

Human Resources

1769 E. Moody Blvd Bldg 2
Bunnell, FL 32110



www.flaglercounty.org

Phone: (386)313-4007

Fax: (386)313-4107

Final Investigative Report Engineering Department

I. Scope of Investigation

A. Focus

This investigation focused on the following allegations:

1. Faith Alkhatib, County Engineer creating a hostile work environment in the Engineering Department.
2. Faith Alkhatib bullying employees in the Engineering Department.

The investigators' assignment was to make findings of facts and conclusions regarding the above issues. However, the investigators are not making a legal determination as to whether there was discrimination under Title VII, the ADA or any other statute nor is the investigator making a legal determination as to whether there was unlawful retaliation. Rather, the investigator is determining whether any of the actions or decisions made by Faith Alkhatib were creating a hostile work environment or considered bullying.

B. Identification of Witnesses and Content of Interviews

Once the scope of the investigation was determined, the investigators operated with independence as to witness identification, interview content, and preparation of findings.

C. Witnesses Interviewed

1. Hamid Tabassian, Assistant County Engineer
2. Richard Zion, Project Administrator
3. Ansley Wren-Key (Patricia), Coastal Engineering Administrator
4. Weldon Spurling, Project Manager
5. Gracie Rezba, Contracts and Grants Coordinator
6. Amy Stroger, Project Manager
7. Faith Alkhatib, County Engineer

At the beginning of each interview, all those interviewed were advised of the following:

Andy Dance
District 1

Greg Hansen
District 2

David Sullivan
District 3

Leann Pennington
District 4

Donald O'Brien
District 5

1. We will be asking questions related to the work environment in Engineering.
2. After the investigation is complete, the information received would be a public record.
3. Witnesses should not discuss the matter, including what the investigator asked them and what they said, with anyone.
4. Witnesses were also cautioned against retaliation to those involved in the investigation and what to do if they feel retaliated against.
5. Notes would be taken during the interview. Copies of the interview notes are attached as follows:

Memorandum to Heidi Petito, County Administrator and Jorge Salinas, Deputy County Administrator outlining the investigation including witness notes and Respondent notes dated May 30, 2023. Exhibit 1

Document of witness notes for Amy Stroger, Richard Zion, Gracie Rezba, Weldon Spurling dated June 6, 2023, and notes dated June 12, 2023, from Hamid Tabassian, notes dated June 13, 2023, from Ansley Wren-Key. Exhibit 2

When the original complainant presented the allegations to Jorge Salinas in the beginning of May 2023, the complainant was hesitant to go on record due to possible retaliation. After Mr. Salinas and Mrs. Wu interviewed three employees, it was determined that the allegations must be documented. The original complainant was agreeable, and all three employees previously interviewed were reinterviewed.

II. Statement of Facts

A. Complainant's Allegations

Hamid Tabassian contends that there is a hostile work environment and bullying in the Engineering Department.

1. Hamid Tabassian feels bullied by Faith Alkhatib.
2. Hamid Tabassian states that Faith Alkhatib does not allow him to ask questions regarding projects. He states that Faith will become loud and accuse him of not being a team player and "throwing rocks" in front of others.
3. Faith tells him that he does not need to know everything, although he is the Assistant County Engineer.
4. Faith changes who is reporting to him and he is unaware.
5. Faith does not allow him to speak during meetings. If he wants to say anything he must wait until the end of the meeting, and it makes it uncomfortable. He states she shuts him down with hand gestures if he asks anything.

6. Hamid states that Faith ridicules him and laughs at his comments and shuts him down.
7. Faith says over and over to him “my way or the highway”.
8. Faith will not speak to employees if she is upset with them.

B. Witnesses provided the following information:

All witnesses were asked to describe the work environment in the Engineering Department.

Witnesses stated that conversations between employees and Faith can become very heated. She is more aggressive with some than others. Faith and Hamid are heard yelling, and it makes employees uncomfortable. One witness stated Faith belittled another employee for reporting a situation to the Sheriff’s Office, out of fear. The same witness also stated she belittled and berated the same employee for ordering something she did not approve of. The witness classified Faith as a bully.

A long-term employee stated that there was yelling and raised voices but “it has always been that way”. There is a sense of frustration in the office. The issues between Faith and Hamid seem more personal. Faith is loud and animated, and it can be uncomfortable if you are not used to it. It can feel like you are being yelled at, and sometimes it is yelling. If you make a mistake, you will be scolded. There is animosity between Faith and other departments such as Road and Bridge.

The following statements were corroborated by more than one witness:

1. Faith is condescending and will talk over and interrupt employees.
2. There is often yelling in the office, many stated it was often between Faith and Hamid, but does occur with all employees.
3. Faith will not let others speak and often will cut them off.
4. Faith will give the silent treatment, sometimes for weeks, if she is upset with you.
5. There is a lack of teamwork in the department.
6. Employees do not know who they report to.
7. Any communications must be reported back to Faith to include conversations and emails with others. However, although it is required to send emails, some employees state that Faith does not read them.

Mr. Salinas and Mrs. Wu met with Faith Alkhatib to share the comments by the Engineering Staff. Faith maintained that she does not yell. Faith was focused on knowing who said what comment. She continually stated that she does not yell and “you do not want to hear me yell. I

talk how I talk". She stated that the issues are with Administration (County). When the issue of not allowing others speak and using hand gestures to shut them down, she just said "ok". When Mr. Salinas discussed what appears to be micromanaging with her, she said "give me examples". Faith denied belittling employees and when asked about not speaking to employees when she is upset, she stated sometimes she just gets busy and does not speak to employees for weeks. She indicated it was not purposefully. Mr. Salinas shared that some Directors and partners state she is aggressive. Faith wanted to know which Directors find her aggressive. Faith stated on several occasions to give her the information in writing, and she will respond. Mr. Salinas advised Faith that we would be following up with employees to see if there was improvement. In addition, she was cautioned on retaliatory behaviors.

In early June (notes attached), Mr. Salinas and Ms. Wu followed up with all employees.

The consensus of all interviewed was:

1. There is no retaliation.
2. There is tension in the department.
3. There is no yelling but there is no communication either.
4. There is obvious tension between Faith and Hamid.
5. It is difficult to get answers and to get work done due to lack of communication.
6. The environment remains uncomfortable.
7. There is no teamwork.

III. Conclusion and Findings

Based on the witness statements, it is more likely than not that Faith Alkhatib is creating a toxic work environment for the Engineering employees and has bullied Engineering employees. In addition, it is more likely than not that Faith has created an environment where yelling, cutting employees off when speaking and working in an environment that lacks teamwork is considered the norm.

Respectfully submitted:

Pamela Wu, AWI-CH
Human Resources Director
12/7/2023

Human Resources

1769 E. Moody Blvd Bldg 2
Bunnell, FL 32110



**FLAGLER
COUNTY**
FLORIDA

www.flaglercounty.org

Phone: (386)313-4007

Fax: (386)313-4107

Exhibit 1

To: Heidi Petito, County Administrator
Jorge Salina, Deputy County Administrator

From: Pamela Wu, Human Resources Director

Date: May 30, 2023

RE: Workplace Bullying and Hostile Work Environment Investigation (Engineering)

This report outlines the results of an investigation conducted as a response to workplace bullying and hostile work environment allegations against Faith Alkhatib, County Engineer which were brought to the attention of Jorge Salinas, Deputy County Administrator. Jorge Salinas, Deputy County Administrator and Pamela Wu, Human Resources Director interviewed each person in this document. The original complainant brought the allegation to Jorge Salinas previously but was hesitant to go on record due to possible retaliation. Mr. Salinas and I interviewed three employees before determining that we must document the allegations. At that time, we reinterviewed each employee to memorialize the statement given previously.

We asked each employee what their perception was of the overall environment in the Engineering Department and if they had experienced any issues within the department and if so, to please provide details. Follow-up questions were asked as needed.

1. Interview with Hamid Tabassian, Assistant County Engineer, May 15, 2023

Hamid told us about an email thread that began May 3, 2023, regarding an issue with a project labeled "Water Oak". Hamid was questioning a pipe or the lack of a pipe and the construction of guard rails and gravity wall. The email was to Amy Stroger, Project Manager, but he had copied Faith Alkhatib, County Engineer. They had a meeting and after the meeting Faith told him he needed to be a team player. Faith told Hamid he was throwing rocks and not a team player multiple times due to questioning the pipe. He stated that this is how we learn, by asking questions. Hamid did not feel he was throwing rocks. Hamid was so upset that Thursday afternoon, he left. The following Monday or Tuesday, Amy sent an email and Hamid said if he knew it was going to be such a big deal, he would have never addressed it.

