

August 21, 2024

**INVESTIGATION OF COMPLAINTS AGAINST WENDY COCHRANE
FINDINGS OF FACT AND CONCLUSIONS**

I. SCOPE OF INVESTIGATION

The Town of Berkley (the “Town”) received a series of complaints against former Town Treasurer and Board of Selectmen (“BOS” or “Board”) member and current Tax Collector Wendy Cochrane (“Ms. Cochrane”).

On April 1, 2024, Town Accountant Ashleigh Haslam (“Ms. Haslam”) emailed a complaint to Town Administrator Matthew Chabot (“Mr. Chabot”) regarding the behavior of Ms. Cochrane. (Exhibit 1) Ms. Haslam’s April complaint followed a prior email communication from February in which she expressed grievances against Ms. Cochrane and a desire for “structured communication.” (Exhibit 10) Next, on April 11, 2024, Assistant Town Administrator Holly Marchand (“Ms. Marchand”) submitted a complaint and affidavit regarding alleged “bullying, harassment, and intimidation” by Ms. Cochrane. (Exhibit 2) Lastly, on June 4, 2024, BOS member Jennifer Vincent (“Ms. Vincent”) emailed a complaint to BOS Chairwoman Tabitha McCrohan (“Ms. McCrohan”). Ms. Vincent’s complaint addressed the purported harassment of staff by Ms. Cochrane and requested an investigation. (Exhibit 3)

The Town of Berkley retained Discrimination and Harassment Solutions, LLC to investigate the allegations discussed above and to determine whether Ms. Cochrane violated the Town’s Policies. (Exhibit 4)

II. SUMMARY OF THE ALLEGATIONS

Ms. Haslam initially voiced concerns regarding Ms. Cochrane in an email dated February 14, 2024. (Exhibit 10) The February 14th email directly responded to an email from Ms. Cochrane that criticized Ms. Haslam to various Town employees; Ms. Haslam was not a recipient of the original email. In her response, Ms. Haslam stated that Ms. Cochrane had “created an environment that...has become uncomfortable and nearly unmanageable.” (Id.) Several months later, on April 1, 2024, Ms. Haslam expressed additional grievances against Ms. Cochrane in an email to Mr. Chabot. She detailed multiple incidents occurring in March 2024, which illustrated continued poor treatment by Ms. Cochrane. Ms. Haslam shared that the “challenges [with Ms. Cochrane] have led [her] to consider leaving.” (Exhibit 1)

On April 11, 2024, Ms. Marchand submitted a written complaint detailing months of escalating “beratement, verbal harassment, and blatant bullying” at the hands of Ms. Cochrane. (Exhibit 2) Most noteworthy among Ms. Marchand’s concerns was an incident that occurred on March 28, 2024. On that day, Ms. Marchand received an intrusive public records request

from Ms. Cochrane.¹ (Exhibit 11) Ms. Marchand began experiencing chest pains and went to the nearby Public Safety building to be evaluated. Under the impression that Ms. Marchand intended to report her for harassment, Ms. Cochrane went to the Public Safety building and initiated a verbal altercation with her in the vestibule of the Berkley Police Department (the “Department”). This incident was captured by security footage and documented in an incident report by the Department. (Exhibit 12 and Exhibit 13) Ms. Marchand states that she has “suffered insurmountable mental anguish and... minor physical health issues” as a result of Ms. Cochrane. (Exhibit 2)

On June 4, 2024, Ms. Vincent, a newly elected member of the Board, contacted Ms. McCrohan, chair of the Board, requesting “information on initiating a harassment investigation.” (Exhibit 3) Ms. Vincent reported that she had “witnessed and listened to elected officials and appointed staff experience a rising level of what I would deem as bullying and harassing behavior” by Ms. Cochrane. (Id.) Ms. Vincent later shared messages indicating similar (firsthand) treatment by Ms. Cochrane during her campaign for a position on the Board. (Exhibit 8)

III. EVIDENCE CONSIDERED

A. WITNESSES INTERVIEWED²

1. Heather Almy
2. Joe Freitas
3. Ashleigh Haslam
4. Holly Marchand
5. Tabitha McCrohan
6. Jo-Ellen Senechal
7. Jennifer Vincent

All interviewees were advised that retaliation against any witness or party for participation in the investigative process is prohibited. Interviewees were urged to report any retaliation. Interviewees were also reminded of their obligation to be truthful.

