



Letters to the Editor, Jan. 26

Posted at 12:01 AM

Principled leadership ousted

For nearly a decade, Chris Dodson served honorably and productively as program manager of the Ashland Senior Center.

It became uncomfortably apparent that the parks and recreation commissioners, their director, Michael Black, and Superintendent Rachel Dails had adopted a dramatically different “vision” regarding Ashland’s seniors. It featured a reduced service program that charged fees and probably included abandonment of the Senior Center “home.”

Why the city leadership chose to move aggressively against a very successful, even compassionate senior program is still extremely hard to fathom.

But given that new policy, it became clear to the city leadership that they would be resisted by the longtime program director, Chris Dodson, who objected to service cutbacks, the threatened move into an unwelcoming new location (The Grove), and the concept of “cost recovery” (as though seniors were a “product” to extract revenue from).

The seniors suddenly, desperately needed an advocate. And Chris — carefully observing all the strictures of her employment — accepted that role.

The city leaders were angered by her principled efforts to save and perpetuate the city services for seniors. She was attacked in public forums. And the decision was made to oust her.

In spite of the city’s contractual promises to Dodson to meaningfully consider her recommendations and to honor her due-process protection, the city obscured its motivation (to discard her), by “laying her off.” She could not be terminated without just cause. And there were no performance issues, so she was “laid off.”

Chris Dodson has filed a preliminary wrongful dismissal claim with the city, and intends to pursue remedies for her mistreatment.

It might be noted that the commissioners have appointed an ad hoc advisory committee formed in an effort to give them some cover in their ongoing determination to eviscerate the senior program.

For the committee was instructed by the commissioners not to even consider restoring the highly commended senior program of decades' duration, nor to consider rehiring its successful manager, which is exactly what it should do.

Claudia Ballard

Ashland



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