

## Council approves Mulder's separation agreement<!--s:35.5-->

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### Content

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OTTUMWA — The Ottumwa City Council unanimously, and seemingly uncomfortably, approved the separation agreement of city finance director Kala Mulder during Tuesday's meeting at City Hall.

Mulder, who served in her capacity for just over two years and started work amid a \$1.3 million budget shortfall, helped lower property taxes for residents each of the last two years, including by \$1 for the next fiscal year beginning in July, and produced a balanced budget. City accountant Tina Jaegers will serve as interim finance director until a permanent replacement can be hired.

Under the amended agenda item "consideration of possible personnel action related to finance director," City Administrator Phil Rath asked the council to go further.

"Based upon information that was provided to the city council at the previous special meeting, and legal counsel's ability to negotiate an agreement regarding separation and general release," he said, "I am respectfully requesting city council to approve and authorize the mayor to sign the previously stated agreement."

The Courier has sent a Freedom of Information Act request for documents concerning Mulder's resignation. The city did not immediately respond to the request on Wednesday.

The resignation process began with a closed session meeting Feb. 9 lasting 1 hour, 44 minutes, in which the council, mayor Rick Johnson and Rath met "for the purpose of discussing allegations contained in correspondence concerning the finance director." Mulder had requested the closed session.

No action was taken in open session after the closed session ended, but it set the stage for Tuesday's meeting, in which Jaegers was approved in the consent agenda for a temporary \$9.73 per hour wage adjustment for the additional finance responsibilities.

Only later, after Jaeger's pay increase was approved, was Mulder's separation agreement approved for the mayor to sign. The separation agreement has not been made public and is among the documents being sought by the Courier.

Council member Doug McAntire was the only one of the four council members — Russ Hull was not at the meeting — to publicly acknowledge disappointment in the process.

"When I decided to run for city council I told people that I was going to be as honest as I could possibly be, that I'm not always going to make the right decision, but I'm going to try my best to make the right decision," he said. "With this situation here, most people don't know the whole thing. I really don't know the whole thing."

"But there's a piece of paper that said that the city council and the mayor were all in agreement on this situation. I work for the citizens and I did not agree on that," McAntire said. "But on paper, it's going to say I did."

McAntire and council member Cara Galloway were confused about the wording in the agreement, which Galloway said did not identify each council member by name.

"There was a line that said 'city council/mayor is in agreement with the superintendent to terminate this particular person,'" McAntire said.

"The agreement before you is a resignation of employment and general release," Rath said. "It's not a termination."

With Jaeger's promotion on an interim level, the city has now had three city finance directors since 2019, despite improving fiscal health. Bob Jay retired in September of 2019, followed by Mulder's resignation.

## **Tagline**

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## **Child images**

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### **Meeting - Ottumwa Council**



**Kala Mulder mug**



