

It's Time to Ask the City Manager for his Resignation

Ian Thomas: 19 November, 2018

About a week and a half ago, I reached the conclusion that I have no confidence in the City Manager. My purpose in speaking to you now is threefold - to explain why we need to ask for his resignation, to request your support for this action as a unanimous Council decision, and to agree on our next steps.

I made my decision before Deputy Chief Schlude's email surfaced, announcing the shift of resources away from the Community Outreach Unit and the Downtown Unit. However, everything that has happened in the last week has confirmed my belief that it is our duty to the residents of Columbia at this time to ask Mr. Matthes to step down and to recruit and appoint a new City Manager.

The specific issue that pushed me across a line I have been contemplating for some time now was the City Manager's deeply disappointing response to Resolution R 23-18, which was passed unanimously by this City Council and directed him to "*Design a citywide community-oriented policing program for Columbia.*" As I said in my remarks at the October 1st Council meeting, the document drafted by Sgt. Robert Fox, but overseen by the City Manager, failed to present a new vision for the Columbia Police Department, failed to demonstrate an understanding of community-oriented policing philosophy, and failed to recognize the excellent work of Lt. Geoff Jones, Sgt. Mike Hestir, and the entire Community Outreach Unit (COU).

As I searched for something positive to take away from what I *wanted* to believe was a forward step in the process towards Columbia residents having the type of public safety program they have asked for, it gradually sunk in that doors had been shut and we had actually taken a big step backwards. I am now convinced that we will not make any further progress towards community-oriented policing as long as this City Manager and this Police Chief are in office – the Chief's vision for the Police Department, as he described it at last week's CPRB meeting, is particularly bleak. Beyond that, I believe the failure of leadership at CPD and the inability of the City Manager to intervene is creating a threat to public safety. As City Council, we have direct control over part of this dangerous situation and I urge you to join me in asking Mr. Matthes for his resignation immediately - this will also change the dynamic for Chief Burton.

I want to emphasize that I appreciate a lot of the work Mike Matthes has done over the last seven years. The poverty simulation he facilitated in 2015, which led to the "social equity" focus in our strategic plan showed vision and courage, and has had a positive impact on City government operations and in the city at large. He embraced our Vision Zero Policy, passed unanimously by the Council in 2016, and oversaw the creation of a strong Implementation Plan with funding attached. And he has supported the establishment and operations of the Columbia Community Land Trust, which is expanding affordable housing opportunities for low-income residents.

However, local government runs in cycles, I understand the average tenure for a City Manager is about six years, and it is clear to me that Columbia needs a change at this time. Mr. Matthes is not managing the Police Department in the way we have asked, and I do not accept the argument that he has no influence over Chief Burton, because he cannot fire him. The recent back-pedaling on what exactly is planned for the COU is either dishonest or evidence of utter chaos – if expanding community-oriented policing citywide was the plan, why was it not described in the Sgt. Fox's report? He has also failed to address leadership problems and a serious lack of transparency in the Water and Light Department.

In summary, I have now lost all confidence in Mr. Matthes, and cannot continue to serve on the Council without publicly stating my position.