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Berkeley eliminates deputy supervisor position, moves Hehn

By Brenda Rindge

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Hehn

Less than 10 months after Supervisor Bill Peagler took the reins in Berkeley County and brought in several new department heads, County Council on Wednesday voted to eliminate one of those positions.

After a nearly 90-minute closed session to discuss “employment, demotion, discipline or release of an employee,” council voted 7-1 to eliminate the deputy supervisor of Operations position held by Marc Hehn. Peagler was not at the meeting due to illness.

Councilman Steve Davis, who cast the dissenting vote, did not return a call for comment Thursday.

Multiple attempts to reach Hehn failed. County spokesman Michael Mule said Hehn was in an all-day meeting Thursday, but a statement released by the county “speaks for itself.”

According to the statement, Hehn will become the county’s manager of Special Projects, a newly created job, and will report directly to Peagler. The directors of the engineering, water and sanitation, and planning and zoning departments — which formerly reported to Hehn — will now report directly to Peagler.

The statement says the changes “are expected to save the taxpayers over \$50,000.”

Hehn’s salary was \$106,658 and the vacant project manager salary is \$52,886, according to the county website. An exact figure for Hehn’s salary will be determined by the council Finance Committee.

According to the statement, the change was necessary due to projects such as Volvo and the Sheep Island Interchange.

“It’s no secret that we have \$1 billion worth of new projects that we did not have when I took office on Jan. 1,” Peagler said in the statement.

“This is a great problem to have, but one we must tackle to most effectively and efficiently run county government. While we have been working double and triple time to ensure these major projects move to fruition quickly, we believe an internal structural change can help Berkeley County continue to stay ahead on these projects.”

The only item on the agenda for the special meeting Wednesday besides the executive session was “termination of an employee.”

The motion made by Councilman Josh Whitley after the closed session was “to accept the administration’s proposal of elimination of the deputy supervisor position and the new proposal of salary to be considered by council’s finance committee.” Whitley declined to comment Thursday.

“The press release may speak for itself from those that were absent from the meeting, but it certainly doesn’t speak for Councilman Whitley’s motion, my second, or for Council,” Councilman Tommy Newell said.

“Council saw problems and we are continuously working to address them.”

Hehn was one of several new department heads brought in by Peagler, the former mayor of Moncks Corner, when he took office in January.

At the time, some questioned Peagler’s choice because Hehn had been forced out as the director of Berkeley County’s Water and Sanitation Authority a decade earlier.

In a termination letter to Hehn on July 8, 2005, then-Supervisor Jim Rozier cited Hehn’s management style, complaints from staff and a lack of trust in Hehn.

Rozier wrote that Hehn intentionally provided incorrect information on a project, which could have cost the county \$500,000 in grants. The letter says it was hand-delivered, but there’s a note in Hehn’s file that he wasn’t given the letter, according to county attorney John O. Williams.

In a resignation agreement signed July 12, 2005, Hehn, who had worked for the county for 20 years, “waives all claims and rights to any past, present, or future position of employment with the County, and agrees not to apply for employment with the County in the future.”

In January, Peagler defended Hehn’s hiring, saying, “Mr. Hehn did not apply for or seek employment with the County; I appointed him. With over 42 years of experience in public service, Mr. Hehn is a seasoned veteran and consummate professional in whom I have great confidence.”

Peagler also came to Hehn's defense when Hehn was Moncks Corner town administrator, a position he held from 2007 until the end of last year.

In 2010, Moncks Corner Town Council took a vote of no confidence in Hehn, but at the time, Peagler said Hehn was doing a good job and that, since the town has a strong-mayor form of government, Council's action "has no effect whatsoever."

"Mr. Hehn has my confidence, and that is all that matters," Peagler said in 2010.

Hehn also served as Dorchester County administrator from 1979 to 1984.

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