Hamid feels like he is here to answer questions for citizens the best he can. He doesn't want to make up things to move forward. Every day people make mistakes. Over and over, he has seen if he questions something it does not go well. Faith will be loud, saying he is not a team player and throwing rocks in front of Amy. This does not make a good working environment. Hamid

Andy Dance
District 1

Greg Hansen
District 2

David Sullivan
District 3

Leann Pennington
District 4

Donald O'Brien
District 5

feels when Amy sees Faith undermine Hamid and state things like he is throwing rocks, then next time he asks Amy a question, she will not want to answer. Hamid is not sure if Amy reports to him. Sometimes she does and sometimes she doesn't. One minute he is responsible for everything that is happening, but the next Faith is telling him that he doesn't need to know everything.

Another example Hamid provided was the Beach Project. Hamid was told via email things that were happening then Faith removed him from the emails. Now he doesn't know what is going on. He asked Faith to add him back. Hamid will forward the email regarding this.

Hamid stated that he feels bullied by Faith. Typically, when they go to meetings, the entire meeting she talks, and you are not given the opportunity to say anything. In one of the meetings, they were going over the beach study. The whole time she (Faith) was back and forth with him. They were at the end of the study going over the review comments, he wanted to ask questions. He had to wait until the end to say anything. This is typical. You must wait to say anything, and it makes it uncomfortable. She shuts him down with hand gestures and if he asks anything, often she will shut him down.

In another meeting with Ansley (Patricia Wren-Key, Coastal Engineering Administrator) and others, they heard about funding coming in. They knew other funding was in the pipeline. Faith scheduled a meeting with Ansley, Amy, and Hamid. They went over funding and what was coming up. Hamid said "if I may say so, we need a management plan for what is coming so we can look at this wholistically and come up with an overall plan. We need assistance from our consultant." Faith began ridiculing him. She said we do not need a consultant. Hamid tried to explain he was coming from a liability point of view, because she started with the plan, they skipped things, and it is all over the place. He said, maybe she knows what is happening, but at the end of the day we need someone who has the best interest of the County. In this case, a third party to have a recommendation. She told Hamid that he knew nothing about the agreement. He asked why they skipped a vacant lot. It's opening a flood gate for the adjacent property. Amy and Ansley concurred. Faith shut him down.

When he tried to explain again, he said "this is why we need a consultant, so the County is not choosing what is to be done." She said, "I do not need that". She laughed at his comments and recommendation. Hamid felt that he wasn't needed for this meeting, she would not listen to him anyway. He got up to go to his office and Faith told him to sit down. He said the way she was talking to him; he wasn't needed. He left the meeting. Then Ansley came to his office. He apologized for his behavior (leaving) Ansley said he did not need to apologize.

Another issue discussed was he was not feeling well on a Monday. He had something that felt like stomach flu. He had meetings scheduled and was writing evaluations that Faith assigned to him. He texted Faith and told her he wanted to work from home, he was not feeling well. She

told him to take personal leave (PL). He continued to attend the Teams Meetings that were scheduled and work on the evaluations she assigned him. Faith knew he was attending the meetings and working. She still made him take PL. She sent him a text saying his sick leave was approved. He sent her a response via text that said, "I cannot work from home today?" He received no response from Faith. He continued to stay engaged throughout the day. He attended meetings, responded to emails, and worked on evaluations. The whole day he was busy. Tuesday, he came to work and shortly after, Faith came to his office and stood at his door. She was acting like he was contagious. He told her it was a stomach bug. He mentioned to her working from home and asked what the policy is. She said that we do not have one. He said I see you work from home sometimes. She got upset and was implying that she works 24 hours. She said he did not know what she did from home. Hamid stated that he feels like she just comes in to see if he is in his office in the mornings and before she leaves at the end of the day. She got upset. He said, "I didn't mean to upset you. But I see others working from home." After that she kept her distance and didn't talk to him for a few days. After a week, he went to her office and said "How are you? I miss seeing you." As soon as he said that she said that he didn't want to see her. She said, "you just said that I come to see if you are here in the morning, and check to see if you are here in the evening". Hamid feels she comes to see if he is there in the evening because she wants to leave. She also sometimes comes to see if he is here or not without saying anything. She was upset when he said it to her, but it was true. It was how he felt. When it was brought up again in her office, she got all upset then got up and came out of her office and said, "when we are out, we have to put our names as out on the board". He said "Are you referring to me? If I go to the bathroom, do you want me to put I am out?" He was trying to understand when he is required to use the board. She was yelling. The whole office could hear her. She had never gone over this with him. He mentioned to Gracie (Rezba) that the board can be used online with an application.

This time he was discussing the Commerce Parkway project with Richard Zion in his office. Faith came in. She wanted to know what they were talking about. Richard said, "this is what we were talking about" and relayed our conversation. "We were talking about a field office on Commerce Parkway." She said "no, we don't do this." Hamid mentioned with the bridge project that some of the issues we had were due to lack of face-to-face conversations with contractors due to no field office. She did not want to hear it. That ended the conversation there. The City of Bunnell City Engineer had the opportunity to review the bid package and emailed Richard that he felt we needed a field office. Richard emailed him back and said Faith would not allow it and if there were questions to contact Faith.

Hamid states Faith says over and over to him, "my way or the highway". She makes the comment to shut him down. Others have heard it. One time in his one on one with her, he told her she is the boss, and it is fine. But he still feels like he needs to say once or twice what he feels his responsibility is. My way or the highway is not acceptable. He appreciates her

experience and knows there are things that he needs to learn. He doesn't expect someone who doesn't know anything about "Water Oak" to know what he knows. At the same time, he knows that others know more than he does. He appreciates all the projects they have done. In this business nothing is perfect. He has seen what happens. You make a decision based on what you know then. Sometimes it's not made on what you see on the paper. He must decide if his license is on the line or if it is going to compromise someone's safety. When he makes recommendations, he makes them based on his skill and experience through the years, if it is not illegal or a matter of safety. She treats him and all the engineers like they just graduated college. In fact, he has a lot of experience in the field, 23 years in another agency. She tells him that she knows that he has done bigger projects.

He stated that he rolls with the punches. He tells her what he believes needs to be done. Sometimes, she will come to his office and tell him the same thing he just told her. She tells him that "we are doing something different" but it's the same thing he told her to do. She just makes it sound like it is her idea.

She comes in, maybe it is her managerial tactic, and talks about Amy and Weldon (Spurling) and others and tells him they have all these issues and problems. He tells her they need to focus on their strengths. The folks we have here, the County is lucky to have them. They are there full-time; they are focused on what they are doing. We should see the glass half full, not half empty. The evaluations she asked him to do, she said they have all these issues. He said they can point out the good things as well. Faith wanted him to focus on the bad and not the good. When she talks to the employees, she never says anything about the bad things. She wants him to do it.

Hamid said he has respect for Weldon. We all do our job differently. For example, he can tell Weldon that we need to focus on this or that, casually. It works. Faith goes in Amy's office for hours, they talk. She is not telling her what she is telling me; she doesn't do this or that. Hamid stated you are showing that particular employee, day after day, hours, that you are chit chatting with them, a corrective measure wouldn't be that long. He mentioned to Faith that she has been going on and on about the ETM how badly they performed. This is Amy's project. She faulted him and Amy for it. Based on that Amy and Hamid had a meeting with Buckley Williams (Contractor). He was requesting additional funds. Hamid told Faith this project has been going on longer than expected. He told Faith to be aware of other projects and fees. This is open to the public. If the bridge gets built and it's not according to plan, it's a problem. If the beach doesn't get done, it's a problem. They had major issues on certain projects. Hamid thinks we make things more complicated by injecting ourselves into it.

Hamid goes to the meeting with Buckley. Hamid told Buckley that the County is not happy with his performance based on what Faith has expressed to him. Hamid has known Buckley for 20 years. Hamid went over the specifics, then told him to go meet with the Project Manager. Hamid said to Faith that she told him all these negative things about the contractor, and he has

known him for many years. She then scheduled a meeting with him (the contractor) and told him everything is fine, and praised him in front of the Board, but that was not correct based on what she said to Hamid. When Hamid confronted her, she said "I would do the same for you. I would tell them in front of others that you are the best." He just said "OK, thank you."

