

OUR VIEW - VENICE GONDOLIER

No loose cannons on the ship of state

The three people elected to Venice City Council in November promised new ideas and a new attitude. In just two months we have already seen some of those new ideas and applaud council for some fresh thinking, even though we don't necessarily think all the ideas are good ones.

And we have felt a sense of urgency about tending to business that makes a nice break from the prior version of council, which we thought spent way too much time debating airport issues and comp plan language and not enough making sure the rest of the city's responsibilities were being seen to.

But even in the spirit of getting things done, we are extremely troubled by the meeting Council Member Bob Daniels had last week with City Manager Isaac Turner.

Daniels is a "do it now" kind of guy. Though we endorsed him, we expressed concern before the election that he might have a tendency to micromanage city staff, a criticism often leveled at former members and one he said he would avoid.

And arguably he did when, accompanied by former Mayor Dean Calamaras and former council member Earl Midlam, he offered Turner a severance package and asked him to resign. Whatever you want to call it, though, it's worse than calling up a department head and telling him how to do his job. Much worse.

A popular refrain at election time is that government must be run like a business. While government often can be more businesslike, there are fundamental differences between the two types of entities that sometimes get lost on people who make a transition from the business world to government. One of those differences — limitations on authority — may have escaped Daniels, who needs the support of at least three other council members to accomplish anything.

It's unclear why Daniels took it upon himself to approach Turner, or what involvement Midlam and Calamaras had. We know Turner's continued employment hasn't been discussed at a council meeting and we have no reason to believe that there have been talks behind closed doors, in violation of the Sunshine Law. Daniels and Midlam told us there have been rumblings of dissatisfaction with Turner in the community and it seems to many that it's time for new leadership, so the meeting was held.

And that could be the case. While we think Turner has done a competent job — and that he was working, until November, under a council that posed its

own challenges — he has not been a dynamic leader and has made a few missteps. He serves at the pleasure of council, however, not any single member. It's up to council as a whole to decide whether to retain or fire him, and on what terms. Daniels is free to make a motion in either direction, but not to attempt an end run around the other six elected council members and try to persuade Turner to quit on his own. And we hope they let him know he has vastly exceeded the terms of his job description.

Turner took some heat over the way he handled his investigation into former Police Chief Julie Williams. Little of what he found was made public, a practice that's justifiable in the case of lower-ranking city employees but not its top law enforcement officer. Now that he has destroyed his notes, based on legal opinions that they weren't public records, we'll likely always be in the dark about Williams' downfall.

Daniels similarly may have been trying to deal with Turner out of the public eye. If so, the effort has backfired, and deservedly so. We can't envision a circumstance in which it would ever be appropriate for one member of a governmental body to unilaterally meet with an employee to seek his or her resignation before the entire body has had a chance to discuss it.

Daniels owes apologies to Turner, his fellow council members and city residents. And he should pledge to respect the role each of them plays in the operation of the city.

Daniels' desire to shake things up and get things moving is admirable, but alienating city staff and the other six council members isn't going to fix anything. He has to remember that he's not the boss — he's only oneseventh of the boss.