FAKE NEWS EXPOSED

The following material compares the observations of Stef Stefanides with reality. Heaven knows why Coastal Bullshit Snooze owner Val Simon allows this travesty. Here is the latest "article" by Stefanides, with the ***facts shown in red****. Facts =* ***Red.***

Council Continues to Wrestle With Manager Search

October 12, 2018

By Steve "Stef" Stefanides ***Okay, which is it? "Steve"? or "Stef"? Make a decision.***



Josh Gruber, former city manager candidate from South Carolina. | Photos by Steve Stefanides

Since February of 2017, the City of Marco Island has been without a permanent city manager to replace former manager Roger Hernstadt. Hernstadt had come to the city with

extensive municipal experience on the east coast of Florida, having served in various roles within Miami Dade County and the City of Miami. Prior to coming to Marco Island, Hernstadt had served four years as the City Manager of Marathon, Florida.

The back-story here is that Stef and others believe that Roger Hernstadt was an "excellent City Manager". While here on Marco Island as our City Manager, Roger Hernstadt:

1. **Lied to State Senator Kathleen Passidomo about the proposed Government Building in Veterans Community Park. Thank Goodness she did not believe him. She is still upset and feels that some on Council also knew of the scheme.**
2. **Met secretly with four City Councilors to arrange a deal to put a hotel in Veterans Community Park. He denied meeting with the developer. Unfortunately, his lies showed up in a Public Records Request – he did meet with the developer.**
3. **Allowed the Police Department to favor Councilor Joe Batte's targets, and had a blind eye to the Police "rape squad" and the falsification of Police records.**

The City Council burned through two prominent city manager consulting firms and hundreds of applicants while completing that recruitment with city staff. **Or, to cite facts rather than innuendo, City Council used two consulting firms because the first firm put forward unacceptable candidates, as agreed to unanimously by Council.**

The election of 2016 brought forward a slate of four candidates, led by incumbent City Councilor Larry Honig who was running for a second and final four-year term. He joined with newcomers Charlette Roman, Howard Reed and Jared Grifoni. They ran as a block and campaigned for change.

At the first **(Huh? "First"? Okay, it was the first meeting in February …)** meeting in February of 2017 Hernstadt tended his resignation with a provision that he would stay on until July of 2017 to help facilitate the transition. The council chose to accept his resignation immediately, which triggered a substantial payout to Hernstadt as provided for in his contract. **City Manager Roger Hernstadt tendered (not *tended,* Stef) his resignation, and Council wanted to know if he would be willing to stay on for a while. Chair Honig, at the request of City Council and at a break, telephoned Hernstadt, who said he wanted to leave right now. Honig reported that conversation word-for-word in the City Council meeting. That has never been disputed, until you tried to re-write history, Stef.**

Many were shocked at the council's actions, which brought forward a loud outcry from the community in protest. **There was no "loud outcry." There was muffled wailing and crocodile tears from the Hernstadt Junkies, who saw that their route to City riches was gone. No longer could they do deals (like the hotel deal) behind the scenes. The Chamber of Commerce went into apoplexy and fired the then-current Executive Director.**

Council moved forward and hired the Mercer Group to search for a new city manager. Those efforts resulted in what many think was an embarrassing first try. That brought forward what had some citizens believing was a pre-arranged deal to hire a young man from Beaufort County, South Carolina who had been serving as the Assistant County Manager. **Some Councilors supported the Beaufort manager. Why does Stef then assert that there was a "pre-arranged deal"? If there was, Gov. Rick Scott would remove the participating Councilors from office. Has a complaint been filed? Is there any evidence? Obviously "no" to both.**

One scene involved an uncomfortable incident when Vice-Chairman Grifoni stepped down from the dais, strode **(or "walked" … "walked" seems better than "strode")** to the podium and proceeded to attack the credibility of several candidates who were vying for finalist positions. Council Chair Honig also exhibited a considerable angst towards one candidate that caused many to question his motives and worried it may have exposed the city to liability for some of his comments. **There is no question, Councilors Grifoni and Honig were too aggressive and negative. The search consultant, W.D. Higginbotham, did not – not – advise Council on protocol. This was one of his jobs, and he failed the City.**

The entire ordeal ended in an embarrassment for the council as they could only muster three votes out of the required five to hire. Only Honig, Grifoni and Rios voted to hire the now tainted **["tainted" because he only got three votes? Let's go back in history and count the votes for Stef Stefanides when he ran for City Council. Twice. "Not so much," as the kids say. What does the number of votes have to do with efficacy?]** final candidate left standing. Subsequently, the South Carolinian was also passed over as County Manager in his home county.

