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Mayor issues statement for discussion at March 2 Commission meeting

Feb. 25, 2009—Mayor Dennis Mulder sent his City Commission the following statements which he hopes will be discussed during the next meeting of the Deltona City Commission (scheduled for March 2):

Following the last commission meeting and the revised memo regarding my intentions our legal staff has found that our actions were both legal and ethical, however I have prepared some comments for your consideration after much reflection on this issue.

- *I ran for office in order to bring a new kind of leadership to the City of Deltona. Any time that a political leader seeks to bring change, there will be those who wish to keep things stuck in the past, run by the same old-boy network that has run things for so long.*
- *I am a political novice. I was not inherently prepared for the caustic and petty partisan attacks that often come along with positions of political leadership. This experience as Mayor has been a rude awakening.*
- *As anyone would, I have had a very emotional response to personal attacks upon me, my fellow City Council members, and our families, launched by a small but vocal group of people who wish to bring our collective dreams for this town to a grinding halt.*
- *There has been a lot of criticism of our initiative, passed last week, to provide municipal support for those of us who are attacked in this manner. In a free society, the press has an exalted position. It must stand as the fourth estate, often the most important pillar of our form of government. The press's job is to stand as a watchdog over those of us who hold political power, and to inform the public of our actions. When we are wrong, it is their job to bring that to the public's attention. I believe that the press has partially done its job in this scenario.*
- ***It is a poor leader who allows the editorial pages to dictate policy.*** *However, it is an even worse leader who fails to consider the fact that the editorial pages can also be reflective of the conscience of a community. I have taken the criticisms made of my actions to heart, and I have reflected upon them in order to serve my constituents better.*
- *Prior to proposing the defamation measure, I sought advice from various individuals; however, **I made a rookie mistake.** I failed to reach outside of the community for opinions that would not be colored by the toxic political environment that brought about this measure in the first place.*
- *After reading the reactions by the media and by my fellow citizens, I determined that perhaps I had not considered the constitutional implications of such an action. Accordingly,*



using my own personal funds, I retained a law firm that specializes in First Amendment and constitutional issues to provide me with an objective analysis of these actions.

- I have their advice here in hand.
- I must say that upon reading this opinion, I was disappointed. This is not what I wanted to hear. I wanted to hear that it was possible for the City of Deltona to marshal its resources to defend those who have been attacked for merely wishing to serve the City's greater good. However, my attorneys have advised me otherwise.
- In a free society, often political leaders must face the reality that the First Amendment may stand as an impediment to their desire to deal with problems quickly, efficiently, and to their liking. In this situation, I had hoped that we could use this mechanism to have the City combat the distractions brought up by this small but vocal and mean-spirited partisan group, so that we could move forward with the business of governing Deltona in a manner that is most advantageous to the greatest number of its citizens.
- However much it may emotionally pain me to hear my family and colleagues attacked, it pains me even more to think that I could have unwittingly failed to consider the constitutional implications of my actions. Accordingly, I am taking my First Amendment attorney's opinion to heart and asking that the City Council immediately repeal the measure that we passed. In order to make this a great city, we must all begin on common ground, and that common ground is respect for the Constitution of the United States.
- We may disagree on how to spend municipal funds, or on small municipal projects. These are disputes and disagreements that are part of the normal democratic process. However, I will not allow this community to be divided on constitutional issues.
- I apologize for my error. I ask my political opponents **on the Commission** to forgive this mistake.
- I offer this apology and this repudiation of the measure of Feb. 16 as an indication that I am not only willing to work with my opponents and friends alike, to forgive this mistake, and believe me when I say that this has been a genuine learning experience. Accordingly, I ask them and all the members of the City Commission to join me in unanimously repealing this measure.

That being said I think someone should make a motion to repeal the action taken at the last regular commission meeting in regards to legal expenditures and that the city manager place on the agenda for the next commission meeting an agenda item discussing security and employee safety at work.

--Sincerely Mayor Dennis Mulder