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IN RE: AARON ZAHN-TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT
AGREEMENT WITH JEA

SWORN STATEMENT
OF
SHERRY HALL

DATE TAKEN: Thursday, December 26, 2019
 TIME: 2:07 p.m. - 2:56 p.m.
 PLACE: Office of General Counsel
 117 West Duval Street,
 Suite 480
 Jacksonville, Florida

REPORTED BY: Heather M. Thomas,
 Court Reporter

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I N D E X

WITNESS: SHERRY HALL

EXAMINATION
 By Mr. Powell 5
 CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER 46

- - -
 (No Exhibits)
 - - -

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1 APPEARANCES FOR CITY OF JACKSONVILLE:
 2 STEPHEN J. POWELL, ESQUIRE
 3 SONYA HARRELL, ESQUIRE
 4 ADINA TEODORESCU, ESQUIRE
 Office of General Counsel
 4 117 West Duval Street, Suite 480
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 6
 7 APPEARANCES FOR OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL:
 8 DERRONNE L. NINS, INVESTIGATOR
 Office of Inspector General-City of Jacksonville
 9 231 East Forsyth Street, Suite 470
 Jacksonville, FL 32202

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1 MR. NINS: This recorded interview is being
 2 conducted at the Office of General Counsel,
 3 City of Jacksonville. Today is December 26th,
 4 2019, and the time by my phone is 2:07 p.m.
 5 I'm Investigator Derronne Nins. I'm employed
 6 by the Office of Inspector General with the City of
 7 Jacksonville. The Office of Inspector General is
 8 assisting the Office of General Counsel with this
 9 investigation regarding Aaron Zahn, former CEO of
 10 JEA.
 11 Ms. Hall, you're being interviewed as a
 12 witness in this investigation. If at any time your
 13 status as a witness changes, you will be notified.
 14 The attorneys who will be interviewing you are
 15 Stephen Powell, Adina ...
 16 MS. TEODORESCU: Teodorescu.
 17 MR. NINS: And Sonya Harrell.
 18 As a commissioned Notary Public in the State
 19 of Florida, I'm authorized to administer oaths.
 20 Please be advised that any false statements made
 21 during your interview or attempts to obstruct the
 22 Office of General Counsel's investigation may be
 23 used in a subsequent prosecution against you.
 24 Please raise your right hand.
 25 Do you, Sherry Hall, swear to tell the truth,

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1 the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?
2 THE WITNESS: I do.
3 MR. NINS: Great. Thank you very much, ma'am.
4 SHERRY HALL,
5 having been produced and first duly sworn as a witness,
6 testified as follows:
7 EXAMINATION
8 BY MR. POWELL:
9 Q Good afternoon, Ms. Hall. I'm Steve Powell.
10 I'm with the Office of General Counsel.
11 A Okay.
12 Q I've been here for some time. I'm currently
13 the chief of the tort and employment litigation group.
14 Working on this with me today is, as Derronne indicated,
15 Sonya Harrell and Adina Teodorescu.
16 I think you -- it seems like you and Adina
17 have had some contact in the past --
18 A Yes.
19 Q -- based upon some preliminaries here.
20 As you are no longer with JEA, you are here
21 voluntarily, and we appreciate you coming in. I just
22 want to give a little background to what we're going to
23 try to cover here today.
24 A Okay.
25 Q And then at the outset, I'll ask you if you

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1 have any questions before we get started. Okay?
2 A Sure.
3 Q So we were tasked about a week ago by the
4 board to look into Mr. Zahn's tenure as CEO of JEA to
5 determine whether there were any grounds for termination
6 of his contract for cause. And in the course of
7 reviewing lots of things and talking to some -- to many
8 people, we've identified a number of areas of interest
9 that we would like to explore with you and we have been
10 exploring with others today.
11 And we're simply wanting to understand from
12 you what you did and what you saw, what you heard,
13 things that you were personally involved in directly,
14 and if there are secondary elements of these things that
15 you were not as direct but are aware of things, we would
16 appreciate that too, but we'd make sure that you qualify
17 that so that it's not something that we understand you
18 to be able to speak to from personal knowledge.
19 So all we ask today is that you answer as
20 completely as you can. If any of our questions are
21 unclear, let me know. I'll be happy to restate. Sonya
22 and Adina extend that as well. I'm going to start with
23 all of this, and they're going to jump in as they see
24 where I have missed something or where they have
25 additional things they want to explore.