This also resulted in an embarrassing exchange between Chairman Honig and the Mercer representative after the failed vote; that exchange saw Mercer walking away from the process due to that incident. It required an intervention by several people to have Mercer agree to come back to the table and re-engage in the search process. **It was not an "embarrassing exchange," it was Chair Honig trying to pin down the consultant to provide a job description, as he had agreed to do, prior to Council's hiring meeting. The consultant would not commit to do that. Councilor Charlette Roman called him out and said that she wanted the description. Chair Honig then asked why it would be a problem. The consultant took umbrage. Presumably Stef favors consultants who do what they want, without being responsive to the hiring authority.**



WD Higginbotham of the Mercer Group.



Niblock Debacle

Mercer brought back another group of finalists in the fall of 2017 and council focused on hiring Dr. Lee Niblock from Alachua County, Florida. Niblock had been terminated from his position in Alachua only 45 days previously.

Niblock's tenure would only last three months because council terminated him for cause due to violations of ICMA ethical standards as well as unresolved charges being brought against him for first-degree misdemeanor battery for unwanted advances against Marco Island Academy's principal.

Following Niblock's termination, council then flirted with the idea of conducting their own search, but could not reach a consensus. Ongoing concerns arose out of that incident regarding councilors' involvement and what some saw as an attempt to mediate a resolve to the issue which would have resulted in Niblock maintaining his position.

This is Stef's, and Val Simon's, most inane and thoughtless moment, admittedly a low bar. "Fake News" does not do justice to the *reckless, fraudulent reporting* in the Coastal Bullshit Snooze. According to sworn testimony (you can go to jail if you lie) to the Collier County Sheriff's Office, the following occurred:

Marco Island Academy founder and Chairman Jane Watt called City Councilor Larry Honig to relate a story about the newly hired City Manager Lee Niblock and Marco Island Academy Principal Melissa Scott. Honig took extensive notes.

Honig then took two actions. (1) He told Ms. Watt to call the City Council Chair Jared Grifoni to relate the story. (2) He called City Attorney Alan Gabriel to relate the conversation with Ms. Watt and to report the suggestion to her that she call the Chair. According to testimony, later that same day Chair Jared Grifoni notified the City Attorney Alan Gabriel. (City Attorney Alan Gabriel had thus been called about the same matter from two Councilors. He could not disclose to either Councilor that he had heard from another Councilor.)

Sworn testimony to the Sheriff's Office is that both Councilor Larry Honig and Councilor Jared Grifoni had as their main objectives that (a) the name of the victim would only be released if the victim herself came forward, and (b) City Manager Lee Niblock would be dismissed.

Councilor Howard Reed, and other Councilors, expressed their irritation at not being notified by either Chair Jared Grifoni or Councilor Larry Honig about the alleged transgression. This is beyond thoughtless. The more people who know, the more people who know. Who on Planet Earth believes that Councilor Howard Reed would keep something to himself? The number of people who "knew" needed to be kept to a minimum, in the interest of protecting the victim. *Only the victim can decide to release her name.*

Councilor Larry Honig testified that he confronted the City Manager three days after the phone call from Ms. Watt. In a City Council meeting, Councilor Honig seconded and voted "Yes" on a motion to dismiss the City Manager, which failed 2-5.

As a result, a subsequent vote of "No Confidence" was passed concerning the actions of Chairman Jared Grifoni, the first such vote ever undertaken since creation of the city. **The "no confidence" vote remains a strange occurrence. No rational rationale was ever given. The feckless, reckless, useless Councilors who voted "no confidence" have lost all of their credibility. (That's Vice Chair Charlette Roman and Councilor Howard Reed. Councilors Joe Batte and Bob Brown are no longer on City Council and are thus now officially irrelevant, a position they have enjoyed unofficially for two years.)**

Polanco Continues in His Role as Interim

For 19 months now, the city's finance director, Gil Polanco, has served in the role of interim manager. This is not his first time in that position, having served after the planned resignation of then-City Manager Jim Riviere prior to the hiring of Hernstadt. **It may not be widely known, but the "manager" role (which is defined and regulated by the State of Florida) cannot be occupied by either the Police Chief or the Fire-Rescue Chief. Thus the choices facing City Council are not particularly good.**

Polanco has agreed to stay in that position until council can find a suitable candidate, but has not desired to take the position on a permanent basis.

Latest Attempts Fail To Resolve Open Position

Late this summer Councilor Charlette Roman suggested that the city engage with the Florida City and County Management Association (FCCMA) to utilize the services of their Senior Managers' Program to help assist in finding an interim manager, one in transition that could take the role and help guide them to finding a permanent manager, while handling the role of manager for the next six to 12 months and allow for a cooling off period.

