

Middleburg Heights City Council fires law director, HR consultant

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Mayor Gary Starr read a statement just prior to City Council's termination of Law Director Gary Ebert, shown at right. (*Beth Mlady/Special to cleveland.com*)

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MIDDLEBURG HEIGHTS, Ohio -- At a contentious early morning meeting today, [Middleburg Heights City Council](#) fired Law Director Gary Ebert and human resources legal consultant Jazmyn Stover.

Council members voted 6-1 to terminate their services, with Councilman John Grech opposing the action.

In addition, council instructed the finance director to not authorize payment of any future work done by Ebert and Stover. Both attorneys work for Seeley, Savidge, Ebert and Gourash Co., LPA, in Westlake.

"I am concerned about not having a law director," Grech told [cleveland.com](#) when explaining his vote. "I thought they did a great job for us. I saw no reason to terminate them."

Mayor Gary Starr appointed Ebert to the position in April after [firing longtime law director Peter Hull in January](#) without explanation. Stover had been under contract with the city since June 2017.

City Council had requested since March that Ebert provide copies of unredacted legal documents related to [a now-settled \\$380,000 lawsuit that former police chief John Maddox waged against Starr and the city](#). Ebert cited attorney-client privilege, which he said never expires. It kept him, he said, from disseminating the documents directly to City Council; instead, he provided council members access in the finance director's office to various private investigators' reports and law firm invoices.

"To date, more than six months later, no member of council has contacted the finance director to review those bills," Ebert said in a memo provided to cleveland.com just prior to the meeting.

Starr defended Ebert and Stover, saying they performed their duties "with full transparency." He expressed concern about navigating through legal issues and economic development projects without a law director.

[A former assistant recently accused Starr of multiple incidents of sexual harassment](#), which could result in a lawsuit. An \$80,000 out-of-court settlement to former longtime safety director Sandra Kerber was paid after Starr terminated her in June 2017.

Council President Matt Castelli agreed that Ebert and Stover "did a wonderful job for the mayor."

"But we need to have a law director that represents all of us and that we can confide and trust in," Castelli stressed. "There have been several times that I have been misled."

Starr became loud and argumentative during the meeting, [claiming that council had not reacted to past and recent situations that he has brought to them involving himself, his family and former city employees](#). Castelli urged Starr to consult with the police chief if he feels crimes have been committed.

"Mr. Mayor, what have you done except get us into lawsuits that we've had to settle?" Castelli asked. "I do not believe it is your responsibility to investigate crimes, neither City Council."

Starr later asked Castelli if they could meet one on one to discuss moving forward. Castelli said he would have [council's special counsel, Joe Diemert](#), in attendance if they did.

"I feel concerned that sometimes I have been taped, to be very candid with you," Castelli told Starr, citing a feeling of "mistrust" that now exists in the city.