Hamid submitted emails about First Avenue. Faith was upset with him and came to his office and said, "this is the last time you disrespect me". This issue was a meeting with the city where they raised the problem with the on-time utility relocation. She also sent an email. All he was trying to say is that it needed to be documented and shown on the plan.

There are issues with FDOT. A couple of months after he started, Faith left for vacation overseas. FDOT raised issues about elevated walkways. They were calling for tests that were not shown on the plan. Amy and Hamid had a conference call with the Engineers. He had some recommendations. Hamid designed bridges for 12 years. For 20 years he managed bridge projects. He agreed with what they were saying, and FDOT would pay for it. FDOT would cover the cost of additional work and testing. Faith came back and in another meeting with FDOT, she asked him to go over what they said. Faith said no, we are not going to do this. If at any point she feels like she needs to do anything different, you will always feel like you are trying to cover yourself. If he makes this change, and does something else, he feels like he is doing something wrong. Amy and Hamid agreed with FDOT's plan. Those items came and bit us and cost more money because we did not accept the change they stated. Additional things were done but much less than what they were asking for. During construction we ran into a lot of problems. The schedule was delayed. It costs everyone. His whole team is fixing and doing work. It cost the County more at the end. As a person who had experience building bridges, he would have followed what FDOT recommended. FDOT had the opportunity to raise comments. They did not raise them on time. They missed it. They came back, said "Hey, this is not there." But offered to fix it and pay for it.

Hamid stated that every day he comes here to make a difference. If Faith doesn't want him here, then ok. This is not good for anyone, that they have this kind of working relationship. She did the same thing with Gracie, she said she doesn't feel safe because someone said they were going to shoot people. Same with Amy. She didn't talk to them for months because they called 911.

Gracie is responsible and does good work. She told Hamid that she is suing the County, but she didn't tell him the details. He doesn't know what it is about. Changes your thoughts about the people you work with.

Sometimes when he says things to Faith, he is like "why did or didn't I say that to her?" Like when she told him about throwing rocks, he felt like saying what do you want to me to do, put

my head in the sand? But he didn't. Hamid said he doesn't want to be the reason for her termination or cause problems for her. He doesn't need this. He would leave.

Hamid stated that shortly after he started here, she seemed insecure. Always trying to cover herself. No matter what, things can be done differently. No one is perfect, and we should not try to be. A lot of the problems come from the insecurity from her.

2. *Richard Zion, Project Administrator, May 15, 2023*

When asked about the environment in Engineering, Richard stated, "I am paid to be an Engineer". His ultimate goal is to make sure it benefits the public and is safe. If there are red flags, we will discuss it. Sometimes conversations between him and Faith are heated. By that he means, she has a temperament and personality. She can be very passionate and aggressive. He does not come out of left field, he comes prepared. He will show her some things she has not seen because she has not been to the site.

In terms of how she communicates with staff, she is more aggressive with other folks. He has witnessed, a while back, an incident with a gentleman who came into the building and threatened to kill people. He asked Gracie if she was ok because she witnessed it. She told him about it. When someone comes in like that, take it seriously. She reported it to FCSO. For some reason, and he cannot explain why, Faith got bent out of shape about her reporting it. As a response to her calling it in, she more or less belittled and Faith spoke loudly about how disappointed she was about her doing that. Gracie is a meek character. It was a classic case of bullying. Gracie doesn't deserve that.

Another time he recalled Faith belittling and berating Gracie for ordering something that Faith did not approve of. He felt it was inappropriate and extreme.

Richard stated we will have to ask others in the office about this, he was in the field. He knows it was on a Thursday that Faith got into a heated discussion with Hamid. Hamid packed up and left. Amy explained to him that Hamid left when he asked where he was. Faith gets upset with Hamid often. It's a small office. You can hear.

Jorge and I asked how often Faith gets upset in the office. Richard said in general, she gets upset with someone in the office about once a week. It's inappropriate behavior but he has worked with worse. Some may call it a hostile work environment. She gets ramped up at making a point and it gets louder and louder. It's pretty much fair game, she does it to everyone. Not one more than others. He said he cannot control how people behave. He feels she focuses on people that she can push over.

Regarding the field office on Commerce, and the discussion between Hamid and Richard. Jorge explained that Faith didn't want the field office. Jorge does not have the experience to

understand why she wouldn't want it. Richard explained in terms of setting up a field office for a job, if your contractors are fairly close so they can mobilize, a field office may not be needed if they have clear access to the site from where they are coming in from. Some projects are large and warrant a field office. He said the project we were talking about needed to be staged somewhere so they can store equipment. It's an added expense for us to add an office. He could go either way with it, either with or without. It would provide some benefit to the project but not to the degree where they had to have it. Hamid and he discussed it, Faith shut it down. It's the City of Bunnell's ultimate decision.

We asked Richard when Hamid and he talked, did he think it was a good idea then? Richard said they see eye to eye on many things. He expressed to Hamid that he could take it or leave it. If it was strongly recommended, he would do it. He did not feel it was 100 % necessary. Once Faith said no, he communicated it to the city and said further conversations need to be had with Faith. It's convenient and not required. Since funding is so close on this project, all money is being scrutinized.

Jorge asked about vendor selecting and scoring. Richard said he actively participates with CEI. We have continuing services contracts to not slow down the process. The statutory requirements allow us to select through the continuing services process. There are a broad group of vendors. Some are better than others. They try to set up a revolving pick. They operate in accordance with Statute. When it comes to the Purchasing side, it feels like the Department has been isolated in general. He tried to loop Rob (Rounds) in and when needed he would also loop Ryan (Prevatt) in Road and Bridge in.

3. *Interview with Ansley Wren-Key (Patricia) May 15, 2023*

We asked Ansley how she feels about the environment in the Engineering Department. She stated that everyone is getting along well. There have been episodes previously. She stated that she had seen Hamid try to tell Faith that he doesn't need to be talked to "that way" and leave a meeting. He thought she was talking to him condescendingly and talked over him along with interrupting him.

Have you experienced or witnessed that with others? Ansley stated Faith definitely interrupts. Another time she heard Faith and Hamid in Hamid's office. They got into a confrontation; she would just cut him off. He said if you are not going to let me talk, then why are you even asking me?

When she first started, Faith was talking to her condescendingly. She confronted her about it. Faith took a step back, regrouped and talked to her in a different tone. Ever since then it has been ok.

Ansley feels like when Faith is stressed, she comes across that way. She talks to Faith at the same level Faith talks to her. They resolve it that way. But it is not like that for Hamid. The difference is he is offended and says "I do not have to listen to this. I have been doing this for 30 years and I don't need to be spoken to like this." Faith and Hamid yell. Ansley just matches tones.

Ansley states she has witnessed Faith not speak to someone for a few days after something was said she didn't like.

When asked if she feels like she is working in a hostile working environment Ansley stated, as a whole, it doesn't feel hostile. Aggressive would be a better word.

Jorge said to Ansley, "With your experience in the past, is this a normal working environment?" Ansley responded that she has worked in hostile work environments. This is stressful. It is more laid back when Faith is not here. Faith is aggressive when she wants something. But it is not stressful when she is not here.

Regarding bullying, Ansley said a lot of times Faith can shut down people's idea. She will undermine it, ask a question that makes you feel like you are on the defense. It just shuts you down. She will ask condescending questions. Faith has a question to come back at you with to undermine. She is good at picking apart little things. She is not quiet about it.

Jorge asked, when an idea is shut down, has she ever come back and changed her mind? Ansley answered, yes.

4. *Interview with Weldon Spurling, Project Manager, May 15, 2023*

Weldon was asked if he felt there was a hostile work environment in Engineering regarding how they talk to each other and raise their voice.

Weldon stated that when talking to someone there can be raised voices, shouting, or it can sound threatening. He has been desensitized. He came from the medical and construction fields where this type of tone is normal. He has been trained to listen to the message, defuse, let them vent. He doesn't feel like he is qualified to give an account on communication.

He thinks of the Engineering department as a client. His job is to solve problems, find solutions and get consensus. He is the gatekeeper of projects. He has to weigh the project decision with his ethics. Professional ethics. Sometimes decisions may be questioned. He will explain and Faith has taken it very well and will tell him he has her backing.

