

# Daniels admonished, Turner under Fire

By GREG GILES NEWS EDITOR VENICE GONDOLIER

In an emotional public meeting, Venice City Council on Tuesday agreed to review the performance of its city manager in two weeks. Mayor John Holic began the meeting by admonishing Council Member Bob Daniels for meeting privately with City Manager Isaac Turner Jan. 13 to ask him to resign, albeit with a generous severance package. Former Council Members Earl Midlam and former Mayor Dean Calamaras were also present at that meeting.

Holic said council did not authorize the meeting, and added he didn't condone Daniels' actions.

"No one person is more powerful than the other. We are a council of seven, each with an equal vote. (This) is not a private corporation, and we do not pay off employees who we are not satisfied with, and cover up the facts from the public."

Holic apologized on behalf of council to Turner "for the improper methods used" and said he hoped "we can all move on from here."

Daniels apologized to council for forcing the issue, but stood his ground in seeking Turner's resignation, stating Turner had lost the support of the community.

Daniels said he was trying to avoid a public spectacle, so he suggested Turner agree to leave "rather than having details and emotions drug to another public forum."

Turner was twice previously terminated from the position of city manager, both times while at Ormond Beach.

"In no way was I trying to be the sole person to seek his resignation, but only to echo strong citizen concerns and present a less controversial course of action if he desired it," Daniels said. "I was not trying to circumvent the other members of council and if that is what is construed, I apologize as that was not my intent."

Daniels said the major issues are "leadership, judgment and his (Turner's) lack of urgency in responding to city issues."

In a packet of information he made available at the beginning of the meeting Daniels cited two dozen instances of what he characterized as Turner's lack of judgment, including not bringing to council a business proposal to grow crops on airport property that could be converted to jet fuel; a still-unresolved local preference bid policy; insistence on the use of consultants despite council's directive to avoid them; his handling of the police chief's removal and ensuing search; and stalling on issues such as weekly trash pickup, employee health care and numerous budgetary items.

He also questioned Turner's meal reimbursements, documented on 21 occasions in 2010 with council members and a few staffers. Daniels called for an investigation into whether one of those lunches was a Sunshine violation.

Turner met on June 18, 2010, at Captain Eddie's Restaurant with then-Mayor Ed Martin and current Vice Mayor Kit McKeon "to determine agenda issues," according to a travel expense voucher submitted to the city by Turner that lists all three names on it. A meeting by two sitting council members talking about upcoming agenda items outside a publicly noticed meeting would be a Sunshine violation.

Daniels maintains that is proof a Sunshine violation took place, or at least creates the perception of one. He demanded City Attorney Bob Anderson look into the matter.

It didn't turn out to be the smoking gun some thought it was. Turner had an easy explanation. He said he met with McKeon for lunch that day, and then after his meeting with McKeon ended, got up and went over to another table on the opposite side of the

restaurant and sat down with Martin. He remembered the meeting, he said, because it was “odd to get up from one table and go to another” to avoid a Sunshine violation. Turner produced another form — this time for a lost receipt that documents the same lunch date, but with only McKeon’s name on the form. The meal voucher form Daniels referred to, according to Turner, mistakenly implied all three met together at the same time.

The explanation didn’t divert Daniels from his chief argument — that it showed questionable judgment in that it could be perceived as an effort to persuade or count votes. And, he said, it’s a waste of taxpayer funds.

“The city manager spent over \$400 on lunches with council members who are retired and have flexibility in their schedule to meet other than during the lunch hour. It shows poor judgment in these hard economic times and poor use of taxpayers money.” Daniels said. “No wonder our city employees are upset with city government wasting dollars,” he said, referring to a tentative contract that was rejected two weeks ago by city workers unhappy with the city’s management.

Daniels made a motion seeking Turner’s immediate termination. But his fellow council members objected, saying they needed more time to study the documents before making such an important decision. McKeon said he didn’t want to undertake such a discussion unless all council members were present. John Moore was absent Tuesday.

Council voted 4-2 to postpone taking action on the motion until Feb. 8. Council Member Jim Bennett joined Daniels in voting not to postpone, out of consideration for the people in the audience who wanted to speak on the issue, he said. Audience comment was taken.

“If there’s one thing I’ve heard very loudly” from the public, said Council Member Jeanette Gates, “it’s they are very concerned with the way this was done. We need to heed the advice of citizens and do this properly.”

ggiles@venicegondolier.com