B. DOCUMENTS RELIED UPON

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| Exhibit 1 | A. Haslam Complaint – April 1, 2024 |
| Exhibit 2 | H. Marchand Complaint – April 11, 2024 |

¹ See paragraph 10 in the Findings and Conclusions section below for more detail. In short, multiple interviewees report that Ms. Cochrane submitted incessant, superfluous public records requests to the Town. (Interviews of H. Almy, H. Marchand, and J. Senechal)

² None of the interviewees agreed to have their statements recorded. In addition, Ms. Cochrane did not agree to be interviewed by this investigator. (Exhibit 19)

Exhibit 3	J. Vincent Complaint – June 4, 2024
Exhibit 4	Town of Berkley Workplace Violence Policy
Exhibit 5	Text Messages Between A. Haslam and W. Cochrane
Exhibit 6	Text Messages Between Father/Sister of A. Haslam and W. Cochrane
Exhibit 7	Text Messages Between H. Marchand and W. Cochrane
Exhibit 8	Facebook Messages Between J. Vincent and W. Cochrane
Exhibit 9	February 13, 2024 Letter from J. Freitas and Executive Session Notes
Exhibit 10	February 2024 Emails Between A. Haslam, W. Cochrane, et al.
Exhibit 11	March 28, 2024, W. Cochrane Information Request Form
Exhibit 12	March 28, 2024, Berkley Police Department Security Footage
Exhibit 13	April 2, 2024, Berkley Police Incident Report
Exhibit 14	April 12, 2024 Letter from M. Chabot Re: Investigation
Exhibit 15	June 2024 Emails Between H. Marchand, T. McCrohan, et al.
Exhibit 16	June 2024 Emails Between J. Vincent, W. Cochrane, et al.
Exhibit 17	June 4, 2024 Emails Re: Master Key
Exhibit 18	June 4, 2024 Email Re: Report of Threat
Exhibit 19	Emails with Counsel for Ms. Cochrane
Exhibit 20	Code of Conduct

IV. POLICIES

The following sections are excerpted from the Town of Berkley Workplace Violence Policy (Exhibit 4):

III. POLICY

It is the Policy of the Town to promote a safe environment for its employees. The Town is committed to working with all employees to maintain a work environment free from violence, threats of violence, harassment, intimidation, and other disruptive behavior. Violence, threats, harassment, intimidation, and other disruptive behavior in the workplace will not be tolerated. All reported incidents will be taken seriously and will be dealt with appropriately. Such behavior can include not only acts of physical violence, but also oral or written statements, gestures, or expressions that communicate a direct or indirect threat of physical harm...

IV. DEFINITIONS

Workplace Violence includes, but is not limited to, intimidation, threats, physical attack, or property damage and includes acts of violence committed by Town employees, or clients, customers, tenants, relatives, acquaintances, or strangers against Town employees in the workplace.³ Violent behavior can include actions or communications in persons, by

³ Whether elected or appointed officials are considered “employees” within the Town’s policies is arguably murky. However, the Town’s policies include protection from acts of violence by “clients, customers, tenants,

letter or note, telephone, fax or electronic mail. Incidents of workplace violence may be acted out individually or take place between employees and other employees, clients/residents, acquaintances/ partners or the general public.

Intimidation is engaging in actions that include, but are not limited to, stalking or behavior intended to frighten, coerce, or induce duress.

Threat is the expression of intent to cause physical or mental harm. An expression constitutes a threat without regard to whether the party communicating the threat has the present ability to carry it out and without regard to whether the expression is contingent, conditional, or future. Threats need not be made in person, but can be made through any means, including but not limited to via telephone or electronically (e.g., via the Internet, email, social media sites or blogs, etc.).

The following sections are excerpted from the Town of Berkley Code of Conduct Policy (Exhibit 20):

111. CODE OF CONDUCT

All Town elected and appointed officials are expected to act honestly, conscientiously, reasonably and in good faith at all times having regard to their responsibilities, the interests of the Town and the welfare of its residents.

