

Hiawatha begins search for new chief of police

(KNZA)--The city of Hiawatha has begun the search for new chief of police as two commissioners respond to the termination of the former chief.

The Hiawatha City Commission voted Monday evening to advertise for the position.

In a surprise move at their December 27 meeting, the Commission voted 3-2 to terminate John Defore. No reason was publicly stated for the action.

Commissioners Dave Middendorf and Becky Shamburg, who cast the dissenting votes, again voiced their opposition to the decision and how the matter was handling at Monday's meeting.

Shamburg said she felt the vote was made on personal opinions, not on facts. "Chief Defore worked for Hiawatha almost ten years and in less than 2 ½ minutes his tenure was ended, all because the Mayor said he wasn't pleased with the chief and felt we needed to go in another direction. A direction, by the way, I still have know idea what that is. In my opinion, a tremendous mistake has been made. Three of our commissioners fired a police chief who has done nothing but improve our police department. More importantly from what i've heard, Chief Defore had the respect of the officers who he led, which makes for a better and more effective police force."

Middendorf said he was " dumbfounded and appalled " at the way Defore was terminated, saying it kind of reminded him of a lynching. " There was no notice prior to the meeting I was made aware of that there was a problem with the police chief and the continuation of his employment was going to be determined in the meeting. But yet three of the governing body were ready and willing to terminate the chief with no discussion of their justification prior to the vote. A decision of this significance by the governing body deserves careful consideration and discussion, and should not have been made in haste."

Middendorf and Shamburg said they felt an executive session should have been called so the entire commission could have been made aware of the Mayor's concerns with the police chief before the action was taken.

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