

News Tribune (Tacoma, WA)

March 1, 2005, Tuesday

Woodard's silence broke city rules; An investigation into the David Brame scandal finds ex-assistant police chief Catherine Woodard violated rules by ignoring the former chief's threats.

By Sean Robinson, The News Tribune

By doing nothing about her knowledge of death threats, domestic violence and sexual harassment, former Tacoma assistant police chief Catherine Woodard broke city rules, according to investigative findings released Monday.

The findings, last remnants of the city's yearlong administrative investigation of the David Brame scandal, close the book on official inquiries into the shootings of April 26, 2003, when police chief Brame fatally shot his wife Crystal and himself. Now they become fodder for the trail of lawsuits springing up in the wake of the scandal.

The documents reveal little new information about Woodard's actions; short conclusions by City Manager Jim Walton represent the only fresh material.

In the 340 or so pages of documents the city released, Woodard's name is blacked out in all references - but her name and her role in the scandal are a matter of public record. Her actions have been described at length in multiple investigations and media reports.

She no longer works for the city, having retired on disability in fall 2003. The city cannot discipline her in any way.

The findings are "preliminary," and will never be more than that, because Woodard didn't participate in the investigation. Like former City Manager Ray Corpuz, another key figure in the scandal, Woodard declined to be interviewed by investigators from the Washington State Patrol, who conducted the administrative inquiry on the city's behalf.

"Your inability to meaningfully participate in the review process prevents me from being fully informed on the various issues, completing my investigation and reaching reasoned final conclusions," Walton wrote in a Nov. 24 letter to Woodard. "Therefore, I have determined that I am unable to make any final findings/conclusions in reference to these allegations against you."

Because she declined to be interviewed, state investigators relied on interviews with other police department employees and Woodard's prior statements in a criminal investigation of the scandal, conducted in 2003 by the patrol and the state attorney general's office.

A summary of the city's findings:

- Woodard knew Brame sexually harassed Tacoma police detective Mary Herrman and tried to lure her into a sexual threesome with his wife. Woodard was the department's Equal Employment Opportunity officer, designated to handle harassment complaints, but did not confront Brame because she was afraid of him. Walton sustained the allegation.
- Woodard knew of death threats Brame made against his wife; Crystal Brame described them to Woodard in a phone call March 31, 2003. Woodard took notes of the conversation, but did not reveal them to anyone but David Brame and did not report them to a law enforcement agency. Walton sustained the allegation.
- Woodard knew of domestic violence incidents in the Brames' marriage dating to 1996, but did not notify city management or law enforcement. Walton sustained the allegation.
- Woodard removed documents from Brame's office and her office shortly after the April 26 shootings, and might have been responsible for shredding some of them. Walton sustained the allegation.
- Walton exonerated Woodard of a charge that she knew of Brame's failing job performance, but failed to tell anyone. Records show that she talked to Corpuz several times about Brame's troubles in the weeks before the shootings.

Attorneys tangling with the city in separate legal actions related to the scandal said the city's findings were no surprise.

"It's sort of like the mountain roared and produced a mouse," said Paul Luvera, the attorney representing Crystal Brame's family in a wrongful-death suit against the city.

"They had that information, they took forever to come up with the allegations – they took 10 months," he added. "And they didn't learn anything new as a result of it. Their approach has been cover-up, protecting self-interest and foot-dragging."

"It confirms what we already knew – that the chief EEO officer of the Tacoma Police Department knew of the harassment and allowed it to continue," said Cliff Freed, the attorney representing Herrman, who has filed a damage claim against the city.

"What that means is the city is admitting liability with respect to Ms. Herrman's claim of sex harassment."

Woodard refers all media inquiries to her attorney, John Wolfe, who did not respond to a phone message Monday.

The city's findings on Woodard were completed four months ago. Elizabeth Pauli, acting city attorney, said the delay in releasing the records to the public reflected negotiations with Woodard, who had the legal option to oppose disclosure.

While the incidents and names contained in the records have been publicly released before, the city's redactions are appropriate, Pauli said, reflecting exemptions to public disclosure laws that protect privacy and effective law enforcement.

"We felt our disclosures were consistent with the law," she said.

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