The Town elected and appointed officials must refrain from communicating or acting in a disrespectful, abusive and/or threatening manner towards members of the community, other elected or appointed officials, the Town Manager/Administrator or Town Staff.

D. Conduct in Relation to Town Staff

- Treat all staff as professional and respect the abilities, experience, and dignity of each individual.
- Never publicly criticize an individual employee or a department. Concerns about staff performance should only be made to the Town Administrator through private communication.
- Officials who interact with Town staff must do so in a respectful manner and understand employees should not be expected to take direction from any individual official on any matter.

relatives, acquaintances, or strangers...” Regardless of whether Ms. Cochrane may be subject to adverse action for violating the policy, the Town must protect its employees from this behavior.

V. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Having considered all the evidence and drawing the appropriate inferences therefrom, based on a preponderance of the evidence, I make the following findings and conclusions:

A. FINDINGS

1. Matt Chabot has served as Berkley's Town Administrator since August 2023. (Interview of H. Marchand) Ms. Marchand is the Assistant Town Administrator; she was hired by the Town in April 2023 and was promoted to her current role in September 2023. (Id.) Ms. Haslam is the Town Accountant and has been employed by the Town since February 2023. (Interview of A. Haslam) Wendy Cochrane is the current Tax Collector for the Town and was formerly the Treasurer and a member of the Board. (Exhibit 3) Jo-Ellen Senechal ("Ms. Senechal") works directly for Ms. Cochrane as the Assistant Tax Collector; she has been in this role for two years. (Interview of J. Senechal) Heather Almy ("Ms. Almy") has worked as the Town Clerk since 2021; she has been employed by the Town for fourteen years in total. (Interview of H. Almy) Ms. Vincent was elected to the Board in May 2024; she was previously a member of the Berkley School Committee. (Interview of J. Vincent) Tabitha McCrohan ("Ms. McCrohan") is the current Chair of the Board and previously served on the Town's Finance Committee. (Interview of T. McCrohan) Joe Freitas ("Mr. Freitas") has been a member of the Board since May 2023; he previously served as chair of the Board and as a member of the Town's Finance Committee. (Interview of J. Freitas)
2. In May of 2023, BOS elections took place in the Town. Ms. McCrohan and Mr. Freitas were elected to the Board alongside Ms. Cochrane, an existing member. (Interview of H. Marchand). Ms. Cochrane and Mr. Freitas have been friends for over twenty years. (Interviews of J. Freitas, T. McCrohan, and J. Vincent) Despite being neighbors with Ms. McCrohan, Ms. Cochrane does not share similar collegiality with her; once Ms. McCrohan was elected, Ms. Cochrane immediately started to "badmouth" her. (Interviews of H. Marchand and T. McCrohan) Approximately three months later, Mr. Chabot was hired as the Town Administrator, and Ms. Cochrane's friction in the workplace expanded to include him. (Interview of H. Marchand)
3. Multiple interviewees report that Ms. Cochrane is "not a fan" of Mr. Chabot and Ms. McCrohan and believes they are "working against her." (Interviews of J. Freitas and J. Vincent) Ms. Marchand concedes that she had her doubts about Mr. Chabot's competency when he started as Town Administrator but asserts that her critiques were constructive and based on him being inexperienced in the role. She shared these concerns with Ms. Cochrane and Mr. Freitas in the fall of 2023. (Interview of J. Freitas and H. Marchand) Ms. Marchand portrays Ms. Cochrane's treatment of Mr. Chabot as less well-intentioned. She reports that Ms. Cochrane bragged that she was going to "light Matt [Chabot] up" before a BOS meeting on January 3, 2024. (Interview of H. Marchand; Exhibit 2) Ms. Cochrane also publicly made comments about the Board during a BOS meeting on January 3, 2024, and referred to it as the "worst Board" on

which she had ever served. (Interviews of J. Freitas, H. Marchand, T. McCrohan, and J. Vincent; Exhibit 2) In response to Ms. Cochrane's public comment, Ms. McCrohan approached her and stated words to the effect of, "If that is the case, then you should just resign."⁴ (Interview of T. McCrohan) Within the same time frame, Ms. Cochrane made a similar comment about the Board to Ms. Vincent via Facebook messaging. ("Good morning. I have decided not to run [for the Board]. Good luck to you working with the worst board ever.") (Exhibit 8)