Faith has not treated him disrespectfully. They have a good working relationship. She trusts in his abilities and how he represents himself for Flagler County. She may ask questions. She

expresses her ok with what is going on. Pleased with the relationship and how it is going on. She gives him support and she will run interference if he needs it. Appreciates that the most.

When there is a disagreement, Faith has the final say. He is permitted to have the ability to express his opinions and can speak his mind.

Jorge asked if he had experienced anyone else being treated disrespectfully? He stated he does not get distracted. We are all adults and all professionals. We have our own communication skills. Things are getting done. If your way is not getting it done, you have the time to express yourself so that you can cover yourself professionally. He does not sit at the watercooler and gossip. He finds a solution and goes with plan B.

As far as communication in the office is concerned, on occasion he has heard shouting. Cross chatter. He takes it along as the normal course. He is desensitized. He has heard shouting but could not speak to it, he was not involved. Staff meetings are cordial. Professional opinions are given, follow-up questions are asked. Have you tried this or that? His recollection is no heated staff meetings.

Regarding receiving the cold shoulder from Faith, he said if he gives Faith an opposing opinion, he will follow up in a couple of days to see how it worked. She may not agree with the opinion, but never the cold shoulder. She has instituted a one-on-one session. He supports these meetings because they give them an understanding of what is happening. They talk about what he needs to do for the day, and he can plan his days.

When asked who he reports to he responded both Hamid and Faith. He gives Hamid the day-to-day operational updates. Hamid meets with Faith every day. He gives him a briefing in case he is in the field and cannot answer questions. He also will forward Hamid emails to keep Hamid in the loop.

5. *Interview with Gracie Rezba, Contracts and Grant Coordinator, May 15, 2023*

What has your experience been with Faith in terms of treatment? Gracie responded that it changed since Richard Gordon left. There is more resistance towards Faith. Not so much with Richard Zion. He is very direct but in a professional way. She feels like the department is not as organized as before. Lack of communication is an issue for everyone in the department. Before dealing with a project, they would talk about them. They would figure out what the problem is, finalize information, create something to help. When somebody emails somebody a staff report or agenda item, it is supposed to go to Faith, Hamid, or Gracie prior to it going to Luci for review. This could be resolved quickly, but there is a lack of communication. Faith decided to do alternate one on one's with project managers then a staff meeting the following week. This helps with communication.

We asked if she thought the work environment is hostile? Gracie said she can hear them talking loudly (Faith and Hamid). She is used to that, especially with Richard Gordon. Gracie states she has experienced a hostile work environment with Ansley. When Engineering staff does a staff report, they send it to her to comment. Almost all of them send it to her. They have been giving Ansley documents to create, like the Dunes report agenda item. Ansley sent it to Hamid, Gracie, and Faith. She asked Gracie to look at it. Gracie suggested a few changes. Ansley snapped at her and started yelling at her. Ansley told Gracie to change it, that every time she does something Gracie changes it. Faith and Hamid were in Faith's office. Gracie said let's stop this and talk to Faith. They went to Faith; Faith was trying to understand what was going on. Ansley said she was not changing it to Faith, Hamid, Gracie. Faith asked Hamid to help Ansley fix and finalize the report. It ended up being a new document. Ansley later apologized for her behavior.

We asked if she has ever been yelled at or shouted at by Faith, we heard that she had. Gracie stated that Faith has different ways of talking to people. She will not scream or yell at her like that. She knows that she is sensitive. She does not recall her yelling at her. Hamid and Faith get loud and heated. We explained we heard she experienced it when she purchased something Faith did not authorize. Gracie stated that she does not remember that, and she would seek authorization prior to purchase anyway. Jorge explained that he heard it from more than one person. Gracie said that Faith did not scream at her. She talks to her; she does not scream at her. She will ask about something but will not yell at her in front of other people.

She knows there was a project where Ansley asked her to do a PO for the dunes project for something that is not part of the contract. We have extra money for the project. Gracie asked for approval from Faith from Ansley, for the change. Ansley provided an approved email from Faith. Faith, Richard Gordon, Hamid, and Ansley were in the conference room. They called her on a Teams meeting. Faith asked what the PO was about. Gracie said Ansley asked her to do the PO. Faith asked her where are you getting the money from? Gracie stated that based on what was told to her, it was part of the grant. Faith shook her head and said where is the amendment document for that? Gracie explained to Faith that she (Faith) approved it in the email and why it was not part of the contract. They ended up holding the work. Richard Gordon stated the County will wait until the contractor agrees to use the remaining money from the Dorian project. She thinks that is the only time that she was called in a meeting when Faith was upset. Gracie stated, "Maybe I am just used to her like that. Maybe others think she is yelling at me. I would not be concerned about that".

Jorge then asked if she witnessed Faith yell at the Engineers? Gracie stated Faith was loud with Weldon, but he is loud also. Hamid and Faith, yes. Amy, there are some instances when I hear her loud, but I don't understand what is really going on. Amy went to Faith's office, they started talking about the Dunes project, they started getting loud. They called Gracie, and asked how

they did the process on the other project. She told her what she remembered. Someone from another department came over and heard them yelling and left. Sometimes their normal conversation is loud. I am not sure if others think that is not normal.

Jorge asked if she had ever experienced the cold shoulder or witnessed it from Faith? Every day Faith goes around and says good morning and does the same when she leaves, she says bye. That used to be her normal routine. After what happened with Hamid, she stopped.

We then asked her to explain what she meant by "after what happened with Hamid". She said late last year or early this year Hamid was not in the office and took his laptop home. He was home sick. He texted Faith he was sick and taking time off. There were a lot of things that needed to be addressed. He came back and she went to his office and tried to talk to him about a lot of stuff, normal routine. When she left Hamid's office, they (Faith and Hamid) didn't talk for a couple of days and then Faith asked her (Gracie) how things were going or what was going on. She asked how Hamid was doing because she hadn't seen him in a while. That same day Hamid went to Faith's office and said he had missed her and had not talked in a few days, then the door shut. It was loud. Faith opened the door and showed him the board to notate if he was in or out of the office. She was explaining to him what the board was for. Hamid said, "well you want me to put there if I go to the bathroom?" Faith got upset more. After that she stopped going around to say good morning. Gracie heard that Hamid said she goes to his office to check to see if he is in the office. He said it to Faith too.

The most recent issue was 3 weeks ago in Weldon's office, regarding Marine Acres. Hamid was in Weldon's office. Hamid said, "you listen to me" and Faith said, "I don't need to listen to you." Faith told Gracie she is concerned about Hamid because he goes to meetings. He is supposed to update her on what is going on. From what Faith told her, she is not getting updated unless she asks. She only finds out some of it when she is cc in an email. Faith told her because she wanted to know where Hamid went and said she did not know about the meeting he was at. This is ongoing. She is used to Richard Gordon's process where he would update her on everything. She believes Faith told Hamid that she wanted to be updated on everything, but Gracie doesn't think he is doing it.

We asked Gracie which employees reports to Hamid. She said all engineers have been reporting to Hamid since about 6 months ago due to another situation. All projects that were Richard Gordon's went to Amy. Amy is still getting familiar with it. Hamid is also getting familiar. The three of them are not updating each other or communicating. Gracie gets confused as to who is doing what. When Amy was out, and Hamid was in, someone had emailed the County and Hamid answered it a different way than Amy would have. Instead of asking Amy what is going on (the bridge project). Amy felt like Hamid was not communicating with her prior to responding to something. Amy has all the information. She is the project manager. With the old process, we would talk first before we put it out there. That is what is missing. Amy recently

has been having issues with Hamid also. She is supposed to CC Hamid on all the emails and what is happening with her project. She stopped doing that. It is not happening for a reason- because Hamid is stepping over what she is doing. The problem is that Faith asks Hamid, and he doesn't know the answers for Amy's projects. Faith always tells them to CC Gracie at least.

6. Interview with Amy Stroger, Project Manager, May 16, 2023

We asked how she perceives the work environment in Engineering? Amy stated that it feels a little different than other departments. Engineering stays within their walls. She is not always sure how people perceive Engineering. There has been a lot of turnover in the department. Everyone is impacted by the dynamic in the department.

We then asked if she noticed raised voices or yelling within the department? She said it has always been that way. Personally, she has been struggling with the relationship between Hamid and Faith. The lines have been blurred. She is not sure who is in charge. It's not a problem if they are both on the same page. But they are not. Not that either is right or wrong, just a very different philosophy. They likely will not make the same decision.

