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## Gripes listed against police chief

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SALISBURY -- Six years after the city spent a reported \$100,000 on a failed council-led attempt to oust Police Chief Allan Webster, a six-page document listing complaints against the city's top law official has reportedly been crafted by Councilwomen Debbie Campbell and Terry Cohen.

"I have seen the document, but I can't comment its contents," Webster said late Thursday. "I will be responding in the near future."

Cohen and Campbell said they had filed no formal complaint, and Mayor Jim Ireton said earlier Thursday the document does not exist.

"I'm not getting in the middle of Terry Cohen, Debbie Campbell and The Daily Times," Ireton said. "I don't have anything to do with it."

But the power is in Ireton's hands. According to the city charter, the mayor holds the responsibility to bring charges of dismissal and requires the mayor "show cause" when doing so. Cause is defined in the charter as incompetence, inefficiency, neglect of duty, malfeasance, misfeasance, insubordination, etc.

Webster was targeted for dismissal by four council members beginning in July 2002, when the power to dismiss department heads was still under the purview of the council.

"Here we go again," said Council Vice President Gary Comegys. "I heard that a six-page document outlining complaints against the chief, exists but I can't comment on its contents because I haven't seen it. Those two council people (Campbell and Cohen) are acting outside their duties and scope as council members."

In 2002, former council members Lavonzella Siggers, Rachel Polk, C.T. Webster and Joseph Scott stated in a letter that the council no longer had confidence in Chief Webster to fulfill his duties. Former mayor Barrie Parsons Tilghman agreed to a \$100,000 investigation, which led to an eventual apology from the council when the case was dropped months later. It was also at this time the charter was changed to put the onus of bringing charges forward, for the purpose of dismissing department heads, solely on the mayor.

Similar to the vague sentiments expressed in the 2002 letter are Campbell and Cohen's public criticism of Webster.

Cohen told The Daily Times in June there was substantial evidence to warrant Webster's dismissal, demotion or the restructuring of his department. During a June meeting of the Crime Task Force, Campbell cited Webster as a "stumbling block" in the committee's success, saying he did not cooperate in the retrieval of information.

When questioned recently, Campbell said while her opinion on Webster's performance has been made clear in the past, she has not taken any action.

"I am on record saying what my concerns are," Campbell said Wednesday. "I have not taken any

action against the police chief. It's rumor."

Campbell was silent on plans to bring formal complaints forward in the future and did not return phone calls on the subject Thursday.

Ireton reported having heard nothing official from the councilwomen and said if any document outlining complaints against the police chief had been submitted, it would have been immediately forwarded to the city attorney and kept a confidential personnel matter.

"Unsubstantiated rumors will not throw this government off track," Ireton said.

Despite campaign claims for drastic change and an immediate attack on crime, Ireton's approach has been slow. He said he wants to work together with Webster to bring crime down through a coordinated plan.

"People didn't elect me mayor to sit around all day and look for cause to fire people," he said. "The circus-like atmosphere that has permeated the government for the last 11 years has stopped."

But Cohen and Campbell have stressed the responsibility of Ireton in taking an official action against the police chief.

"By charter, it is the mayor's role and at his discretion to decide what comes next," Cohen said.

Comegys said the police chief does not work for the five-member council.

"The charter says he works for the mayor and the city administrator (John Pick), and if there's any alleged impropriety by the chief, a course of action needs to come from the mayor," he said. "In fact, any personnel action needs to come from the mayor; and this is a personnel matter, and I will be waiting to be briefed on it by the mayor."

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