4. Another (now) member of the Board with whom Ms. Cochrane has clashed is Ms. Vincent. Ms. Vincent commenced her BOS campaign around January 2024, and she was soon inundated with Facebook messages from Ms. Cochrane. (Interview of J. Vincent; Exhibit 8) Topics covered in Ms. Cochrane's messages included:
 - a. Repeatedly criticizing Ms. Vincent for using the term "Select Board" instead of "Board of Selectmen" (Exhibit 8)
 - b. Speaking poorly of Mr. Chabot and Ms. McCrohan to Ms. Vincent and inviting her to do the same (Id.)
 - c. Expressing anger with Ms. Vincent for sharing screenshots of Ms. Cochrane's messages with other Town employees (Id.)
 - d. Asking Ms. Vincent if she was "part of what Tabitha [McCrohan] did to [her]"
5. On February 12, 2024, Ms. Haslam and Ms. Cochrane had a conversation regarding the salary of the Town's Assistant Treasurer, Molly Lima ("Ms. Lima"). Ms. Haslam wanted to give Ms. Lima a raise. (Interview of A. Haslam) Later that day, Ms. Cochrane emailed members of the Board expressing frustration regarding hiring and job responsibilities within the Treasurer's office. Although Ms. Haslam was not included as a recipient of this email, she emailed a rebuttal to members of the Board (including Ms. Cochrane) on February 14, 2024. (Exhibit 10) Ms. Haslam adamantly refuted Ms. Cochrane's criticism, and she clarified several allegedly untrue points raised in Ms. Cochrane's initial email. (Id.)
6. On the morning of February 14, 2024, the Board met for an executive session. At this time, Mr. Freitas was still Chair of the Board. During the meeting, Mr. Freitas "scrutinized" Mr. Chabot, Ms. Marchand, and Ms. McCrohan.⁵ (Interview of Ms. Marchand; Exhibit 9) Ms. Marchand recalls being critiqued for spending time in the offices of other employees during the day, but she questions whether Mr. Freitas' concerns with her were genuine, or if they were a byproduct of questionable information from Ms. Cochrane. (Interview of H. Marchand)

⁴ Mr. Freitas recalls that Ms. McCrohan's reply to Ms. Cochrane was actually, "You're getting too old, maybe you should quit," but no other interviewees corroborate this account. (Interview of J. Freitas)

⁵ The executive session on February 14th was preceded by a letter from Mr. Freitas to Mr. Chabot dated February 13, 2024. In the February 13th letter, Mr. Freitas, in an effort to address communication issues in the Town offices, demanded that all correspondence run through the Town Administrator and his assistant (Mr. Chabot and Ms. Marchand) and be forwarded to the Chair of the Board (at that time, Mr. Freitas). (Exhibit 9)

