

ADMINISTRATIVE INVESTIGATION
City of Demorest, Georgia Police Department

Background

I was retained by the law firm Carothers & Mitchell which provides legal services to the City of Demorest. The charge given was to investigate claims made by various non-law enforcement personnel in the police department of an unpleasant work environment and charges of favoritism.

The office in question is where G.C.I.C. reports are run for use in the City's municipal court as well as for background investigations, primarily for third party vendors on behalf of prospective employers. As I learned, the City has for many years made background investigative services available to private sector employers; over time, this service has generated significant revenue for the City. Recent changes in state law and/or regulations have served to significantly limit the fees that can be charged for these services.

I interviewed four female non-law enforcement employees of the department, the police chief and assistant chief and had a conversation with the city manager for background.

Allegations

To a person, every individual interviewed confirmed that there exists a tense and stressful work environment within the office where the G.C.I.C. terminal(s) are located. These problems recently came to the attention of the city administration when department employees were given the opportunity to submit an evaluation of the department. This practice had not been implemented in the department for several years and not during Casey Chastain's ("Chastain") tenure as chief. Because some of the feedback from department employees raised concerns about department administration, city manager Mark Musselwhite made himself available to meet with any employees who desired to do so.

There was a consensus among most everyone I interviewed that problems in the office—while already existing, to a lesser degree—were exacerbated in late 2025 when Chastain moved the position held by Rachel Blasberg ("Blasberg") from part-time to full-time. When doing so, he gave Blasberg additional job duties, including a role in fulfilling open record requests, assisting with municipal court clerk duties, and others. This move seemed to anger some employees in the

office; Rachel Bryant (“Bryant”) expressed that she believed Chastain should have informed the longer-tenure employees before doing so (it also seemed that Bryant may have wanted to assume some of these duties as she expressed an interest in being more involved with the municipal court). In response, the chief expressed (accurately, in my opinion) that his actions were within the scope of his authority and that he did not need the approval or consent of anyone.

Regardless of what happened and when, I learned that four employees are housed in a small office in close proximity to one another, yet some rarely so much as speak to certain others; even when forced to do so for work-related matters, the interactions are strained and few.

Out of the evaluation process came accusations of favoritism in the office, specifically from Chastain toward Blasberg, who was described as the “teacher’s pet.”¹ It was said that Blasberg spends (at this point, perhaps ‘spent’) more time in the chief’s office than the other employees. I do have the impression that a friendly relationship exists between the two, but nothing struck me as inappropriate.²

As their evidence of the perspective of favoritism toward Blasberg, some of the evaluations (or during following discussions) alleged some physical interactions by the chief toward Blasberg. Chastain, in his interview, made clear that he is highly offended by this accusation; Blasberg expressed the same sentiment. It was clear to me that no one alleges any “touching” was sexual in nature, and my take-away was that any physical encounters were merely friendly and innocuous. And I have no doubt that the airing of this allegation has resulted in changed behavior.

Findings and Recommendations

Whatever the catalyst, there is clearly a toxic atmosphere in this office. I believe that much of the problem is grounded in conflicts between people who simply have very different personalities. While I heard no tangible evidence, this type of work environment is sure to adversely affect productivity – if it hasn’t already. When asked what a possible solution to the situation might be,

¹ .”¹ I think it is appropriate to mention that I noted vast personality differences among these employees, from some being soft-spoken and reserved and others being more outgoing and talkative.

² In fact, it seems that Blasberg has a friendly social relationship with Chastain’s wife.

employees proposed that *getting rid of (fill in the blank)* was the answer. That demonstrates the untenable environment that was described to me. One person I asked this question of began the response with “if the situation isn’t already beyond repair, ...” That may well be the case.

This is a problem detrimental to the City that cannot continue without being addressed. There has been mention of installing cubicles in the office so that the employees are not in close visible proximity to one another. While not a perfect solution, I would endorse that as a good first step, perhaps followed by some teambuilding training and exercises. While none of this will fully address the issues that arise when people are simply *very different in personality from one another*, it is a place to begin.

It is apparent to me that each of the involved individuals has the technical skills to well perform their jobs. Equally important to those skills is the ability to get along with the people you must work with to perform your job. Many city workplaces enjoy a family-like atmosphere among employees, where holidays and birthdays are celebrated and camaraderie prevails. That is not the case everywhere and need not be, but an environment where people dread going to work every day is a recipe for failure. I strongly encourage decisive action be taken by management so that the employees—all of them—know they have been heard and that change is coming.