

City manager asked to resign

By GREG GILES NEWS EDITOR VENICE GONDOLIER

City Manager Isaac Turner's performance evaluation was added to next week's Tuesday council agenda, following a request by a sitting council member last week for Turner's resignation.

Council Member Bob Daniels met with Turner on Thursday to offer him a separation agreement calling for nine months' severance pay equal to \$111,375, plus accrued sick pay and all paid holidays, as well as health and life insurance for the same period. He hoped Turner would decide within 24 hours to accept the offer, but that's not what happened.

Daniels said the city needs a manager who is more responsive to council and who will carry through on its directives in a timely manner.

Daniels, who is neighbors with Turner in Willow Chase, said it wasn't personal, just business.

"Nobody ever enjoys this type of thing," he said. "All throughout the election citizens brought up Mr. Turner's performance. Citizens are demanding action now, not next year."

He used Tuesday's special meeting as an example of the city administration dragging its feet on myriad issues.

"Today we were supposed to make a decision on health insurance and (consolidation of) advisory boards," Daniels said. "No decision was made because information was lacking or more study needs to be done. Mr. Turner had to be reminded changes to health plans (under discussion) today were to be implemented immediately, not in 2012. People want relief now."

Daniels said he was invited to the meeting by a group. Longtime Mayor Dean Calamaras and former Council Member Earl Midlam accompanied him to the meeting on Thursday.

"The ball was put into his court," Midlam said. "We are here to help the community and its employees. The infrastructure is falling apart. A lot of issues are not being taken care of, period. There are some major challenges to keep that budget down and there is definitely a difference in philosophies" on how to get there.

The meeting came as a surprise to Turner.

"To the degree Mr. Daniels is concerned with meeting goals and objectives ... I concur it's not only his right but his responsibility," Turner said. "They have every right to get them done quickly. We have got to get them results. I look forward to that overall discussion.

"I've been very pleased working with (Mayor John) Holic. He's working to bring the community together. I want to help ... to be a part of that."

Holic seemed taken aback by the developments.

“I don’t know where he (Daniels) got the authority to do it,” Holic said. “I am trying to not be a micromanager with the staff, and I’m not going to be that way with the councilmen, either.

“This is not where I wanted to be at this point. I thought we were going to focus on some other issues. I did say during the campaign that we are a charter form of government where the city manager does the work and we are the overseers. I said if he isn’t able to do that, I would turn around and ask council to replace him. I have not asked council to do that.

“It is what it is. We will deal with it.”

Turner, the first black city manager of Venice, was hired on Feb. 10, 2009. The city employs a somewhat informal evaluation process for its city manager. According to the city clerk’s office, only three evaluation forms were completed by council members in 2009, all giving Turner high grades for his performance.

Only two evaluations were provided by the clerk’s office this year, although Daniels said he has reason to believe there are more.

In October, Council Member John Moore gave Turner mostly “fully satisfactory” ratings, but former Council Member Sue Lang, the day after losing her seat, wrote a scathing evaluation of Turner, giving him all “unsatisfactory” ratings.

Turner felt obliged to respond.

“Almost all of the comments on Ms. Lang’s assessment are related to items which were formally approved by the majority of city council members, but opposed by Ms. Lang. (Her) assessment included numerous inaccuracies.”

He blamed Lang for interfering with the city manager’s functions, including resurrecting the issue of city maintenance of county roads — an issue city officials would rather leave alone.

The city manager’s performance evaluation is scheduled to be considered next Tuesday, Jan. 25, at council’s regular meeting at 1:30 p.m. at city hall.

ggiles@venicegondolier.com