7. Later, on February 14, 2024, Ms. Marchand reports that Ms. Cochrane called her crying. Ms. Cochrane claimed that she was afraid of Mr. Chabot and then threatened to commit suicide. (Interviews of J. Freitas, H. Marchand, and T. McCrohan) Ms. Marchand contacted the Town's Chief of Police during this call, and a wellness check was performed at Ms. Cochrane's home. (Interview of H. Marchand) This incident was documented in Ms. Marchand's February 14, 2024 email to Town Counsel and reported to additional Town employees the following day. (Exhibit 2, *Attachment A and A-1*) Ms. Marchand reports that following the February 14th phone conversation, Ms. Cochrane stopped attending BOS meetings and began "spewing texts" to her. (Interview of H. Marchand)
8. On February 28, 2024, Mr. Freitas resigned from his role as Chair of the Board, citing an inability to reconcile the competing personalities of his colleagues. He was replaced by Ms. McCrohan. (Interviews of J. Freitas and T. McCrohan)
9. On March 13, 2024, Ms. Cochrane approached Ms. Marchand in her office and attempted to discuss the events of February 14, 2024, with her. This made Ms. Marchand very uncomfortable. (Exhibit 2) The following day, Ms. Marchand sent Ms. Cochrane an email regarding setting boundaries; however, Ms. Cochrane was not receptive. (Exhibit 2, *Attachment B*)
10. Multiple interviewees report that Ms. Cochrane submitted incessant, frivolous public records requests to the Town. (Interviews of H. Almy, H. Marchand, and J. Senechal) On March 28, Ms. Cochrane submitted one such request, asking for "any and all ways of correspondence and opinions from any department heads or employees regarding the Town Admin. [Mr. Chabot] and Assist. Town Admin [Ms. Marchand]..." (Exhibit 11) Ms. Marchand recalls being "sent into a panic attack" with chest pains when she reviewed Ms. Cochrane's request since it pertained to her performance. (Exhibit 2)
11. As a result of the stress caused by Ms. Cochrane's information request, Ms. Marchand went to the neighboring Public Safety building, accompanied by Ms. Almy, to be medically evaluated. (Interview of H. Almy; Exhibit 2) Soon after, Mr. Freitas allegedly told Ms. Cochrane that Ms. Almy and Ms. Marchand had gone to the Police Department to report her for harassment.⁶ (Interview of H. Almy) Once Ms. Marchand was medically cleared, she and Ms. Almy returned to the Town's offices. On their way back to Town Hall, Ms. Cochrane confronted them in the vestibule of the Public Safety building. Ms. Almy and Ms. Marchand describe Ms. Cochrane's demeanor as accusatory and state that she screamed at them. (Interview of H. Almy; Exhibit 2) The confrontation in the vestibule of the Public Safety building was captured by the Department's security cameras. While the tenor of the conversation is unclear from the footage (it does not have sound), it is indisputable that there was a verbal altercation

⁶ Mr. Freitas concedes that he told Ms. Cochrane that Ms. Almy and Ms. Marchand had gone to the Police Department. However, he does not clarify whether he told Ms. Cochrane the reason for the trip, and he was not aware that an argument transpired at the Public Safety building. (Interview of J. Freitas)

between Ms. Almy, Ms. Cochrane, and Ms. Marchand. (Exhibit 12) Further, the Police Department's April 2, 2024 incident report states that Dispatcher Lexis Katz witnessed the altercation and described it as an "argument" that was "started" by Ms. Cochrane. (Exhibit 13) Later that same day, Ms. Cochrane emailed Ms. Almy and Ms. Marchand, apologizing for her behavior at the Department. (Exhibit 2, *Attachment E*) Ms. Marchand replied, reiterating her concerns with Ms. Cochrane, and formally requesting that she cease any communication with her other than work-related matters. (Exhibit 2, *Attachment F*)

12. In May 2024, the Town held another BOS election. Ms. Vincent was elected to serve on the Board; Ms. Cochrane did not run for the position.⁷ Ms. Almy describes May as a "turning point" in Ms. Cochrane's behavior—she could no longer "get through" to Ms. Cochrane, who began lashing out at Ms. Almy and other employees. (Interview of H. Almy)
13. On the morning of June 4, 2024, Mr. Chabot instructed Ms. Cochrane to return her master key to the Town's offices. Over the course of several emails with Mr. Chabot, Ms. Cochrane claimed that she lost her master key.⁸ (Exhibit 17) At approximately 1:00 PM on June 4, 2024, Ms. Cochrane returned her master key to the Town. (Exhibit 18) Ms. Marchand reports that when returning her key, Ms. Cochrane yelled at her and also referred to Ms. Vincent as "that bitch." (Interview of J. Vincent; Exhibit 18)
14. The following day, Ms. Cochrane sent a lengthy email to Mr. Chabot, Ms. Vincent, and others airing her grievances against various Town employees and the circumstances surrounding her loss of the BOS and Treasurer positions. Ms. Cochrane also voiced discontent with the Town's demand that she return her master key and reiterated the past issue of Ms. Vincent sharing screenshots of their Facebook conversation. (Exhibit 16) Ms. Vincent replied, noting that the Town was simply following master key protocol, and she also explained that the Facebook messages had no expectation of confidentiality, especially since Ms. Cochrane was making accusations against other Town employees. (Id.)
15. Later in June 2024, another incident occurred which interviewees refer to as the "secret note." (Interviews of H. Marchand and J. Senechal) In short, during the BOS meeting, a member of the Board of Assessors, Jeanne Russo ("Ms. Russo"), passed Ms. McCrohan a note to ask whether topics regarding Ms. Senechal's Assistant Tax Collector position would be discussed at the meeting. (Interview of J. Senechal) Soon after, Ms. Cochrane submitted a public records request for the "secret note," likely assuming that it was about her. (Interviews of H. Marchand and J. Senechal) Ms. Marchand documented this request in her emails to Mr. Chabot, Ms. McCrohan, and

⁷ To reiterate, Ms. Cochrane's only current employment with the Town is her role as Tax Collector; she no longer serves as Treasurer nor member of the Board.

