



DAVIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

www.davishistoricalsociety.org

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November 1, 2004

Davis City Manager Jim Antonen &
Members, Davis City Council
Davis City Offices
Davis, CA

Dear City Manager Antonen and City Council Members:

The Board of Directors of the Davis Historical Society (DHS) has voted unanimously to express to you its concern and dismay over Esther Polito's removal as staff to the Historical Resources Management Commission (HRMC).

We urge you to reconsider this action and to return Ms. Polito to her position.

We have been given to understand that this removal was prompted, at least in part, by three beliefs about her behavior that we think are either wrong or wrong-headed. If there are other reasons for her removal, we would appreciate hearing them.

First, some have claimed she has exercised undo influence on HRMC decisions. We respectfully disagree

A frequent observer of HRMC proceedings, who is not a member of the DHS Board, has written the assessment of Ms. Polito's behavior that we quote below. As sometimes observers of HRMC meetings and as observers of Ms Polito more generally, we concur with this observer's characterization:

At Commission meetings I've attended, Ms. Polito has been very low key and "non-partisan," to the extent even of a flat tone of voice, such that it was impossible to tell how she felt about things.

Although she does sit at the big table with the Commission, that's almost dictated by the Museum venue. She does not intrude herself into the presentations or deliberations, except to call the Commission's attention to something they needed to consider and such actions are infrequent. Otherwise she provided what I would consider well-prepared support in the form of complete answers to questions from the Commission, as well as background documentation.

Based on my experience of observing "staff support" of boards, commissions, and attorneys in State and other proceedings, I would rate Esther Polito exemplary in her support of the HRMC and the neighborhood associations.

I think it would be a terrible waste of the taxpayer's money to replace a hardworking staff member with extensive background in historical matters in Davis with someone very probably less experienced.

Second, we have heard that her removal is intended to allay *perceptions* of her behavior among some people as much as to respond to her actual behavior. If this is true, we need to say that you have a responsibility to act on real behavior and not on its mere perception by some people.

But, if you want to act on mere perception, be aware that there are large numbers of people who do not find Ms. Polito's behavior untoward. Quite the contrary, she is widely thought to be an outstanding and beyond-the-call-of-duty dedicated employee of the City who is utterly professional and judicious.

Last, we have heard that some people object to her as HRMC staff because she expresses and acts on a historic preservation ethic. This is a bizarre objection because the official policies of City of Davis are profoundly preservationist. We refer you to sections 40.13A.010 and 40.23.010 of the Davis City Code (attached).

If she did NOT by her speech and action support the policies stated in these sections she should be replaced, not the reverse. Let us not stray "through the looking glass" and into a wonderland where actions are construed to be the opposite of what they really are.

We very much appreciate your consideration of the concerns we express above.

Cordially,

John Lofland
Spokesperson for the Board of Directors of the
Davis Historical Society in the matter of Ms. Polito and the HRMC

Attachment: sections 40.13A.010 and 40.23.010 of the Davis City Code