When she discussed her feelings with Faith, she wasn't satisfied. Faith will usually think about it later and come back to discuss. But Amy never got that. It is ongoing and not resolved. She discussed it again during her evaluation process in front of Hamid and Faith. She felt like Faith heard what she was saying this time, but there was no feedback. Hamid was in the room as well, but he had no feedback. Her sense is that he is frustrated and has done all that he can. She feels frustration and exacerbation from him, like he has given up. There is definitely a communication barrier on both sides.

Most conversations on project related stuff are directly with Faith. She is not sure how much she shares with Hamid. He doesn't know about things and is not sure why. He may be sharing emails with Faith, and she doesn't always read all of her emails. Faith and Richard talked for an hour and a half every morning. This is not happening. Maybe she is getting emails and not keeping up with them. It's all communication issues.

Amy's struggles –she does what Faith tells her to do and Hamid questions it. She doesn't know who she reports to. There is a level of frustration. Faith has told them to report to Hamid in email, but Faith doesn't respect that. The staff tried to respect that. The staff is caught in the middle.

Sometimes people say things that are a trigger – Faith will say something that is a trigger for Hamid and vice versa. It appears really quick that they are not understanding each other and escalates to an argument. Faith and Richard would also raise their voices pretty often. It was how they worked through the problem. Not personal, mutual respect. Not uncomfortable.

Between Hamid and Faith, it's different. Hamid feels disrespected. It's a little darker. It's uncomfortable. It feels more personal. They were in a meeting where Hamid was getting frustrated because he was trying to say something, and Faith would not allow him to speak. He kept getting cut off by Faith. It built to a point where he had an outburst which caused a bigger conflict. Amy has been cut off before while talking. She is fine with pushing back on it and will say "let me finish". Sometimes Faith will let her finish. She has had a lot of time to adjust to her personality and how her mind works and how to communicate with her including why Faith reacts the way she does.

Amy does not recall Faith talking to others like she does Hamid. Everybody has had their times when she has "yelled" at them. Amy does not really consider it yelling. She believes it is a culture thing. She is loud and animated. It's uncomfortable if you are not used to it. It can feel like you are being yelled at. But sometimes it is yelling.

We asked if he ever heard "It's my way or the highway"? She does not recall Faith saying that. Faith does make it clear that she is the head of that department, and you are taking orders from her and not another department head. If Amy has discussions with other departments or department heads, she will have that discussion with Faith as well.

She has never felt uncomfortable taking action on a project and would express it if she did. She will express if she has a different opinion. Ultimately it is Faith's decision.

Jorge asked what happens when she pushes back? Does Faith give cold shoulder when not in agreement with her? Have you ever experienced that? She has had a couple of those happen. Most recent was with a person that came in and made threats and her and Gracie called Law Enforcement. Faith knew how she felt about the way she handled it. Faith was angry with her. Faith would not speak to her for several weeks. The conversations were only as necessary. It was bad for a while.

She thinks Gracie's discussions were a little bit different. She did not think it was handled appropriately. Her concerns were not listened to, whether they were valid or not. The hurricane coming helped create a distraction from that.

We then asked, overall do you feel like the environment is hostile? She stated she enjoys working here. She has other options. In general, she enjoys the department, but they are not working together as a team and not interacting together. They have had in the past really good team relationships. At times the department can be unhealthy and at times it can be extraordinary. Hostile is a label she would not use. Sometimes with the workload and the stakes being high and deadlines, you can feel like you are always in a panic mode which can escalate your emotions.

Jorge asked how does Faith handle her making mistakes? Amy stated, there are very little decisions that she is not aware of. If there is a problem, you should have gotten her buy in before you made the decision. Jorge asked, what happens if you forget something? Amy stated, you will hear about it.

Amy was asked about whether she felt Faith provides feedback in a constructive way or if she feels she or others are belittled. She stated, you will hear about it. You will be scolded. She was not sure how to express it. You will definitely get scolded. It may sound more like why did you do this or it may be different than what she would have chosen.

Others have said that they feel like sometimes they are treated like they just got out of college. Do you feel like Faith treats you like you just got out of college? No, not her, but if Faith has not begun to trust you then you might feel that way. If the person just started with the County, Faith may not understand the logic behind the decisions made.

Amy doesn't feel like anyone is personally attacked. She said it is the inability to get on the same wavelength is an issue. What is being said is not what is being heard. Then there is a reaction to what is being perceived.

Jorge asked about the walk over on the bridges – some are sinking and about the funding for it. FDOT wanted to pay for a study. Faith did not want to do it and now we have to pay to get additional work done as Jorge understood it. Amy stated, this is not exactly true.

Jorge asked if we spending more money fixing it. Amy said there was more money spent than reimbursed by FDOT. FDOT has standards for pilings that are written for bridges not walkovers. It went through multiple levels of review. The design was completed, accepted and all comments were addressed. All design issues should have been resolved in the design phase. Several months into the construction phase and an Engineer from FDOT states they disagree with the pilings. There were multiple meetings between Engineers. In the end, it was resolved by getting another study to understand a little bit more about the pilings and what the variations are within the boardwalks.

It all got worked out and everyone agreed to a plan. We satisfied FDOT concerns with the plan, a mutually developed plan. There was a difference of opinion on how Hamid and Faith would handle. Hamid's background is not with local projects. He deals with \$60M projects whereas we are building a trail through the woods.

Amy was asked if she is happy working in this environment here. She stated that she is. Just recently feel like they could be working better together. Flagler County has been good to her. She enjoys what she does. She said sometimes you get pigeonholed into one thing. Here she has been able to do many different things. Generally, she is pretty happy here. The workload is tough. For a long time, they have been overworked and understaffed. Since 06 or 07. If

something happens to her it would be difficult. When someone leaves you get their work, the workload is so much it makes it hard.

She stated she does not know what Hamid is working on. She received Richard Gordon's projects when he left. Jorge asked if Richard's projects were reassigned from her to Hamid. None of the projects Richard had have been given back to Hamid. As far as she knows, Hamid has one project and helps Ansley with the dunes. If everyone is reporting to Hamid, it may be that Faith's vision was a higher level for him.

Jorge asked how Engineering's relationship is with other departments. Amy stated that it's an issue. She is very troubled by the way Road and Bridge are structured and how they interact with each other. What they do is intertwined. What they do affects Road and Bridge and what Engineering does affects them. When the divisions were together communication was better. They both understood what was happening. They still try to communicate. Amy is really frustrated with Water Oak. Amy made it a point to invite Ryan Prevatt to meetings on the progress and final. Then out of nowhere she gets feedback that was provided to Mike then to Heidi, Faith and finally Amy. This was normally a conversation between Amy and Ryan. Amy said it never should have escalated. She had this discussion with Ryan. He said there is so much animosity with Faith. Amy said she didn't understand why he could not have a conversation with her due to a perceived animosity with Faith. He showed up to the inspections, design etc. He did not bring up any issues. That is her frustration. It feels like undermining. It is not correct, so now she has to take a day to file a report on how it was handled since it is on the record.

It was a normal process for them to talk to each other. Now there is an issue. Weldon had a project that Ryan should have been included on, but Weldon did not know and failed to invite him. That is understandable.

Is there anything else that you feel like we need to know or want to discuss? Amy said, the structural relationship between General Services and Public Works has bothered her. They do not report to the same person at all. One reports to Heidi and one to Jorge. If they do not have the conversation on a grass roots level, then they are not happening at all. It's a disconnect. The priorities are not being reconciled. If you are talking to each other, those things work themselves out. Staff had more interactions and interchanges. They could call each other and say "hey what do I do" or "what do I order". Now those things don't happen and both departments suffer from that.

She recommends that it would work better if they were together although there are good reasons for the departments to be separated. But sometimes there are two directors in public works. At some point, you are working closely with the other on the same topic. There should be a union at some point, inviting each other to meetings. Ryan will dial in virtually instead of

coming over here. She can tell he is not comfortable coming up here. She can see anxiety there and she believes it's due to a strained relationship with Faith.

