prohibits a City Official from "grant[ing] any special consideration, treatment, or advantage to any citizen, individual, business organization, or group beyond that which is normally available to every other citizen, individual, business organization, or group."

The City Manager said Mayor Nelson participated in a budget discussion on July 27, 2023, in which he commented that proposed changes to Visit Bastrop's budget were "premature." Other City Councilmembers were present in the meeting and corroborated the comment. Mayor Nelson denied saying the changes to the budget were "premature," and said he said he was glad the issue was resolved because the City was too far into budget considerations to address it. Regardless of the exact words used during the meeting, Mayor Nelson said his participation in the discussion was in his official capacity as mayor and not on behalf of any other entity.

There was some discussion of Visit Bastrop's budget and business operations in the text messages between Smith and Mayor Nelson in May 2023 (found on pages 202-203, 207, and 208). Accordingly, Mayor Nelson and Smith did discuss Visit Bastrop business and its budget, at least in May 2023.

I did not uncover any other evidence of conversations between Mayor Nelson and Smith related to Visit Bastrop's budget. The conversations above occurred before Mayor Nelson was sworn in as Mayor and the text messages the City obtained ended on June 4, 2023. Mayor Nelson said his relationship with Smith ended on August 10, 2023. If Mayor Nelson were to provide communications between June 4 and August 10, 2023, I may have better evidence supporting or disproving this element of the investigation.

Has the Mayor been involved in a romantic relationship with the leader of Visit Bastrop, and did he attempt to lie or conceal this relationship from the public or City Council during the election or after being sworn in?

In his interview on December 12, 2023, I asked Mayor Nelson what the nature of his relationship with Smith was. Mayor Nelson said he and Smith had been friends for almost five years and questioned what his relationship with Smith had to do with a financial investigation into Visit Bastrop. I explained that if a public official is having a romantic relationship with a contractor, and there are allegations that the contractor has engaged in some kind of misconduct, there is a possibility that the public official could be involved as well.

I asked Mayor Nelson whether he had a romantic relationship with Smith. Mayor Nelson did not immediately answer the question, but after some discourse, ultimately said that he did not have a romantic relationship with Smith in the period when he was a public official. Mayor Nelson would not answer the question for the period prior to June 20, 2023, and again questioned how his relationship with Smith was germane to the investigation.

I asked Mayor Nelson again to confirm that he said he did not have a romantic relationship with Smith at any point in time when he was a public official, and he asked the City Manager to step out of the room. After the City Manager left, Mayor Nelson said they had a friendly relationship, and there was perhaps some romance in it. Mayor Nelson said to allude to the fact that it was a sexual relationship is “overreaching.” I told Mayor Nelson that the City obtained communications between him and Smith spanning approximately a year and a half. Mayor Nelson said that nothing prior to June 20, 2023, was relevant to our conversation. When I asked when the relationship ended, Mayor Nelson told me it ended on approximately August 10, 2023.

Mayor Nelson said City Council had not asked him whether he had a relationship with Smith while he was a public official. He said the City Manager made a presentation in executive session regarding this investigation, and it was decided to move forward. He said he told Council something to the gist of “if you have proof, bring it forward.”

Both Mayor Nelson and Smith would not provide copies of their personal phone records, on the stated basis that they believe the City is not entitled to view non-official communications. Mayor Nelson first told me in his interview on December 12, 2023, that he did not have a romantic relationship with Smith. He later said they had a friendly relationship, and there was perhaps some romance in it, but it would be “overreaching” to call it a sexual relationship. The text message correspondence between Mayor Nelson and Smith includes explicit references to sexual acts and romantic statements, such as [REDACTED].”

This concludes my fact-finding report. Please let me know if you require further information.

Sincerely,



Sarah Glaser

STG:slw

Exhibit "E-1"

To whom it may concern.

I would first like to make it clear that I absolutely love my job and what I do. When I moved to Bastrop I fell in love with the community and instantly knew this is where I wanted to put my roots down. With my role here at Visit Bastrop I am able to contribute to the growth and economic vitality of the city which is where my passion is.

