



The Council Knew: How One Sentence Could Sink a City

Description

Greensboro's former city attorney, Chuck Watts, didn't exactly tiptoe into retirement. He bulldozed in, abruptly announcing that his time at City Hall was done—effective immediately, of course. No fanfare, no drawn-out farewell speeches. Just a quiet exit, leaving behind a wake of unanswered questions and a city bracing for what comes next. At first glance, it might look like your average "retirement" story—an overworked public servant hanging up the briefcase. But don't be fooled. This is no standard political exit; this is the calm before a storm that could rock Greensboro's very foundation.

If Watts was hoping to quietly slip into the night, his timing was disastrous. Just days before, the pressure had been mounting over his outside legal work with Cyberlux, a company that, to put it mildly, is not doing well. In fact, it's on the verge of collapsing under a mountain of debt. But what really made Watts' exit spectacularly messy was a simple quote from him: "So, the work that I did for an outside client was AUTHORIZED by council, so that's not the issue." And just like that, he tossed the hot potato right into their laps.

Here's the thing: What should have been an innocent defense of his dual roles—public servant by day, private counsel by night—turned out to be the gift that keeps on giving for everyone watching this unfold. In trying to shield himself, Watts managed to open a Pandora's box of legal nightmares. He's essentially handed investors, angry stakeholders, and maybe even a few disgruntled city contractors the key to a very expensive lawsuit. All because he casually confirmed what, to be fair, wasn't a secret: that the City Council had signed off on his outside work with Cyberlux. Let that sink in. This man, who had one foot in public service and the other in a company teetering on the edge of disaster, just implicated the very people who had allowed this arrangement to continue.

But let's not kid ourselves—this isn't about the Council's approval. This is about the impossible conflict Watts had been juggling for who knows how long. It's one thing to ask someone to wear two hats—it's another to ask them to wear two hats while simultaneously keeping the ship from sinking. And that's exactly what Watts was doing, whether he realized it or not. On one side, you've got a city with legal needs that require constant attention: contracts, city council meetings, public policies—every day, a new fire to put out. On the other, you've got Cyberlux, a company

drowning in debt and in desperate need of legal firefighting. Oh, and did I mention that Cyberlux is also working with the military and law enforcement? Just a small side project.

Now, imagine trying to split your focus between these two. It's like trying to juggle chainsaws while riding a unicycle—sure, it can be done, but don't blink, because one misstep, one misplaced focus, and it all comes crashing down. And for Watts, this juggling act didn't just hurt him; it compromised the interests of both Greensboro and Cyberlux. If he was focused on untangling a lawsuit for a dying company, how could he possibly give 100% of his attention to the needs of the city? And vice versa. But hey, don't worry, the Council gave it their blessing, right? They approved the arrangement. That's the kind of oversight you'd expect from a body with years of political experience. Or not.

And therein lies the real kicker: By admitting that the City Council expressly authorized his dual role, Watts inadvertently implicated them in the whole mess. The message is clear: either they were willfully blind to the inherent conflicts of interest, or they just didn't care enough to question it. Either way, the result is the same. The city's legal oversight was in shambles. Now, they've got their hands dirty, too.

Now, let's zoom out a bit. The real fallout of all this, of course, lies with Cyberlux. The company is well past the point of no return, its finances a sinking ship. With over \$40 million in liabilities and only \$25 million in a final payment from HII, Cyberlux is just waiting for the inevitable collapse. That's bad news for everyone involved, especially the investors who stand to lose everything. But here's where it gets even murkier: those investors aren't just going to sit there and take it. They'll want answers, and when they don't get the ones they like, they'll head straight to the courts.

Now, Watts has unwittingly given them the ammunition they need. By admitting that his work for Cyberlux was authorized by the City Council, he's created a direct path for investors to sue the city. They can argue that his divided attention, his failure to prioritize their company's legal needs, and the lack of proper oversight were all contributing factors to Cyberlux's financial ruin. Essentially, Watts made himself—and, by extension, Greensboro—a prime target for lawsuits. While the city does not owe a duty of care to Cyberlux itself, that won't stop creative litigants from attempting to connect the dots—especially if they believe the city's actions enabled or emboldened Watts to neglect his responsibilities to the company.

But the potential litigation doesn't stop there. Watts didn't just put himself in hot water; he potentially exposed the entire city to a range of malpractice claims. Here's the thing: if Watts was too busy handling lawsuits for a failing company, then how could he possibly have done his job for Greensboro properly? And if his legal advice to the city was subpar as a result, any contract or legal agreement he worked on could now be subject to challenge. A contractor who felt shortchanged by a legal document? A vendor whose interests weren't adequately protected? They could all find themselves with a reason to bring a lawsuit—pointing to Watts' divided focus as the reason for any failures or missteps. It's a chain reaction waiting to happen, and it's one that could cost the city far more than just a few legal fees. This is how malpractice claims spread like wildfire.

And don't forget about the ripple effect. Watts might think his dual roles only impact him and Cyberlux, but that couldn't be further from the truth. Anyone who crossed paths with the city during this period—service providers, contractors, anyone involved in legal dealings—could now claim that the legal oversight provided by Watts was deficient, and they could use that as leverage in lawsuits. From public contracts to private negotiations, Watts' divided attention opens the door to a whole new

realm of legal exposure. Just one wrong move in any of those agreements, and suddenly, Greensboro is on the hook. All because Watts was too stretched to do his job properly.

This is where it gets especially sticky for the City Council. If lawsuits start rolling in, the council members will have to answer for their approval of this dual-role arrangement. Were they reckless in allowing Watts to be pulled in two directions? Did they fail to consider the long-term consequences of letting him take on work for a company in crisis? The optics aren't good. And the legal fallout could be even worse. The city could find itself mired in years of litigation, fighting battles it never should have had to face.

This entire situation also serves as a cautionary tale for other cities. What happened in Greensboro isn't some isolated scandal. It's a glaring example of how conflicts of interest in the public sector can spiral into full-blown legal disasters. The lesson here is simple: when you have someone who's responsible for keeping a city's legal affairs in check, you can't afford to let them split their focus between public service and a private company—especially not one in financial freefall. The stakes are too high, and the risks, as we're seeing, are catastrophic.

So, while Watts may have thought he was covering his tracks by claiming City Council approval, all he did was leave a breadcrumb trail leading straight to a mountain of lawsuits. He may have tried to retire from the mess he helped create, but that won't stop the inevitable legal repercussions from coming down like a freight train. Whether it's Cyberlux investors looking for answers or contractors in Greensboro feeling wronged, the fallout from Watts' departure is just beginning. And at this rate, it's going to be a long, bumpy ride.

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