



May 7, 2025

To Whom It May Concern

The current morale in the Planning & Zoning Department has fallen to an all time low over the course of the past two months. I feel that this situation is currently felt in every department in Washington County government. I believe it is due to the actions and attitude of the Washington County Prosecuting Attorney, and a lack of intervention and direction from the Washington County Board of County Commissioners.

In the P&Z Department we no longer know what our job duties are, what we can or are allowed to do or say to the public, or how to execute the duties we believe still exist. We have no direction from our immediate supervisors, the Board of County Commissioners. We have received directives from the Washington County Prosecutor as to what he believes we are allowed to do, without directive from the Board of County Commissioners for confirmation. The standard operating procedures that have guided and governed the P&Z for many, many years have been, "Changed" or "Put on Hold" for an indeterminate time by the Prosecuting Attorney, again without directive from the Board. We have been told we have been incorrectly interpreting the County Code and thus doing this wrong for over 20 years. This "interpretation" of our code is in direct violation of what the citizens involved with creating the code in the beginning, intended. Thus,

leaving the staff unable to do even the simplest of tasks due to not knowing what tasks or information we are allowed to give out to the public.

The working environment in the office has become one of frustration and confusion. Even when asked for input from County staff, that know their job, and have done the job successfully for some time, that information has been ignored and the staff have been berated and harassed for giving it. Veiled threats directed at staff have been made because of such presentation of information that may contradict information or opinion of the Prosecuting Attorney.

On one occasion the Prosecutor came into the office with an individual who is allegedly filing suit against the County. While in the P&Z office he handed staff a document and stated, "This permit will be issued, the case has been settled, there will be no arguing or discussion about it!" The document had the Prosecutors signature and the individual filing the action signature. Nowhere on the document was the Board of County Commissioners signatures. Thus, leaving P&Z staff questioning the validity of the demanded action, and who the Washington County Prosecutor represents. Not to mention leaving staff wondering if we comply with the Prosecutors demands without a signed directive from the Board outlining the stated demands, will we be held liable if the situation goes sideways.

For the five (5) plus years I have worked for Washington County Planning & Zoning, we have always adhered to the County Code and State Statute in how we do business. We have always been very careful as to information and procedures coming out of our office. For this we have been challenged, threatened, and verbally abused at times by the public. Such is the nature of our job, and we acknowledge and accept this without reservation. Yet we always believed that the Board, our immediate supervisors, trusted us to do our jobs correctly, believed in us and what we do, and had our backs if we did everything by the code. As well, we believed that the Board valued our experience, knowledge, expertise and opinions on issues in our department. This, sadly, is not the current environment we have to work in. Yes, we at times, made mistakes. But no more or less than any county staff. We admitted to those mistakes when we made them and did all we could to right them. And at no time in my memory, did we violate the county code. At least not knowingly.

I have always been proud to serve this county. I grew up here and have returned here to live out my retirement after fifteen years in law enforcement and another twelve years in code enforcement. I currently do not still feel that way. I have worked in government most of my adult life in some capacity and have seen good

and bad. Unfortunately, what I and my fellow P&Z staffers are living in, is the worst I have experienced in all those years of service.

To summarize, the current environment in the Planning & Zoning Department, (and the entire Courthouse in my opinion), and the morale therein, is so tense and depressed that working has become drudgery. We are still working in our respective positions only because we care about our county and the people living here. Even though the hostile working environment has started to manifest itself in health issue and concerns among staff, we still feel compelled to stay and do our best under these conditions. We believe that the core population of our county wants to preserve our current way of life. We believe that the changes that are being pushed through will destroy our current way of life, violate the County Comp Plan, and the County Code and possibly state statute. That being said, we would proceed with operations in the department in whatever manner the Board of County Commissioners direct. But we must have those directives in writing with the signatures of the seated County Commissioners on the directive. In this way we have confirmation that this is the will of the Board, and we will be covered by the County in the event anything goes wrong. We believe the Prosecuting Attorney does not have the legal ability to make demands on our department apart from the Board, nor does he have the right to demand and harass the staff.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Charles Downey", with a large, stylized loop at the end.

Charles Downey

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