Since being employed with Visit Bastrop I have witness many unethical behaviors from our C.E.O. Susan Smith. Her emotional based decisions and comments has made our working environment very distracting and triggering. As a person who genuinely cares for her community, I believe Susan is a poor representation of our organization as it's leader.

She has made myself feel very uncomfortable with her unprofessional discussions about certain board members. For example she yelled out loud to the entire office "That Bitch" in regards to Becki Womble, she then continue to call her a money grubbing whore.

Susan also had a H.R. Meeting with another employee in which she very aggressively called in all the other employees and tried to get us against Cherry Kay, this was very triggering as her emotions were high and confrontational. After this emotional meeting she asked us to go have drinks with her on Visit Bastrop's dime. Due to fear of her retaliating if I say no I went, even when I made it clear to her I didn't want to go because I wanted to finish my project. (receipt attached)

She will come back from board meetings or meetings with city officials and based off her emotion, give us inaccurate information. This would lead us into projects Susan thought was necessary to fit her agenda of saving her own reputation.

She has told the employees that we are not to speak to board members or anyone at the city and go straight to her with any issues.

She will give us deadlines on projects that we have designed and come up with just to throw one of her projects in that only benefit her agenda. We then have to deal with her hostile attitude towards us for not getting the original project done. Most of the time these original projects are waiting on more data to ensure it is getting done correctly.

I have witness many different forms of retaliation with the her and the other employees. She took away Ashton's opportunity to get her CDME because she applied to a different opportunity for work. She took away Cherry Kays work from home benefit because she didn't like her attitude during the H.R. Meeting.

I can't count the amount of times she changes what she says of just forgets.

During my very first convention that I was very excited about, she completely deserted the team and did not lead or encourage us in any way, then requested we leave early.

She has made me feel uncomfortable with her relationship with the mayor. During the Big Bang Celebration she snuck away with him in the corner of the IBIH brewery to watch the fireworks. She also paid for their drinks using the private account (receipt attached) .

At the end of the day I just want to be able to come to work and do my job, she makes it almost impossible because it always feels she is emotionally unstable and our work is based on Susan's emotion of the day. Please help.

Megan Garcia
Marketing Manager

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Garcia', with a stylized, cursive script.

Exhibit "E-1"

Stephanie Doradea
Business Manager
Visit Bastrop

August 4, 2023

Re: Susan Smith

To whom this may concern,

My name is Stephanie Doradea and I have been employed with Visit Bastrop since September 12, 2022. The purpose of this letter is to inform you of things I have personally witnessed which have caused me great concern about my leadership.

On July 10, 2023, Cherry Kay Abel came into the office after a meeting she had with a potential customer at the convention center. Cherry Kay made a remark that she had received a text message from Becki Womble letting Cherry Kay know that Susan Smith had "thrown her under the bus." This set Susan off, and she yelled "that bitch!" Susan was very angry and told the office that she was going to get Becki thrown off Visit Bastrop's Board of Directors and she was going to pull our Chamber membership. In this conversation, Susan Smith expressed Becki as a "money grubbing whore."

On July 11, 2023, Susan Smith had a scheduled meeting with Cherry Kay Abel and Corina Saenz, our Human Resources Consultant. As we were waiting for Cherry Kay to come in for her meeting, I overheard Susan Smith take a personal call with Mayor Lyle Nelson. During this phone call, I heard Mayor Nelson tell Susan Smith that he had a conversation with City Attorney Alan Bojorquez regarding phone records and text messages for city council members. I also heard Mayor Nelson mention City Council Member Crouch and City Council Member Plunkett regarding phone records and text messages. I heard Susan Smith and Mayor Nelson discuss this subject for several minutes. During this phone call, I heard Susan Smith tell Mayor Nelson "[REDACTED]"

The meeting with Susan Smith, Cherry Kay Abel, and Corina Saenz commenced shortly after the phone call with Susan Smith and Mayor Nelson took place. During this meeting, Susan Smith stormed out of her office directly into Megan Garcia and my office. Susan demanded the entire staff join the ongoing meeting. As we walked into this meeting, I was immediately intimidated and felt a hostile environment. Susan very angrily asked everyone to elaborate on a comment that Cherry Kay had made before the entire staff was brought into the meeting. It made me very uncomfortable to be placed in that situation out of Susan's emotional outburst.