7. Interview with Faith Alkhatib, County Engineer

Jorge and I met with Faith to discuss the concerns of her staff. To ascertain whether her staff had talked to her already we asked if she knew why she was coming to meet with us. She stated that no one had talked to her. We asked if anyone shared that we invited her staff to speak with us, she again replied no. We explained we received a complaint about the work environment in the Engineering Department. We reached out to Engineering employees who were willing to speak to us. We wanted to share some of the comments and feedback we received in hopes that she could help us understand the environment and how we can elicit change going forward. Faith wanted to know when we met with the staff. Jorge stated that it began the day prior to her being out. She stated that she is in the process of a disciplinary action or reprimand for an employee. I advised that prior to issuing the disciplinary action, I would like to review it. I need to ensure that if issued, it does not appear as retaliation.

I explained to Faith that the issues we are going to discuss are repetitive and have happened to various members of the Engineering Department. I expressed to Faith that all the employees respect her as County Engineer and for bringing grant dollars to the county. They feel she is very competent but does not play well with others. When I told her that they respect her and the work she does regarding grant dollars, she shook her head in approval as if to say "yes".

I explained that her employees perceive her as a bully and state that she is upset with an employee at least once a week resulting in an argument or raised voices. Faith responded that she talks in her normal voice. She does not yell. Later in the interview she asked what our definition of bullying is. We gave her the example of the purchasing incident with Gracie that was reported to us.

Jorge explained that the Engineering Department is a toxic and unhealthy environment as reported by employees and the employees state this has been going on so long, they have started to tolerate what most of us would consider an unhealthy or hostile environment. Faith responded with "Did they say that?" She then told us to put it in writing, who said what, and she will respond.

Jorge shared that some employees also expressed that Faith has created a department that is geared toward isolation from other departments and that has introduced issues

that could have been avoided. Faith said that she was told that Ryan was told to go to Heidi and not Amy. The issue is with Administration. She said she has called Mike Dickson, and they try to work with Ryan. She does not have any issues with Ryan. Her department is required to speak to General Services. I explained that her employee feels that the lack of communication is because of her relationship with Ryan. She said, "what do you mean relationship?" as if I was implying she had a personal relationship with Ryan. I clarified that I was speaking of a "working relationship". She says she doesn't have any issues with Ryan. Faith feels that the culture in the County creates isolation. Jorge asked what she meant. She stated that there is no communication. She doesn't know what other departments are doing. Innovative Technology is always helpful though.

We expressed that her relationship, or lack thereof, with Hamid affects the department. There is tension and yelling or just no communication. The yelling and inappropriate behavior is making others uncomfortable. Outside employees have entered Engineering and heard yelling and left. Faith said that if someone has an ego and has 30 years' experience, then it's an issue. She was referring to Hamid. She said she does not yell; she may talk loudly sometimes. She said, "it affects others?" Faith maintains that she does not yell at all. She said "Yelling? You don't want to hear me yell. I talk how I talk." Faith continued to make statements like "do you need to hear me yell?" We did not respond to her comments.

We proceeded to share that her employees state that she does not let others speak and states that she is the boss/department head and makes all decisions. She does not make her employees feel valued or heard. It was reported that she has made the statement "my way or the highway". Further, several employees stated that she cuts them off and sometimes uses hand gestures to shut them down. At first Faith just said "Ok". Then she stated she never made the comment "my way or the highway." Further she stated she does not get in the middle unless there is an issue. She told us to ask them how many times she attended the project meetings. Jorge stated it appears as micromanaging. She said, "give her examples". He told her that many stated that she wants to know everything that happens. If an employee goes to a meeting, they must report to her what happened. Faith said, if the employee wants to make a decision that is fine but grant funding she is protective of. There are impacts. She does not get involved in everything they do but said that she wants updates. She has to know what is going on with the projects. She does not know all the details. With Amy, Hamid

attended two projects. She said to Hamid, "Why suddenly now you tell me that you did not extend the contract. It expired." She said he tried to blame Amy.

Faith stated she has an open-door policy. She wanted to know if they said they could not come in. I tried to express that maybe they were not comfortable coming to her due to being cut off. It was difficult to explain this concept to her because she was not hearing what I was saying.

We then asked her about giving employees the cold shoulder. I explained this is a form of retaliation. Her employees say that at times she will not speak to an employee for days or weeks, unless she has to, if she is upset with them. Faith stated she is not purposely not talking to them, she just gets busy.

We told her it was reported that she belittles employees for mistakes or doing something she doesn't approve of and she does in front of others and so loud the entire office can hear it. Faith denied doing this. We gave examples where others overheard this happen with Gracie and Hamid. She denies any of this happened and states it is not true. Faith states that she has never ridiculed or belittled Hamid or Gracie in front of others. When told that employees say she speaks condescending to the, she did not comment or respond.

Jorge expressed that employees do not know who they report to. It is confusing for them. They say they were told by her via email to report to Hamid but then she does not respect that. Faith said that she knows about the confusion, but she does not undermine Hamid. If they are in a meeting, he has to conduct himself accordingly. She does not like it when she is surprised during a meeting, he should talk to her before. As colleagues, we need to look into it, whatever is happening. She said that Hamid would talk about the consulting firm and about how they are unprofessional. He talks about other people; he talks about staff. Hamid told some of the staff that Richard Gordon is not a professional. Ansley told her that morning that Hamid told her that Richard Gordon was unprofessional. I asked her how the topic came up. Faith said it came up in a conversation because Faith told Ansley to talk to Richard Gordon.

Amy came to her and wanted to know why Hamid was in the middle of her projects. Faith said maybe he is trying to help her. Amy said he copies everyone. Faith was coming up with a process as to how to keep everyone updated to improve communication. She ended up using monthly reports.

We explained employees feel there is a lack of communication and teamwork in the department. Faith replied, when Richard (Gordon) was here she managed staff. When she hired an Assistant (Hamid), he was learning and started issues. Last Thursday she told Hamid to calm down in front Amy. He got mad. He gets mad.

Jorge told her some employees questioned why Faith would criticize a vendor in her office due to low performance and praise them in front of the Board which is intentionally misleading our elected officials. These are inconsistencies that make some engineers uncomfortable. She said, when it comes to people that are working on a project, there are many there. She said we have to be careful when we go to ruin someone's relationship. As far as this consultant goes, they needed to be trained to do the job. They were experienced with lab projects. They were a great team. Amy complained to her that they changed the staff. There was a problem for 7 months with the project, Hamid was in the middle of it, and it was never resolved. They asked her to get in the middle and solve the issues. When the team started, there were a lot of challenges. According to Amy, Hamid was sitting in the meeting attacking the design team. As a Professional Engineer you cannot attack the design unless you do a full review.

She further stated the consultant for the project gave a time extension to the contractor. They told her staff and FDOT and not her, now it is not federalized. They will not fund it. ETM now wants more money (Buckley) due to the extension of the contract.

Then County Administration decided they wanted a presentation for the bridge in front of the Board. She asked Buckley to make a video. He said he would make it happen. Faith and Buckley coordinated with his marketing person. Buckley attended the Board meeting, and she told the Board that he created the video. She also said they have a great team working on the project. Hamid had a problem with that. She was talking about the team, not one person. There are a lot of people on the team. Jorge said, "You stood up in front of the Board and said they are a great team." Faith laughed and said Hamid was walking away. There are several members of the team.

Jorge explained that some of the behaviors described have also been experienced by some of our partners and other County departments. Some partners and county staff shared that they prefer to work with the other Engineers than deal with her. Faith said, the meeting where Hamid walked out, Hamid was being insubordinate. In addition, he was attending meetings with Amy, which caused problems. Amy gets upset and comes

to her. Faith will ask Hamid "Did you look in the files?" Hamid will say "No, I am not looking in files". There are issues due to them not looking through the file. The files are a mess. They are on the N drive. Richard (Gordon) will file everything in the N drive which is good for the County for tracking purposes. Sometimes she will tell Hamid "You were in the meeting. You were in the construction phase. Why did you not bring that up then?" He rushes to a conclusion. He does not do anything based on facts. He doesn't check the files. Faith stated the hostile work environment is created by Hamid. He does not update her. She must ask him.

Jorge asked what happens when they do not agree. She said they have everyone come in and discuss it, then she will make the decision. Faith said do not bring problems without solutions. For example, with the dunes project, Hamid has 30 years of experience, but we need to do things differently to get the job done. Look at the goal. What are they trying to accomplish.

Faith stated that Richard (Zion) said Hamid wanted to ride with him to Water Oak specifically. If you want to do something, then be responsible for it. She heard from her staff that Hamid is giving them more work than they can handle. They say that he doesn't comprehend, and they think it is his English. Faith said Hamid's English is better than hers.

