

Ex-city manager, ex-mayor could be key witnesses if case goes to trial

BY CHRISTINA VEIGA
CVEIGA@MIAMIHERALD.COM

Former Homestead City Manager Mike Shehadeh will be the star witness if his former top lieutenant's lawsuit against the city ever goes to trial. Kelsay Patterson, an attorney for former Deputy City Manager Johanna Faddis, said he waited to file the suit until Shehadeh settled his own case with the city. The City Council recently agreed to pay Shehadeh \$250,000 to settle a wrongful termination claim.

Former Mayor Lynda Bell, now a Miami-Dade county commissioner, also will be a key witness, Patterson said.

A week ago, Faddis filed her own case in Miami-Dade Circuit Court, alleging that Homestead officials acted negligently, invaded her privacy, intentionally inflicted emotional distress and defamed her by releasing private text messages she exchanged with Shehadeh on her city-issued cell phone. She's asking for \$350,000.

City Attorney Richard Weiss did not immediately return a call for comment.

A wrongful termination claim that Patterson had threatened previously was not included in the lawsuit. Faddis was terminated in December 2009, according to a severance agreement she signed. In the agreement, she also agreed not to sue the city.

The case names each City Council member except for Mayor Steve Bateman. Patterson said that was an oversight because he didn't know the mayor also is a voting member of the council.

"It's possible we'll amend it to include him in the future," said Patterson.

But the suit targets Vice Mayor Judy Waldman for additional counts not brought against the other council members. Those counts include intentional infliction of emotion distress and defamation by implication, according to the lawsuit.

Patterson said Waldman seems to be the most outspoken about the text messages, while other council members "don't seem to be speaking at all."

Still, they are named in the suit because they are known to have received CDs of the personal messages, which were then distributed to the media.

"Those messages didn't accidentally find their way to these media people," Patterson said. "It was reckless on the part of those who had the material."

The messages on which the case centers were uncovered during an investigation of Shehadeh that the City Council initiated after a new majority was elected in November 2009.

In the messages, Shehadeh professed intimate feelings for Faddis, a married woman and his subordinate.

Through their attorneys, both Shehadeh and Faddis have denied ever having a relationship.

"You can only imagine these sorts of communications, just plastered and splashed all over South Florida, you can imagine what this could do to a marriage," Patterson said.

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