⁸ In an email on June 5, 2024, Ms. Cochrane herself concedes that this was a lie; she never lost her master key. (Exhibit 16)

others on June 18, 2024, and June 20, 2024. She also mentioned that Ms. Senechal had been “interrogated” by Ms. Cochrane about the incident via text message. (Exhibit 15)

16. The interviewees collectively raise several overarching concerns with Ms. Cochrane’s behavior. Primarily, numerous employees report that Ms. Cochrane sends them constant text messages, some of which are harassing; Ms. Cochrane has even texted family members of Town employees.⁹ (Interviews of A. Haslam, H. Marchand, T. McCrohan, and J. Vincent) Such communications have been documented by several interviewees including Ms. Haslam, Ms. Marchand, and Ms. Vincent. (Exhibit 5, Exhibit 6, Exhibit 7, and Exhibit 8) Notably, Ms. Haslam states that Ms. Cochrane’s texts to her family had a significant impact on her—she is not close with her family, and she felt that Ms. Cochrane crossed a line with these messages. (Interview of A. Haslam)
17. Ms. Cochrane’s temperament and stability are also points of concern for her coworkers. Ms. Haslam describes Ms. Cochrane as a “pot stirrer,” who pits people against each other and is “a little unhinged.” This makes Ms. Haslam feel unsafe at work when Ms. Cochrane is also in the building. (Interview of A. Haslam) Despite having a positive relationship with Ms. Cochrane initially, Ms. Marchand finds Ms. Cochrane’s behavior “intolerable.” She provides one example when Ms. Cochrane refused to attend a lunch she planned and said, “I don’t eat lunch with traitors.”¹⁰ (Interview of H. Marchand) Ms. Almy states, “You never know how [Ms. Cochrane] is going to be when you walk into the Town Hall.” She further explains that Ms. Cochrane often feels “left out” and has a problem with Town employees being friends.¹¹ (Interview of H. Almy) Ms. Vincent believes Ms. Cochrane continually traumatizes Town employees and community members. She feels that Town employees will keep leaving their jobs if Ms. Cochrane’s behavior is not addressed. (Interview of J. Vincent) Ms. McCrohan characterizes Ms. Cochrane as “completely wild” and delusional, and she refuses to be alone with her at work; their only communication occurs via email. (Interview of Ms. McCrohan) Finally, while she offers a more sympathetic viewpoint on Ms. Cochrane, Ms. Senechal states that Ms. Cochrane is overly protective and struggles with the concept of “agree to disagree.” (Interview of J. Senechal)
18. Numerous interviewees also portray Ms. Cochrane’s credibility as a major issue. For example, Ms. Marchand reports that on the same call when Ms. Cochrane threatened to commit suicide, she also stated that she knew how to lie to the police officers to convince them that she posed no risk to herself. (Interview of H. Marchand) Ms. Haslam reports numerous occasions on which Ms. Cochrane falsely conveyed the opinions of their coworkers or spread other untrue information. She provides several examples:

⁹ Ms. Senechal does state that Ms. Cochrane’s text messages to her are, “for the most part,” professional. (Interview of J. Senechal)

¹⁰ Ms. Senechal also reports that she has heard Ms. Cochrane make a statement to this effect. (Interview of J. Senechal)

¹¹ For example, Ms. Haslam reports that Ms. Cochrane was upset that she and Ms. McCrohan were very close. (Interview of A. Haslam)

- a. Ms. Cochrane told Ms. Haslam that Ms. Almy was upset with her because Ms. McCrohan sent her a birthday card that said “bestie,” although this was not the case. (Interview of A. Haslam)
- b. Ms. Cochrane claimed that Ms. Lima was upset with Ms. Haslam, but this was untrue. (Id.)
- c. Ms. Cochrane accused Ms. Haslam of failing to reconcile the Town’s accounts despite Ms. Cochrane being responsible (as Treasurer) for inconsistent calculations. (Id.)
- d. Ms. Cochrane told Town employees that Ms. Haslam was “high” and brought her daughter when she was interviewed for the Town Accountant position. Only the latter claim was true. (Id.)