Ken Parker, who represented that group, provided the council with guidance to do just that, but in his words they proceeded with a "hybrid" style of process, which ended up bringing forth potential candidates for both the permanent and interim positions.

For the last several months Councilor Howard Reed has attempted to convince his colleagues on council that they should be looking to concentrate their efforts on hiring a permanent replacement to fill the vacant position of Marco Island City Manager after the November election. **Councilor Howard Reed believes that Gil Polanco is doing an "excellent job," thus, why the rush?**

Some would question whether it was a wise choice, given the fact that a new election was looming on the horizon and three seats would be filled for the seven-person board. The present council had struggled for almost 19 months.

Two weeks ago council met with Maria Menendez from Coral Gables and James Hock of Michigan, both of which have extensive municipal management experience. Council would interview the last candidate of the three finalists on October 4, after a day of private one-on-one conversations with David Harden.

Reed consistently voiced his displeasure with the process early on, especially with the method which would involve an open ended private negotiation regarding contract details held between only the chairman and the successful candidate, if one was to be chosen. **Councilor Howard Reed did not have the courage to tell his colleagues that he had no intention of following through on his vote to move forward with Vice Chair Charlette Roman's suggested process. Instead, Councilor Howard Reed let everyone – including the hapless candidates – believe he was supportive of the process. He is a liar and a fraud. He thinks he is clever, possibly the way a puking 2-year-old thinks she is cute.**

Details have begun to emerge regarding the closed-door negotiations with Dr. Lee Niblock. It appeared Niblock strong-armed Chairman Jared Grifoni and got a better deal from council than had been originally agreed upon after those negotiations went into a closed-door meeting with Chairman Grifoni and city attorney Alan Gabriel. **Crock of shit. City Council by a 7-0 vote gave (then) Vice Chair Jared Grifoni authority to negotiate. "Negotiate" means "find a way over or through (an obstacle or difficult path)." Vice Chair Grifoni did just that.**

At a previous council meeting, Reed displayed a chart showing the difference between what was originally voted upon and what was finally agreed to in those private negotiations. **Councilor Howard Reed's tedious and unnecessary charts show one and only one thing: Councilor Howard Reed is a fool. His ideas are rejected, but he keeps coming back to propose them. Sadly he has two more years on Council. We can probably keep seeing his incredibly enlightening "White Papers." The best "white paper" would be liquid White Out on him.**

After failing to reach the requisite super majority vote of five to hire a manager based upon the requirements of the City Charter, both councilors Honig and Grifoni questioned Reed's motives for his vote on the issue. **Neither Councilor Jared Grifoni nor Councilor Larry Honig "questioned" Councilor Howard Reed's motives. No need to. Councilor Howard Reed subsists on presumed sleights and imagined insults.** Councilors Honig and Roman have been critical of Polanco in the past and their desires to find a replacement, whether temporary or permanent, have been well known. **In other words, they understand reality.**

Councilor Joe Batte came to Reed's defense at least twice when Chairman Grifoni repeatedly asked Reed to justify his vote. "Mr. Chairman I've sat here for two years and

never once questioned your motives or reasons for your votes. You are badgering Councilor Reed."

"I believe we have failed for numerous reasons to not accomplish the goal of hiring a manager of excellence," said Reed, and he would later list off a litany of reasons he felt they as a group had failed.

Since that meeting, an orchestrated **(by … John Arceri? Who is the "orchestrator," Stef? Inuendos like this are at the core of "fake news.")** social media and email campaign has been launched against Reed, in addition to Councilors Joe Batte and Bob Brown. Brown was absent from the meeting due to a medical matter. Neither he nor Batte will be returning to council in November. **Thank God.**

"We are less than a month from seating a council which will comprise three new members. **(Could be two new members, if Councilor Victor Rios is re-elected.)** I think they have a right to be part of this process. To saddle them with another failed choice to lead the city would be wrong. They have a right to have a clean slate and move forward to find the right candidate for the job, without interference from us. They are the group that will be working with the individual for the next several years," said Batte in an interview. **What a phony, Batte. Councilor Joe Phony. When Councilor Larry Magel resigned to take care of his daughter, then-Chair Joe Batte ramrodded Bob Brown to fill Larry Magel's term. Councilor Joe Phony refused to consider other candidates, and actually said (check the tape) "There is too much important City business ahead of us. We need to fill this position, my Brothers." Actual words.**

It is unclear whether Reed will stand strong or relent from his position when council meets again on October 15 in chambers at 5:30 PM. **Seriously, Stef? Councilor Howard Reed will "relent from his position" when Hell freezes over.**