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PORT HUENEME SETS TEAM BUILDING PRECEDENT

(PORT HUENEME, CA) The Port Hueneme City Council met Saturday, October 31st to discuss Council relations in an effort to deal with issues stemming from inappropriate and verbally abusive behavior from a fellow City Council member during a recent closed session. In an effort to address this issue and others, a majority of Port Hueneme City Council members decided to provide direction and leadership in support of a cohesive effort to move the city forward during these difficult times.

“Three of us felt it was in the best interest of the citizens of Port Hueneme to confront some very destructive behaviors we were seeing more and more frequently, and with that abrogate the effects of the two members who have stymied the City from moving forward in a positive and meaningful direction,” said Port Hueneme Mayor Sylvia Muñoz Schnopp, who provided the impetus for the City Council to bring in a management consultant to conduct the teambuilding exercise for the entire group in an effort to turn the City in a positive direction. “Today’s exercise helped us set necessary boundaries and norms which we hope will help provide a safe work environment for Council members and employees so that we can collectively be effective in the running of City government.”

Although the meeting started with all five council members present, only three members remained at the end of the day: Mayor Schnopp, Council Member Jonathan Sharkey, and Mayor Pro Tem Doug Breeze. The two other members left separately shortly after the commencement of the meeting, with one escorted out of the meeting by Port Hueneme Police Officers after a verbal outburst where he threatened a fellow Council member. Neither Tom Figg nor Jim Hensley returned for the balance of the meeting, leaving the three remaining Council members to proceed on their own.

Mayor Pro Tem Doug Breeze commented, “Council Members Figg and Hensley have continuously refused to work as a team with the other Council members for the betterment of the City. Instead they take actions to hinder progress while also making unfounded accusations and veiled threats to staff, seriously harming morale and

productivity. And when the City Attorney advises us that their behavior poses a significant potential for substantial liability to the City, I feel it is our duty to call a stop to their actions.”

The teambuilding meeting was facilitated by management psychologist Dr. Bill Mathis and key issues were dealt with, including Council members’ concerns with regard to members disclosing confidential, closed session information, members creating hostile work environment for City staff, and undermining the work of the City Manager and City Attorney. The three Council members who stayed provided an abundance of detailed examples of the inappropriate behaviors they had witnessed over the past year, which have created potential liabilities for the City. They also discussed possible solutions and proactive efforts to provide constructive direction to staff.

Council Member Jonathan Sharkey said, “Any employer has to take allegations of workplace harassment seriously. Bullying cannot be tolerated, no matter who it comes from.”

Mayor Schnopp added that the exit of Figg and Hensley was not a surprise, but was unfortunate. “They showed us and the community they don’t want to govern the City,” she said. “Figg and Hensley have shown us time and again they don’t want to be team players, and with their actions Saturday, they’ve certainly failed not only the City, but have failed to uphold their commitment as Port Hueneme elected officials. It’s sad to think they have essentially thrown in the towel, and an indication that they have not taken the time to understand they represent the entire community and not just themselves or a small group of constituents. For those of us that remained, our commitment is to make the best decisions we can, using the best information we’re given, to move the City and organization forward in a positive direction, deal with the critical issues at hand, and provide a safe work environment for staff and the City Council. These were the main reasons for the exercise. While only three of us stuck it out for the entire day, I believe with the progress we made, we will be able to do just that.”

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SYLVIA MUÑOZ SCHNOPP
MAYOR