

Dear City Council,

In my faith, we are taught that if we sin or make an error that we must endeavor to fix the harm we have caused. In this case, my error was in judgment which I voiced publicly. So it is fitting that now I publicly admit my error.

When I ran for Treasurer it was motivated by two factors. First, I was asked to run by Mayor Pritchard because he was worried about someone filing as a write-in who would act nefariously. Second, I saw an opportunity to give some form of public response to the idea of eliminating the position entirely. I publicly voiced both during the campaign and continued speaking about eliminating the office during my short tenure in office. It is specifically to the idea of eliminating the office that I now see I was in error.

What I said during the campaign was true. Many cities with our form of government do not have treasurers. Also, it is true that the position in Galesburg had devolved into a glorified money courier. Idealistically what I said is true but, practically it is nowhere near true.

When I took office, the Finance Department had already assumed the responsibility of doing the deposits because my predecessor stopped coming to the office. They did this with no legal authority to do so. I allowed it to continue with the understanding that records had to be reviewable by me and I reviewed the monthly reconciliations through the finance department's software. They accommodated this request.

In August, when I resigned due to a job opportunity I was pursuing, I signed a document giving the Finance Department the written legal authority to continue this as agents of the Treasurer's Office. Knowing I was leaving, I explained that once I was gone this legally would be null and void, however, it may justify the practice in the interim between Treasurers. I noted once the new Treasurer was appointed by the Mayor it would be up to them if the practice continued.

That was 1 year and 7 months ago... In that time, I have asked the Mayor directly at least twice when he was going to appoint someone. I have told the City Manager that he needed to get the Mayor to act on repeated occasions. No one has been appointed.

As a result, the City of Galesburg has violated every single provision of the city ordinance governing the Treasurer's Office and by extension compromised the financial security of the city. In addition, they have violated state law. 65 ILCS 5/3.1-35-65 stipulates the Treasurer's Report must be filed by that office. In 2018, the Finance Director signed the document and delivered it. She legally is not able to do so. As long as the Treasurer's Office is an office of the City of Galesburg, the Treasurer must review, sign, and deliver this in accordance with the law. Additionally, 40 ILCS 5/3-141 stipulates that the Treasurer must deliver a report by second Tuesday of May to the City Council on the condition of the Pension funds. To be clear, this was not being fulfilled when I took office. I was notified of it after the fact by the City Clerk and got it submitted in June to the city council. To my knowledge, it was not submitted to the City Council in 2018.

Why has someone, anyone not been appointed? Well, that is simple. In 2018 I was at a political event with the Mayor. I asked directly, when are you going to appoint someone? His response was that they (city administration) wanted it to “just fade away”. When speaking with some on the City Council, this was exactly what they said to me. They were lead to believe that it had just been absolved. However, the only legal way to do that is to eliminate the office. You have to remove it from the city ordinances and modify them. You cannot simply ignore it and choose not to do anything.

On many occasions, I spoke with the City Manager about the City’s need to put this on the ballot in 2018. At that point, they had a full year to do so. He would always beat around the bush about it or just stay quiet. Like so many things with our city, the City Manager chooses to try and keep things quiet instead of dealing with the issues before him.

I am speaking to you about this now because I believe I have given more than enough time for the Mayor and Administration to do the right thing. I am doing it because in light of the issues of managerial integrity being displayed by the city administration, specifically in regards to Lisa Wilson’s case. I do not want our city to continue to operate in a manner that is financially reckless and ethically corrupt.

I believe that the lack of integrity in multiple facets has demonstrated that giving City Administration more power with less oversight is a very dangerous thing. At the minimum, a Treasurer must be appointed and they must assume the full duties of the office immediately. As soon as feasible, I believe the Finance Department should be moved to directly answer to an elected Full-Time Treasurer with the City Manager along with Mayor and City Council acting simply as a check by having access to records and reviewing actions. Alderman Fleming, you were right.

It is one thing to make a mistake or miss something. It is another to intentionally violate city ordinances and state law for over a year. With this and recent legal rulings, it is clear there is a culture in the City Administration that cares about “peace” and expediency instead of righteousness and justice. I am sorry for my part in allowing this travesty to present itself. All I can do is try to fix what has been done. I hope that you in the City Council will join me and take action.

Sincerely,

Elisha French

Former City Treasurer