



Community Services Unit & Part-time Recreation Leaders Chapter

January 4, 2024

To: Members of the Berkeley City Council

From: Berkeley Public Employees Union, AFSCME Local One and Berkeley SEIU 1021 CSU/PTRLA

Re: Mismanagement of Public Works and Loss of Confidence in City Management

Our members in Public Works joined the City because they trusted that the Department, as overseen by Council, would continue to uphold progressive values and forward thinking policies and treat workers with dignity and respect. However, exciting and interesting work cannot be completed when vacancies are perpetuated by the City Manager's lack of transparency, certainty, accountability, leadership in retaining staff and including staff in policy decisions, and overall aversion to reality.

The City's unfunded infrastructure liability stands at nearly \$3 billion, a grave indictment of City Management. Their *mismanagement* of one of the City's most important departments continues unabated, and requires prompt corrective action by Council, including but not limited to, a new City Management team.

Lack of Transparency, Certainty and Accountability

Management's failures are most alarmingly demonstrated by the recent November "resignation" of the former Director of Public Works, Liam Garland, and the events leading to his departure, including the dismissal of Deputy Director Farid Javandel in May and the resignation of Deputy Director Andrew Brozyna in July of the same year. Public Works staff continue to operate without senior leadership and with little evidence that the timeline for a permanent replacement was considered at the time of Mr. Garland's departure. The City Manager has issued no statement regarding her faith in remaining Department leadership, nor a clear explanation for her decisions. Neither does it appear that the City Manager consulted with the Council as a whole about these decisions, which now jeopardize the City's entire infrastructure.

The lack of professionalism and communication following these departures is corrosive and demoralizing for staff. Vague public assertions of her need to seek "[confidence and](#)

[integrity](#)” in Public Works staff’s work product is a clear attempt to shift blame to workers and departmental leaders, and evade accountability at the level of City Management. Such tactics degrade staff confidence in the City Manager and deputies. Issues of confidence and integrity emanate from *incompetent City Management*, not hardworking staff.

If Berkeley expects to retain and attract staff, staff should not be forced to manage demoralizing, misleading, and vague communication from the City Manager and an unparalleled level of uncertainty in their positions and worth to the City. A City Department should not be managed by seeding fear and deep uncertainty.

Ultimately, according to the City Charter, the City Manager is accountable for the “efficient administration of all departments.” In this, she has fundamentally failed.

Lack of Leadership in Retaining Staff and Including Them in Policy Processes

Debilitating divisional vacancies as high as [32% in Public Works](#) leave staff unable to meet the basic needs of Berkeley residents, let alone the aspirational policy referrals from Council.

Staff sincerely want to implement Council aspirations, but need competent City Management who can retain staff at all levels, including inspiring, intelligent, and highly competent directors such as Director Garland, and the hundreds more unfilled critical positions.

If Berkeley truly aspires to be a leader in public policy implementation, the City Manager and Council must respect their staff, [reflect](#) national best practices where staff have a larger voice in the policy committee process, and connect staff expertise and capacity with sufficient budget allocations. Council and staff should perform assessments of all policy proposals through the policy committee process, considering: staff capacity, budget, estimated project duration and level of complexity. Department heads should weigh in and provide these reality checks for Councilmembers prior to adoption. The public deserves to know what is actually possible.

Staff should not be punished for Management's lack of leadership, including its historic underinvestment for capital needs and failure to retain staff. Staff are excited to build the City of the future, but cannot manage current demands without competent City Management.

Avoidance of Reality

A well-liked problem solver and leader, Mr. Garland served as a voice for the unmet needs of staff and resident services. His annual staff surveys yielded results for staff, providing laser focus on high-impact vacancies and creating new training opportunities to retain talent. Mr. Garland repeatedly stated in Off Agenda Memos in [2022](#) and [2023](#) to Council and the City Manager, that the department is understaffed and receives more directions and referrals from Council than can be currently processed as a result of the failed stewardship of Public Works by current City Management.

A responsible City Manager must work to address realities faced by staff, rather than ignore uncomfortable truths and dismiss messengers. Currently, staff cannot be honest and open about realities facing the City due to the arbitrary removal of Public Works leadership.

Our members are committed to re-building a strong and resilient Department of Public Works, but have no faith in their ability to do so with the current City Manager.

Sincerely,

Berkeley Public Employees Union, AFSCME Local 1

Berkeley SEIU 1021 CSU/PTRLA