Faith stated that Hamid got mad and angry because he could not work at home. He was so angry. He sent her something in writing that he was mad. It was a text. She said she would find it and submit it to us. She said that her method when they are out is to send an email or text. Then they work it out.

In reference to the loud talking in her office, she talked to him about the board on the wall. She doesn't want to know where they are, just mark the board. Hamid said, "When I go to the bathroom you want me to put as out?" She said, "this is the end of our discussion." She felt Hamid was being sarcastic. Jorge said that he feels the board on the wall is too much. Faith said that she wants to know if someone is in the field. It's a method of communication.

Faith stated that Hamid refused to get his lab certification. He said to have Amy do it. Faith asked Richard Z. to get it too. She said that Hamid said he was not going to do it. Amy told her she would quit if Hamid were her supervisor.

Faith asked Ansley and Hamid to work on an amendment for Eastman and Olsen for the dunes project. Faith said she will take chances with Engineering but is very serious about funding.

When Engineering has agenda items, she wants good documents and there is a process. Staff sends items to Gracie who sends them Luci after review. Hamid sent a staff report with documents. He copied Luci and Faith. When Faith started reading the staff report, she did not feel it was written for the public to understand. She said to Ansley and Hamid "I always like it when anyone can understand without having to explain it." They started explaining it to her. She said she understands it, but please change the language.

Faith went on to tell us that Al (Hadeed) called her and asked if she read the amendment, someone deleted the landscaping part of it. She said she would read it but needed some time. He said he will have Sean hold it. When she talked to Hamid and Ansley, they said they decided to delete it because FEMA would not pay for it. Faith said we still needed it, regardless of funding. Faith said they still have to include it. They asked if they should put it back. She said yes. They did not send it to Gracie. Therefore, it did not go out to everyone. If it went to Gracie, she would have cleaned it up. That is why we have a process. Hamid makes his own. "Too many cooks" is the comment that Sean (Moylan) made. Faith likes to look at the big picture.

Jorge asked why Al was invested in landscaping, it is not a legal thing. Faith said Al is a Lawyer/Engineer. Al just noticed in the agenda that it was crossed out.

Jorge shared that some directors and partners state that she is aggressive. Faith wanted to know what directors find her aggressive. Jorge stated that he had to intervene with Finance and her. Faith said, "How am I aggressive if I say I need help?" Jorge said that he could name two or three directors that have told him she is aggressive, but he dismissed it at the time. Same as contractors that state they do not want to deal with her. Faith states she is offended by the comment that Directors find her aggressive and difficult to work with.

In discussing communication, Faith stated that Jorge came to Engineering to send Hamid to meetings. Faith also stated that that Jorge came in and told her to send Ansley to a meeting since she (Faith) was leaving for the day. She said she does not know about it when he sends her staff to meetings.

Jorge followed up by asking for further information. She said there was a meeting about the radio show to talk about the beach. Jorge said to send Ansley. She said he could have asked her who to send. She had already worked it out with the contractor. Jorge said the person called

him and Heidi and asked them to send someone. So, he came to her and said can you send Ansley? Faith told him that it was resolved. He said OK.

She continued stating that he made a decision to send Ansley. He makes the decision to send Hamid and does not tell her. Faith was escalating and raising her voice. Jorge told her to stop. He had to say "stop" three times before Faith stopped talking. He then explained in a firm tone and somewhat elevated voice, that he does not need her permission to go to her staff. Faith then looked at me and said Jorge was being aggressive. She then told Jorge that he can go to Hamid is fine. Jorge said that he will go to whomever he needs to, and he will invite whomever he wants to a meeting. Faith said that is fine, she can adapt to different management styles.

The conversation then shifted. She was trying to remember an incident where she had an altercation with another director since Jerry and Jorge started. She wants to know who it is. This seemed to bother her.

Jorge said he does not understand why she says that since he and Jerry that there is no communication. She states that there is little communication and that she has not had any altercations with directors. Jorge said that it could have been one that reports to Heidi and not him.

It is important to note that during Faith's interview, I often used words such as "staff believes" or "employees feel" as to not place blame directly on her. Faith continually made comments throughout the interview stating to give it to her in writing who said what. She also said several times "a lot of these are feelings, give it to me in writing and I will respond". Jorge and I explained to her we could not until the investigation was finished.

Conclusion

Based on the interviews of the Engineering staff, I have determined that there is an overall acceptance of a toxic work culture by most of the employees in the Engineering Department. Employees state that shouting or yelling is a normal practice for the Engineering office. Some employees stated they are "used to it" or are "desensitized" therefore it does not bother them.

Although they recognize that this behavior is inappropriate and does not happen in other departments, they made excuses for its existence in the Engineering Department. Some of the excuses were "it's always been this way", "that is how we/they communicate", "I am used to it", "Engineers can be loud to get the point across", or "it is an element of her culture". It's likely that they are afraid to be open due to past reactions.

All the Engineering Department employees agreed to some degree that Faith is animated and loud, especially when she is passionate about a topic. In addition, they all have witnessed loud disagreements between Faith and Hamid which makes the environment tense and uncomfortable. There seems to be a disconnect between Faith and Hamid that is bleeding over to the entire department. It was also noted that employees believe that Faith has a disagreement with at least one employee per week in the Engineering Department that escalates into an argument or loud conversation. Some of the employees have felt that she is condescending when she speaks to them. Some have addressed this with her and some have not.

Most of the employees agreed that at some point they have not been permitted to talk or express an opinion or have witnessed others “shut down” for trying to express their thoughts or opinions. Faith has made it known that she is the head of the department and gives direction and makes final decisions. She expects to be briefed on every meeting that employees attend.

Although the employees would not classify the environment as hostile, they do feel it is unhealthy. They feel there is a lack of teamwork, and the department is not functioning at the level it should be. Further, the ongoing feud between Faith and Hamid is affecting the entire department. Many employees either do not know who they report to, or thought they reported to both Hamid and Faith or were told via email by Faith to report to Hamid but then the decision was not respected by Faith. Hamid and Faith have different views on how to handle things which are causing conflict because they are not in agreement most of the time.

As to the allegation of bullying, there was one employee who stated he felt like Faith bullied another employee, but the other employee did not see it as bullying but normal behavior. It is concerning that the employee sees this behavior as normal.

I recommend we meet with the employees again to see if there have been any noticeable changes to the behavior and culture in the department since we met with Faith. I would also like to assess whether retaliation is occurring. Once that is completed, I recommend we train the Engineering Department on the characteristics of bullying, how to recognize it and what to do about it.

Moving forward, regardless of the outcome above, I recommend we have a discussion with Faith to express the concerns of Administration in relation to the Engineering Department culture, how it works against County culture and expectations for change, along with consequences for failure to implement change. I would recommend a follow up memorialization in writing. In addition, it is recommended that Administration discuss how to handle conflict and effective listening skills, and suggest voluntary or mandated anger management counseling through the County’s Employee Assistance Program.

Please feel free to reach out to me with any questions.

June 6, 2023

Amy Stroger

Follow up meeting.

Engineering

This meeting is to check to see if anything has changed in the Engineering Department since our last meeting. It has been a couple of weeks since we spoke.

Anything improved? Has there been any retaliation?

No retaliation. Definitely a tension. Greater inability of Hamid and Faith to work together and coach. They are not talking at all. Maybe it is because nobody is supposed to talk (amount the investigation). Little communication about anything.

Expressed concern to Hamid and Faith as it related to projects. Nothing has changed. Has had staff meeting or two. Hamid has not participated. Just told everyone that if they had any questions he was here to ask. No screaming. No talking. Nothing.

The investigation itself is causing tension. When you tell others they cannot talk about it, no one wants to talk. The process is damaging in itself.

In terms of your interaction with Faith has it changed? No, pretty normal. No cold shoulder. The arguing and yelling stopped. They are not talking though.

Still wondering how Hamid and Faith are going to work out. What the role is and who she falls under.

She does not have questions or any other comments.

I got the impression there was more that she wanted to say but did not. She used phrases like she did not have questions at this time. Nothing to ask at this time and no more to comment right now.

Richard Zion

Any changes positive or negative. Anything observed he could share.

Faith has had a change of attitude, has put on a charm campaign. Softened her approach. Quiet and reserved. No yelling.