Ms. Almy, despite admitting that Ms. Cochrane “will give you the shirt off her back,” maintains that a lot of Ms. Cochrane’s statements are untrue. (Interview of H. Almy) Ms. Vincent believes that Ms. Cochrane “twists people’s words” and makes dishonest accusations as well as baseless threats. She agrees with Ms. Haslam that Ms. Cochrane’s competency is questionable. (Interview of J. Vincent) Ms. McCrohan adds that Ms. Cochrane always reports secondhand information, which is often not true. (Interview of T. McCrohan) Additionally, several witnesses discuss questionable claims that Ms. Cochrane brought against Ms. McCrohan including renting illegal kennels, having an out-of-code in-law apartment, not paying her taxes, and deliberately missing an executive session to participate in a Christmas event. (Interviews of J. Freitas, A. Haslam, H. Marchand, and T. McCrohan) Finally, even Mr. Freitas and Ms. Senechal, who are openly sympathetic to Ms. Cochrane, state that while they don’t think she is deliberately dishonest, her “situational responses” are not always accurate, and she is a “pit bull” when she doesn’t get what she wants. (Interviews of J. Freitas and J. Senechal)

19. As a final note, all interviewees—even those sympathetic to Ms. Cochrane—agree that there are serious problems afflicting the Town’s government. Many interviewees describe the environment at Town Hall with phrases such as hostile and toxic. (Interviews of H. Almy, J. Freitas, A. Haslam, and J. Senechal) Interviewees pinpoint confidentiality and individual power struggles¹² as major factors contributing to this negative environment. (Interviews of H. Almy, J. Freitas, T. McCrohan, and J. Senechal) Although Ms. Cochrane is the primary concern, some interviewees attribute partial blame for Town Hall’s toxicity to Mr. Freitas’ relationship with Ms. Cochrane and his presence on the Board. In their minds, Mr. Freitas contributes to both of the aforementioned problems. (Interviews of H. Almy and J. Vincent) Troublingly, Ms. Almy claims that Ms. Cochrane told her about this investigation before the executive session in which it was announced, and she also reports that Ms. Cochrane found out about the investigation prematurely from Mr. Freitas. (Interviews of H. Almy and J. Vincent)

¹² Ms. Almy explains that both Ms. Cochrane and Mr. Freitas “like power but have lost power.” (Interview of H. Almy) Mr. Freitas had “many blowouts” with Ms. Cochrane. He also calls Ms. McCrohan a “young Wendy [Cochrane]” and feels that neither she nor Ms. Cochrane can “stay in their own lane.” (Interview of J. Freitas)