Later that afternoon, Susan Smith called the entire staff into her office to discuss the events of Cherry Kay's meeting. This furthered my feeling of discomfort because Susan wanted to inform the team that everything was okay with Cherry Kay and herself and that no one was in trouble. Shortly after letting us go from that meeting, Susan Smith walked out of her office and said, "who would like to go out for a drink - on Visit Bastrop." I told Susan that I had work to do and still needed to make up an hour from a doctor's appointment my children had earlier that pay period. I truly did not feel comfortable going out for drinks with her after the emotional rollercoaster I had experienced that morning. Susan did not take no for an answer and told me I could make up my time by going for drinks.

On July 13, 2023, Susan walked into my office and asked me if I was okay and if it was weird that she asked us to go out for drinks after dragging the team into Cherry Kay's meeting. She began the conversation by telling me she was not going to apologize for bringing the staff into Cherry Kay's meeting

Exhibit "E-1"

with her and Corina because “it had to happen.” I told her that it was weird for me. I told her that after such an emotional event, I personally need to be left alone to process my feelings on what I have experienced. She continued to talk to me for several minutes until she could tell I was still uncomfortable and asked me if I was ready for her to leave. I told her yes; I was ready to end the conversation and continue with my work.

On July 14, 2023, Susan Smith, Ashton LaFuenta, Megan Garcia, and myself were at the convention center preparing Visit Bastrop’s information table for Corvette Invasion. Susan asked us to place more visitor guides on the table. I opened 3 more boxes, and we emptied the guides onto the table. Once we finished, Ashton had a meeting she had to prepare for and left. Susan asked Megan and me to walk through the convention center with her. I picked up the empty boxes to throw them away. Susan extended her arm out to take the boxes from me to which I handed them to her. We take a couple steps, and she sees Steve Ballard walking towards us from setting up outside. She extends her arm straight towards Steve holding the boxes but does not say a word. Steve understood what she was intending and walked up to her and took the boxes. She says nothing to Steve but turns to me and says, “and that’s how that’s done” and walks away. I felt incredibly embarrassed about the way Steve was treated and apologized and thanked him for all his help.

On August 4, 2023, Mayor Lyle Nelson came to the Visit Bastrop office to retrieve Bastrop Homecoming Rodeo armbands from Susan Smith. Susan asked Mayor Nelson if he would go into her office to read an email, she had just sent to City Manager Sylvia Carrillo and him. Mayor Nelson walked around Susan’s desk to read this email over her shoulder. They were both out of my sight as I heard them discussing the contents of this email. I then see Mayor Nelson walk back around the opposite end of her desk and within my line of sight. Susan’s office door perfectly conceals my vision from her desk. I see Mayor Nelson lean over Susan’s desk. I heard Susan’s heels and chair indicating that she had stood up from her chair. [REDACTED]

These are just a few instances that I can pinpoint that truly portray the hostility and unethical behavior I have witnessed from our CEO. For the past month, I have kept a record of all the time Susan Smith spends away from the office. In the last 31 days, Susan has been in the office from 8:30 am to the end of business for a total of nine days. The rest of those days, there have been a multitude of excuses from “working from home” to “I’m home sick. Won’t be in.” Keeping in mind that four of those nine days were spent at a convention in Dallas. I do not feel comfortable being led by a person whom I question their leadership and moral values. I come to work because I love working with our great team, but I get anxiety of having my own voice in fear of retaliation from my boss. I would like to thank you for your time and understanding through this.

Respectfully,
Stephanie Doradea

Exhibit "E-1"

August 4, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

As a dedicated employee of six years, you must understand how difficult it is to write this letter. However, I feel that I cannot remain silent any longer. The Visit Bastrop workplace has become extremely toxic and hostile environment to work in and I am requesting the necessary measures be taken to remedy this situation.

I have always strived to maintain a positive and professional relationship with all my colleagues. However, Susan's behavior towards the staff (and previous staff) is unprofessional, unethical, and unacceptable.

