

In late January of this year, after having argued with the Commission since I started about their role in operations, I asked for a new contract.

My January request reflected on areas of overreach and a specific concern I had as discussed in an Administrative meeting last November. During the November meeting, I advised the Commission that language in the City Code conflicts with language in the City Charter concerning the role of the City Manager regarding personnel.

The Commission was getting involved in operational matters assigned to the City Manager in the City Charter. The City's Charter is voter approved and formed from the State's Constitution. It acts as a "constitution" for the city and supersedes City Code. In Montana, only those powers given in the Charter can be used by a governing power and can not be overridden by a City Code. I argued that the City Code must align with the City Charter. As Helena's Manager, I swore an oath that included the protection of the City Charter.

I asked for a revised contract because the conflict between City Code and City Charter violated the City Manager ethics code and what I believe the Charter says is the role of the Manager. Also, my contract stated that the Commission had to offer me a renewal by June and revising it would take time. If the revision was not done by June, I would be spending the second half of 2022 looking for a job because I would not renew the current contract.

Instead of talking or scheduling a meeting with me, the Commission implemented a flawed, punitive process with no appeal that was not part of my contract. I had no recourse when I did not agree and had to resign or work inside the City Commission's preferred interpretations of the Charter.

While I did not want to leave my job, I cannot work for a Commission that would require I violate the 120-year old city management ethics code and the City Charter. They will not remove themselves from personnel matters and operations. I am the daughter of Butte-America immigrants and Harlowton Harlows—we moved home to Helena, and I was honored to serve as the City Manager for this great state's capital.

I tried to take our future forward responsibly by addressing the circumstance constructively with a recommendation to correct what I believe to be a conflict. I left swiftly so that the Commission could move in the direction they wanted, reduce the cost to the community, and the impact on the employee team.

I am thankful to the dedicated employees and this community for believing in and acknowledging the progress we achieved together.