B. CONCLUSIONS

1. At the outset, it is important to note that this investigation was hampered by Ms. Cochrane's unwillingness to be interviewed. Her decision impedes the ability to understand the details of the complaints and leaves holes in the evidence. Nevertheless, the uncontroverted evidence is overwhelming that Ms. Cochrane has engaged in a manner of communication (both electronically and verbally) that coworkers characterize as invasive and intimidating. While much of Ms. Cochrane's conduct appears to be enmeshed with and a byproduct of the Town's internal political struggles, that is not an excuse for her behavior. I find both Ms. Haslam and Ms. Marchand to be highly credible. Both demonstrated a credible recollection of facts and circumstances when interviewed about their complaints and neither has any apparent motive to lie. Accordingly, based on the allegations raised in their complaints, Ms. Cochrane has violated the Town's Code of Conduct in her interactions with both Ms. Haslam and Ms. Marchand. (Exhibit 20)
2. Whether or not Ms. Cochrane violated additional policies requires a deeper analysis. Regarding Ms. Marchand, throughout her complaint and in her statement, she details countless interactions with Ms. Cochrane during which she felt threatened and intimidated. (Interview of H. Marchand; Exhibit 2) Although many of these incidents were not witnessed (this was often the impetus for Ms. Marchand's fear), I credit her reporting and consider that her allegations against Ms. Cochrane are consistent with the behavior reported by other interviewees. Moreover, perhaps the most severe altercation between Ms. Cochrane and Ms. Marchand took place *with* a witness—Ms. Almy—and was thoroughly documented by emails and a police report and was captured on surveillance video by the Police Department. Although the footage has no audio, the corroborating reports of Ms. Almy and Ms. Marchand combined with the statement from the Department's dispatcher, Ms. Katz, establish that a contentious verbal altercation was initiated by Ms. Cochrane. Furthermore, Ms. Cochrane's admitted intent for going to the Department was to prevent an alleged harassment complaint filed against her. Ms. Cochrane apologizes and admits to some wrongdoing in her email to Ms. Almy and Ms. Marchand after the interaction. (Exhibit 2, *Attachment E*) Given Ms. Cochrane's exhibited tendency to be highly defensive in her email communications (Exhibit 16), acknowledging culpability is suggestive that her behavior at the Police Department was unprofessional at the very least. Even though Ms. Cochrane acted upon a false report from Mr. Freitas, attempting to stifle the concerns of her coworkers (if that had been why they traveled to the Department), is unacceptable. Ms. Cochrane's collective behavior toward Ms. Marchand, coupled with the incident at the Police Department on March 28, 2024, rises to the level of intimidation ("engaging in actions that include but are not limited to, stalking or behavior intended to frighten, coerce, or induce duress"), which is prohibited under the Town's Workplace Violence Policy. (Exhibit 4)
3. Ms. Haslam's complaint relates largely to her concerns with Ms. Cochrane's disruptive communication style and often untruthful statements impacting her position and success with the Town. Ms. Haslam fears that the false statements by Ms. Cochrane will convince other employees that she is incompetent when in reality, inefficiencies in the

accounting office are a product of Ms. Cochrane's behavior and/or work product from her roles as the Tax Collector and Treasurer. The emails exchanged around February 14, 2024, are a prime example of this phenomenon—Ms. Haslam felt the need to send a lengthy rebuttal to defend herself against accusations made by Ms. Cochrane. (Exhibit 10) While such conduct by Ms. Cochrane is worrisome and cuts against her credibility, I cannot find—on this record—that Ms. Haslam offers sufficient evidence to yield a violation of the Town's Workplace Violence policy. With that said, Ms. Cochrane's treatment of Ms. Haslam undoubtedly contributes to the toxic environment that has negatively impacted the Town's employees.

4. The effect of Ms. Cochrane's misconduct is both serious and disruptive to the operation of Town government. I credit Ms. Haslam and Ms. Marchand who both report significant mental and physical impacts as a result of Ms. Cochrane's treatment and report that they will leave their positions if her behavior continues. (Interviews of A. Haslam and H. Marchand) For example, Ms. Haslam needed to stay home from work on March 28, 2024, because of the "physical toll these situations [with Ms. Cochrane]" had taken on her. (Exhibit 1) Similarly, Ms. Marchand reports that her "anxiety 'does not shut off' when [she goes] home for the day and [her] entire life and well-being have been affected by the next to non-stop intimidation and harassment from Ms. Cochrane." (Exhibit 2) Further, I rely on BOS members Ms. Vincent and Ms. McCrohan who attest to the credibility of Ms. Haslam and Ms. Marchand as complainants and consider that they have witnessed Ms. Cochrane's behavior firsthand and have also been alerted to it by multiple employees. They desire to improve relationships at the Town Hall and protect employees from poor treatment by Ms. Cochrane. (Interviews of T. McCrohan and J. Vincent) To create a positive and productive work environment for staff, corrective action and counseling/coaching are warranted to reverse the damage caused by Ms. Cochrane.

Based on the above, I find that Ms. Cochrane violated the Town's Code of Conduct Policy in her interactions with Ms. Haslam and Ms. Marchand and the Town's Workplace Violence Policy in her interactions with Ms. Marchand. The impact of Ms. Cochrane's behavior has detrimentally impacted both complainants. In addition, Ms. Cochrane has created a challenging and unsettling work environment for many employees in the Town Hall that needs to be addressed.

If I may provide you with any additional information, please feel free to contact me.

Very truly yours,

Regina M. Ryan

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