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ALERT TOP STORY

JOE'S POLITICAL FIX

Holleman: Maplewood rings in new year with more political fighting

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By Joe Holleman

Political correspondent/columnist

Politics in Maplewood did not take a break for the holidays.

Several contentious issues have cropped up over the last three weeks: a mayoral election challenge; a mystery salary for the new city manager; and not one, but two ethics complaints.

On the ballot front, former Mayor Barry Greenberg said Wednesday he will mount a write-in campaign aimed at defeating incumbent Mayor Nikylan Knapper in the April municipal elections.

Supporters of Greenberg met Tuesday night to organize the campaign, which is starting off with the slogan “inclusion is for everyone.”

“The whole foundation of the mayor’s campaign back then was inclusion,” Greenberg said. “But since she’s been elected, it’s all been about her appointing her backers to committees and commissions.”

After serving 14 years as a Maplewood councilman, Greenberg was elected mayor in 2017. He lost a reelection bid in 2021 to Knapper, who got 58.3% of the vote.

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Underscoring some dissatisfaction with Knapper’s first term is the fact Sandi Phillips, a former council member who supported Knapper in her first race, is Greenberg’s campaign treasurer; and a key member of Greenberg’s campaign is Jon Erik Hanson, Knapper’s former treasurer.

Knapper declined to comment Wednesday about Greenberg entering the race.

Greenberg’s challenge is in no small part connected to the city’s recent **hiring of Amber Withycombe** as Maplewood’s new city manager.



Maplewood Mayor Nikylan Knapper.
David Carson, St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Withycombe is a close ally of Knapper, who has appointed both Withycombe and her husband, Joshua Kryah, to several city commissions. Withycombe has no experience working for a municipality and still is in the process of earning a master's degree in public administration.

Withycombe, who officially starts Thursday as city manager, could not be reached for comment.

Greenberg and others have been critical of what they labeled as a **secretive process used** to pick Withycombe. The job was not

posted in any professional publications and the field included only three candidates, all suggested by council members.

The previous city manager was Michael Reese, who resigned in October and was **paid about \$130,000** to leave his job without comment. Police chief Matt Nighbor has been serving as interim city manager since Reese departed.

On Tuesday, the Post-Dispatch filed a Missouri Sunshine records request for the salary that Withycombe will be paid as city manager. As of Wednesday evening, the city had yet to respond to the request.

The dueling ethics issues also have ties to Withycombe: Both complaints involve Councilwoman Chasity Mattox, the only council member who voted against hiring Withycombe at a Dec. 12 council meeting.

Mattox said that after the vote, Maplewood resident Brad Jackson posted disparaging personal remarks about her on a community Facebook page.

Jackson sits on both the city's Plan and Zoning Commission and the Sustainability Committee. He said he was appointed to both posts by Knapper.

"I'm politically active and I support the mayor, and I'll support her again," Jackson said. "But it's not like we hang out or anything."

Jackson said his post — which was taken down by the page moderator, who then blocked him from the site — was in response to criticisms directed at him by supporters of Mattox.

Mattox said she filed a complaint against Jackson because he is a member of the city boards. Then on Dec. 18, Mattox said she was told Jackson had filed a complaint against her.



Former Maplewood Mayor Barry Greenberg.
Joe Holleman

Jackson said he filed the complaint because Mattox, who represents the ward in which he lives, “is not fit to serve” on the council.

Mattox has referred further questions to her attorney, Bevis Schock.

“I don’t think this ethics complaint (against Mattox) has a lot of merit,” Schock said.

Schock said he had no further comment until the council makes a decision on Jackson’s complaint, because the situation “could very well end up in another court.”

Knapper said the decision to move quickly on investigating Jackson’s complaint against Mattox was required by city ordinances.

The mayor said the city has a defined process and timetable it must follow when a complaint is filed against an elected official.

“But we don’t have an ordinance” that deals with appointed officials named in ethics complaints, she said.

Knapper said the council currently is discussing the issue with the city attorney and the matter is slated for discussion during the work session of the Jan. 9 council meeting.

When asked about the Mattox-Jackson situation, Knapper said, “I don’t condone harassment of any kind for anyone.”



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