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### HOMESTEAD: Homestead city manager fired amid allegations of wrongdoing

Homestead's city manager has been booted amid allegations of wrongdoing.

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Three months after his political allies lost reelection, Homestead City Manager Mike Shehadeh was fired for what Mayor Steven Bateman and city leaders called "conduct unbecoming a public official."

Bateman and the City Council voted 6-1 Wednesday to fire the city manager, who has not worked at City Hall since the day after the mayor and three new council members swept into office. During his three-month leave, Shehadeh was paid a prorated portion of his \$179,431-a-year salary.

Only council member Wendy Lobos, a Shehadeh supporter who was not up for reelection last November, voted against the termination.

Shehadeh has been at the helm since February 2008. His employment contract allows the council to dismiss him at any time and provide severance pay. If he is terminated because of "conduct unbecoming a public official," Shehadeh receives no severance. His contract runs through Dec. 31, 2011.

Hours before the Nov. 4 swearing-in, Shehadeh agreed with Bateman and City Attorney Richard Weiss to go on paid administrative leave as a kind of "cooling-off period."

"There was a lot of tension among Mike, the staff, citizens and the council," Bateman said.

Union members had complained that Shehadeh had refused to meet with them. Some residents had said they disapproved of how he treated people at council meetings and other events. He and Vice Mayor Judy Waldman publicly feuded at budget hearings.

The city charter said the council cannot terminate the manager until 90 days after an election. On Nov. 23, the council voted to suspend Shehadeh with pay until Feb. 2 -- the full 90 days. Meanwhile, they asked Weiss Serota, the city's attorneys, to investigate any allegations of misconduct and provide the council with a written report.

Wednesday's termination does not become official until Feb. 17, after Shehadeh has a public hearing to hear accusations and respond to his critics, Weiss said.

Shehadeh could not be reached for comment Wednesday. His lawyer, Al Perez, defended him.

"He's been a loyal employee for 15 years, having received merit pay increases and promotions during that time including a substantial pay increase less than nine months ago. Oftentimes, city managers are used as pawns in a political game. . . .

"I will recommend my client file suit seeking damages in excess of \$5 million," Perez said.

The termination came an hour after private investigator **Patrick Franklin** summarized the results of his fact-finding investigation to the council. Weiss Serota had hired **Franklin** in December to interview the council, note their concerns about Shehadeh and investigate them.

Weiss said the city manager had several chances to respond to the fact-finding but had declined.

Perez said neither he nor Shehadeh had received any written accusations.

The report alleged Shehadeh had attended political functions, solicited campaign contributions for former Mayor Lynda Bell and discussed political strategy with Bell and former council member Steve Losner, thus violating the rules of the International City/Council Management Association, of which he is a member.

The report further said from 2005 to 2009, there was evidence of "bid-splitting" or breaking up a large contract into smaller contracts to avoid council review on work awarded to HSQ, an engineering firm where one of the directors is Shehadeh's brother, Nour.

**Franklin** said local and federal authorities are also looking into the matter. When asked if the FBI was investigating Shehadeh, FBI spokeswoman Judy Orihuela said the bureau had no comment.