

Santa Clara Union Blames Dismissed City Manager for Poor Morale

SVV svvoice.com/santa-clara-union-blames-dismissed-city-manager-for-poor-morale

Carolyn Schuk

March 8, 2022

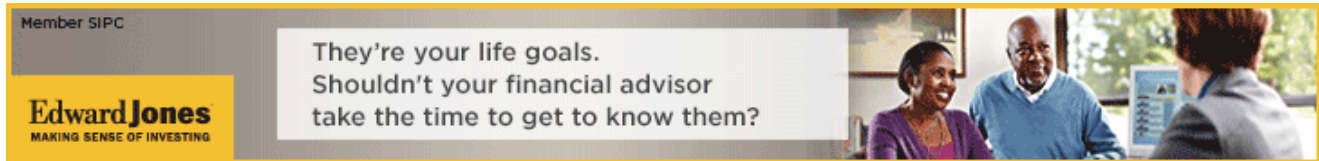


A week after the Santa Clara City Council dismissed City Manager Deanna Santana citing lack of confidence in her leadership, AFSCME Local 101 — Field Operations and Maintenance Staff (Unit 6) — published a statement of support for the Council’s action, citing its own lack of confidence in Santana’s leadership.

Unit 6 represents the people who keep everyday life in Santa Clara running smoothly — maintaining parks and streets, keeping the water running and the sewers unclogged. Because this is work that can’t be done from home, the union’s members were also hard hit by the pandemic, said Unit 6 President Gary Ferraris.

“During the priority setting session on February 8, [2022] City Manager Deanna Santana laid responsibility for reduced employee morale on national trends as well as at the door of this City Council,” wrote Ferraris.

SPONSORED



“While Ms. Santana was correct in naming these as contributing factors, she made a significant omission in her declaration,” continued Ferraris. “I will explain how the currently suspended City Manager’s hand-picked executive leadership team has played a primary role in systematically quashing our morale, along with our passion to serve this community...Ms. Santana’s disavowal of any responsibility...has resulted in the necessity of this letter to the Mayor and the Council.”

Ferraris says that the decline in morale predates the pandemic when “unclassified management began keeping spreadsheets and micromanaging employees. There was even an instance when management initiated disciplinary action for ‘excessive absenteeism’ for a member who was struggling to gain control of his child’s chronic illness.”

The union president alleges Santana’s administration failed to adequately protect workers, pointing the finger at the City’s HR department; which, Ferraris said, backs up management at the expense of workers’ safety and well-being.

For example, Ferraris said that Santa Clara’s safety training doesn’t meet OSHA standards and that safety equipment is outdated. He also described a somewhat dismissive attitude about risks — for example, equating the health risks of the annual cleanup campaign with those of routine garbage collection.

In one case he accuses City management of what verges on wage theft or fraud. He alleges, for example, that employees were asked to perform duties of higher classifications without being paid at the higher rates. Another questionable episode Ferraris cited was a situation where Santa Clara billed a contractor for a City supervisor’s overtime and federally mandated paid rest break, but refused to pay the employee for the break.

“When Unit 6 filed a grievance for this fraudulent act with the City Manager, she referred the situation back to the Assistant Director of HR, whom the grievance was written against,” wrote Ferraris. “This behavior, to use the language HR is so fond of, could lead to disciplinary action up to and including termination.”

These grievances came to a head during the recent contract negotiations. Unit 6 was in a negotiating impasse with the City in January after Santana insisted the union accept another year of zero salary increases. After a month and a half of mediation sessions, a tentative agreement was hammered out and was supposed to be on the Council agenda on Feb. 22.

“But then it wasn’t put on the agenda and we were told it would have to be postponed because there was no City Manager,” said Ferraris.

“We’re working on avoiding a strike,” said Ferraris. “We’re making Deanna Santana, Aracely Azevedo [HR Director] and Marco Mercado [Asst. HR Director] well aware that we are planning in case there’s a strike, given Santana’s history in Sunnyvale when [workers in] that city [were] within hours of striking.”

This is the first time that labor disagreements have reached this point in his experience working in Santa Clara, said Ferraris, and that dismissing Santana is a positive step for Santa Clara.

“We applaud the Council for taking the ever-important first step in restoring a high-quality working environment in which we can proudly and passionately serve our community,” he wrote.

As of publication time, the City hasn’t responded to our request for comment. Here is Unit 6’s open letter. [[unit 6 no confidence CM](#)]

Deanna Santana’s HR Department

Ferraris’ reference to Santana’s “hand-picked executive leadership” refers to a flurry of new hires into Santa Clara’s executive positions that followed Santana’s arrival in October 2017 which put in place the managers that the union president names in his letter.

Less than six months after Santana came to Santa Clara in late 2017, the City Manager pushed out Santa Clara’s longtime City Manager Liz Brown, (3/20/18 Council [Meeting](#)) accusing Brown’s department of “weak internal controls,” “inappropriate administrative actions,” “serious failure to adhere to the required actions,” “mismanagement of our payroll system,” and “loose management controls.”

The issue was a raise for former Police Chief Mike Sellars, who had been venomously attacked by Mayor Lisa Gillmor in her 2016 campaign to elect police union president Pat Nikolai as police chief.

Santana replaced Brown with Teresia Zadroga Haase, a Manhattan Beach colleague of Assistant City Managers Nadine Nader and now-departed [Mark Danaj](#) (both Santana’s former San José colleagues); giving Haase a [\\$65,000 raise](#) to come to Santa Clara. Haase retired about a year later and Santana replaced her with another former San José colleague, Aracely Azevedo, who got a \$59,000 raise when she came to Santa Clara.

Assistant HR Director, Marco Mercado, is another of Santana’s former San José colleagues. He got a \$34,000 raise to come to Santa Clara in 2019.

SPONSORED



**Interested in having The Weekly
in your place of business?**

Email us at info@SvVoice.com for partnership opportunities

The **Weekly**
www.SvVoice.com
408-243-2000