Staff meetings or project meetings – interactions. The dynamic has been a little weird. There is obvious friction between her and Hamid. He is held up in his office quietly. I am not sure how they are communication.

Richard stays in his office and works. There is obviously something between her and Hamid. Tension is generally within the environment in the office. It seems like where there was a direction there is hesitancy to pick a course on projects. What makes it difficult, Hamid was brought on in that capacity to supervise all the projects. Thought they would work with Faith and Hamid and a unified front. Can't

seem to get a solid opinion from them. It can make it difficult for him. They give different opinions, but he feels like she is the head of the department, so he follows her. Feels like things are just settling out.

Feels like she is a little gun shy to interact. She is always resolute and said this is the direction they are going for better or worse. Collaboration is gun shy. Hamid has been putting a lot of info into projects. He is far behind on some things. He must catch Hamid up every time they talk about a project. He just doesn't know the information. He has been copied on the emails to keep him informed. He will still have to explain to him. He is invited to all the meetings. Even if Hamid is off on Friday, he could dial into the meeting for 30 minutes instead of having to explain it. Hamid's role in the department was to route things through him. Things have changed somewhat.

Operationally it is confusing. Is he still her assistant? Doesn't know if Hamid's role has changed. He is engaged and then disengaged, and it can be disruptive. Faith has been reserved or quiet.

Gracie Rezba

This is follow up from our meeting a couple of weeks ago. We wanted to check to see how things are going.

Are things better, worse or the same. No conflicts that she has noticed. Few things she has noticed. The next day she submitted her resignation letter. Waited for Faith to come back to tell her. She sent out a copy to all of the office. This was the first time everybody knew about it. Hamid came over and said he understood why she would want to move over there but would have a better future here. Said she could be a project manager here in the future. She said that she is getting pulled more to the financial side of things not grant. He said he was not trying to change your mind. Amy doesn't have PE. The way it was said, it was different. He should not have told her that she doesn't have a degree in engineering even if I know about it. She told him that she had leed stuff. He said that is not a big deal, you can get certificate for that. It was not appropriate. She has a lot of respect for everyone over there. She lost interest in what he was saying.

Another thing happened. There has been some talk about some projects that Amy has been working on. She has been seeing the emails. There have been meetings on Water Oak and Graham Swamp.

The agenda item that went to the board for transportation alternative, pulled by the board for next meeting. They want to prioritize the list. They put John Anderson back on the list as number 5. She sent Hamid an email if he wanted her to send Graham Swamp and Transportation Alternatives to FDOT. The resolution has to have a list of projects and description. The one signed by the Chair only had the list.

She tried to look for the description 22 on the list and the other has 21. The document the chair signed has 21 projects. She emailed him and told him to let her know what he wanted to do. He asked how the list got changed. She explained to him that if he doesn't send it to her and directly to Luci, then she can't track it. Luci sent it to Sean to see what to do. Next thing she saw, Hamid sent the entire list to FDOT. She doesn't know what he is trying to tell her.

Hamid came over and asked for a CEI document. He asked her what her basis is on checking the rates on CEI. She told him that it should be part of the contract. Average rate per position. He said she should have the average rate from FDOT for positions. The rate for senior engineers seems too high. He was showing her Richard Gordons rate. It was out of the blue he picked that position. He said she should have it in her file. They sent it out to bid. We cannot negotiate the rate, only the hours. It's part of the contract we accepted. Thought it was done.

Got an email to her and Ansley and CC others. She said he wanted her to use FDOT rates. It does not apply to what they are doing. It is a dunes project not road. The next day he came back to her to ask again. She wants him to talk to the project manager. She told him she would check with Ansley to check with the consultant. She knows it doesn't apply. He was getting frustrated. She told him that she would let Ansley know.

He sent another email and cc legal department. Not sure why. Finds it very different that he has been acting like that. She drafted a response, but Sean answered before she could.

He sent another long response to Gracie to her email. He said he was not asking for a specific position in the average staff report document. She told him she can tell the story about why he is asking for the position. She said he said he is not going to continue to correspond on this topic.

When Hamid gets frustrated, he shakes his head and scratches his head.

On the screen in our conference room, he wanted to log in using his log in information. She told him that he could not do that. He told Faith that apparently it was illegal to log in using your own email access. She notices that sometimes he doesn't interpret things the way others do. Trying to explain Tyler, he doesn't get what she is saying, she will explain it again. Then later, he makes her feel like she is the one that didn't explain it to well.

How have staff meetings been? Last one they had yesterday, each one of them share issues working on or needs attention. When it gets to Hamid he says he has nothing to share. Faith said ok and moved on.

Anyone raise voice? Doesn't really know anymore. Weldon, Faith and her all have loud voices. No yelling or screaming about things getting done.

Relationship between Faith and Hamid seems ok. He has a weekly meeting with Faith. No yelling, they seem to be ok.

Is the meeting shorter? Same on the calendar. Doesn't notice if they extend. She knows Hamid and Amy had a meeting last Thursday. She stayed until 6 and they were still here. Doesn't know if it is project related.

Anything you would like to share that we haven't asked? Does Faith know? Yes. She hasn't said anything.

Weldon Spurling

Things are the same as far as his interactions and his business.

Any raising voices – no

Interactions between Faith and Hamid. They meet regularly but he is not privy to those meetings. He doesn't notice any loud voices or anything when they meet in Hamid's office.

Pretty much the same interactions with Hamid.

Hamid Tabassian 6/12/2023

Follow up on Engineering issues. Gave couple of weeks to see how things been going, any change, retaliation. What is your experience and observations.

IDK if I want to call it retaliation but past 2 weeks 10 days – Faith would come and say good morning and run away. No opportunity for him today good morning.

She sent an email; he didn't know she would be out for two weeks. She sent an email to everyone. Very much reduced communication and input from her. Other than that,...

Amy mentioned, and Hamid said that she was acting a little bit different. Asked if he had told Jorge about a project. He said Jorge has communication with other people. She wasn't comfortable with her projects being discussed.

When he saw the email on Friday he went and asked Faith if there was anything he needed to know. She said no. Then later mentioned the bridge.

Jorge asked about meetings. Does she give you the opportunity to speak? He said yes, there is some favorable improvements there. NO raising her voice or screaming.

Jorge said there is concern from staff that the relationship between him and Faith is affecting them. Amy had mentioned that to Hamid.

Jorge said that there need to be defined responsibilities because staff is confused on who to go to.

Talked to Hamid about the staff and their feelings of not being united. Hamid said that the last staff meeting an issue came up where the project was moved to July meeting. She said the project would be delayed for one year. Ask Luci to move it to the second meeting in June. Hamid stated the funding

would not be available in July 2024. He said it would start in July 2023. FDOT would have the funding available in July 2023. Immediately she said she would call FDOT now, they confirmed that it would be available July 2023. She listened to Hamid's comment and verified it with FDOT.

To be honest, some people would make that an issue and say it could be taken advantage of. He doesn't like to have arguments and loud outbursts. That is not good for the department to have these. Unfortunately, that has been what has been happening. He has been patient, once or twice, you talk about it and he tried to with her but it didn't work.

Jorge: Change in treatment from Faith toward the other engineers? Not that he has noticed.

Jorge: Is there anything that you would like to share that we haven't asked?

I am sure the agency knows, I personally and in meetings, what was being said about Flagler County is not - my thing is for the agency, if you are working at the agency, I would not put down the agency in front of others. If I am out of here, that is different. I do not think that is good. Not good for yourself. When Faith told him that he would never disrespect her again, she disrespected herself. When you work for the agency and put it down you are disrespecting yourself,

In her position, to be honest, it didn't seem right to him. Hearing the things that she says. From the board members to the different departments. Criticizing other departments and Board members.

J: Has she every threatened to write him up when he left the room?

No, except when she said this was the last time, he would disrespect her. I don't think she wanted to fire him. She said that about Amy. She doesn't care for her to be here but would not fire her. Same with me. From what he heard from Amy, she may change her mind or feel differently.

Ansley Wren Key 6/13/2023

No altercations, so that is better. Treatment of others – better. No condescending talk. Interactions between Hamid and Faith have improved. Witnessed them talking. Feels like she has clear direction. Jorge asked who she reports to. She meets with Faith every two weeks. They talk about what is coming etc. She considers Hamid her supervisor but interacts with Faith more because she knows more about her area. Things seem fine.