



10210 E Sprague Ave ♦ Spokane Valley WA 99206  
509.720.5000 Fax: 509.720.5090 ♦ cityhall@spokanevalley.org

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May 8, 2024

Via email: amerkel@spokanevalleywa.gov

Al Merkel

Mr. Merkel:

The purpose of this letter is to inform you that the investigation of allegations that you engaged in inappropriate and harassing behavior creating a hostile work environment is now complete. The summary of the investigator's findings is that you engaged in repetitive communications and behaviors directed at City employees that were disrespectful and hostile. Examples of such behaviors include displays of anger, yelling, invading personal space, and blocking exit routes of others while you were yelling at them. Additionally, you have been overheard belittling staff to others, including but not limited to referring to employees as "incompetent," "not knowing what they are doing," and "not running things right." Taken together, these behaviors were found to have created an environment of fear and intimidation. While the report does not conclude you were motivated by gender bias or another characteristic prohibited by the Washington Law Against Discrimination, it nonetheless finds that your behavior disrupts staff's work and has caused many staff members to feel afraid and intimidated at work.

This letter is also intended to offer you an opportunity for us to personally meet at 8:30 a.m. this Thursday, May 9<sup>th</sup>, so I can present you with the findings of this investigation and give you an opportunity to relay information to me that you believe controverts the investigator's findings or is otherwise important regarding this matter. At this meeting you may also explain, in your view, what, if any, actions should be taken to ensure a productive work environment for employees. I will carefully consider the information you present while determining how best to proceed. You may have representation with you at the meeting, however, our meeting will not be open to the general public.

You may provide information to me for consideration in writing as well. If you choose to exercise this option, I request your response be received prior to May 16, 2024, so that I may timely bring this matter to a close. In the meantime, the current measures providing you with a separate space at City Hall on the first floor and designating your sole points of contact as me, Deputy City Manager Erik Lamb, and Human Resources Director John Whitehead will remain in place. These measures will allow you to continue to fulfill your role as a City Councilmember.

If you have any questions, please contact me.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "John Hohman".

John Hohman  
City Manager

cc: John Whitehead, Human Resources Director