I have, for years, witnessed numerous unprofessional encounters with various staff members (including myself) and Susan. As a director and senior staff member, I often get approached by other staff looking for guidance and clarity on these situations and I, unfortunately, do not feel that I have the tools I need to advise them. This leaves me feeling inadequate as a director/leader within this organization.

A few of our major concerns include:

- Workplace intimidation
- Workplace retaliation
- Absence of True Leadership
- Unethical practices

I also want to express concern about the amount of time Susan is out of the office. Rarely, she is in the office five days a week. When she is present, she is merely that, she stays distracted with personal and political conversation during office hours. Dealing with this lack of accountability has led to a lack of trust and respect. A workplace environment where the rules apply to everyone but the boss discourages the team's motivation and as a small staff, we cannot afford this. Motivated and committed employees are inspired by motivated and committed leaders. The constant disruptions in the office make the staff uncomfortable and ultimately it affects our productivity.

I have explored the options of reporting these issues to the board of directors as well as our internal HR team, but none of those conversations have yielded any results.

I respectfully request that these issues be addressed to create a better, more professional work environment at Visit Bastrop.

Thank you for your time and understanding. I hope to hear a resolution regarding this issue soon.

Ashton LaFuente

Employee Statement, August 4, 2023

Name: Cherry Kay Abel

Position at Visit Bastrop: Director of Sales

Employee Statement, August 4, 2023

Name: Cherry Kay Abel

Position at Visit Bastrop: Director of Sales

An employee of Visit Bastrop, this is my witness statement of the actions of our CEO/President, Susan Smith.

I have been employed for almost 4years and I have witnessed numerous accounts of retaliation and hostility.

As an employee, I have reached out to our board of directors' numerous times about my frustration, and I have not had any feedback or response. I have been told by Susan that I am not allowed to talk to anyone, and she is the organization, so I need to come to her with any issues.

Recently, I was in trouble because of a text message to Becki Womble on how I responded. This text message was the result of poor communication on Susan's part. When Susan saw the text message she said, "That Bitch" then she proceeded to say, "That money-grabbing whore". I was shocked that she would say those things about one of her board members and in front of her staff as well.

The following Monday, she sat me down with HR to inform me that I need to be a better Director and I need to be cautious of who I speak to, and I need to stay in my lane. I let her know that I am under personal attack and the full staff knows it. She immediately got up and asked the staff to walk into her office to discuss further. She put everyone in a very inappropriate setting. Then later in the day, she asked all of us to go have drinks on VB's dime.

During this HR conversation, she said that I would need to come back to the office three days a week so she can monitor my work and help me be more efficient. She made me a makeshift office in the storage area right outside the bathroom. I have been working from home for almost two years with no issues and my work has always exceeded her expectations.

When attending out-of-town conferences, she picks and chooses (after the fact or during) what she considers a business expense. There is no defined outline of what will be out of pocket on the trip. She denied my Starbucks purchase listed on my expense report, but she will buy everyone cocktails on a whim whether it be at a conference or a normal day in Bastrop.

On numerous occasions, I have witnessed Susan using extremely offensive words toward a board member and I felt uncomfortable hearing the content. I let her know that I don't think that is appropriate.

Exhibit "E-1"

This behavior has not changed since I started, and she has fired numerous employees prior to me for no reason.

She hired me and wanted me to fire the previous Director of Sales, but she did not let me follow through, so she fired her during COVID. Now, she wants to hire her back to work with me and I let her know that I was uncomfortable with that decision. We are supposed to discuss this next week.

She continually discusses my private conversations with other staff members and then she tries to say things that are untrue, so she plays us against each other.

These actions are not consistent with that of a leader and her preferred method of communication is ordering everyone around with an emotional hostile tone especially if there is something said by one of the staff that she doesn't like. She consistently belittles the staff to the point where we don't want to work here or always live in fear of being fired. She has no qualms about letting us know that we all are replaceable. The office environment with her there is counterproductive with the lowest overall morale I have witnessed since I started with Visit Bastrop.