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1 When I'm done, they may ask you questions
2 themselves. I don't think we'll be terribly long,
3 particularly given what I understand your relatively
4 short tenure at JEA was, and we'll just move through
5 these topics.
6 And if there are things that -- frankly, if
7 there are areas that we fail to get into that you think
8 might be of interest to us and you want to share it with
9 us, that would be great.
10 Do you have any questions before I get
11 started?
12 A Not so far.
13 Q Okay. You are now employed at the Tax
14 Collector's Office?
15 A I am transitioning over there. My first day
16 will be January the 6th. That is correct.
17 Q And you called me on the phone last week, I
18 think, or maybe earlier this week --
19 A Yes.
20 Q -- when all this got started and asked me to
21 generally describe what was going on here and you shared
22 some information with me.
23 I think that you started with JEA on July 9th?
24 A July 8th, I believe. It was a Monday, if I'm
25 not mistaken. That was a Monday.

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1 Q And you came over from the Tax Collector's
2 Office?
3 A I did.
4 Q Where you had been for some time?
5 A Yes. I'd been there roughly eight years.
6 Q What was your job at the Tax Collector's
7 Office?
8 A Deputy tax collector or chief administrative
9 officer, use those titles interchangeably.
10 Q Are you returning to that position?
11 A Yes, I am.
12 Q All right. Why did you make the move to JEA?
13 A So I was offered an opportunity that I saw as
14 a promotional opportunity. I had worked for JEA briefly
15 several years back. I want to say maybe 15 years ago.
16 Thought it was a great place to work at the time and had
17 throughout the years contemplated different
18 opportunities at JEA and looking to potentially go back.
19 Nothing was the right fit. I was offered an
20 opportunity to go over in a promotional capacity for me
21 at the time, and it seemed like a good opportunity and
22 so I took it and went over there.
23 Q Your position at JEA was what?
24 A Most recently vice president and chief
25 government affairs officer.

2 (Pages 5 to 8)

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1 Q What were your -- I mean, I can suppose, but
 2 if would you just summarize for us, what were your
 3 duties and responsibilities?
 4 A So federal, state, and local government
 5 affairs kind of sums it up in a nutshell. But helping
 6 to manage any issues going on at the state level, from
 7 legislative issues, things that JEA was trying to
 8 accomplish at the state level. Monitoring and
 9 assisting, we had someone that was helping at the
 10 federal level, and then of course local government
 11 affairs dealing with the local City Council, legislative
 12 issues that came up, that type of thing.
 13 Q As I understand it, there was a member of
 14 council who was the designated liaison to JEA; is that
 15 right?
 16 A Yes, that is correct.
 17 Q Who was it at the time you came in?
 18 A Council member Danny Becton.
 19 Q Did it remain Councilman Becton throughout
 20 your time?
 21 A He is still the liaison unless something has
 22 changed that I don't know about.
 23 Q And how did that liaison relationship
 24 function?
 25 A So he attended our board meetings. He came

1 in, and we would do more in-depth information sessions
 2 with him. I would help facilitate and pair him up with
 3 our CFO, with outside attorneys.
 4 If he had questions about things that he
 5 wanted to learn more information about, we would bring
 6 him in and give him sort of a workshop forum for more
 7 detailed information on things that he had questions
 8 about.
 9 Q Were you recruited to JEA?
 10 A Yes, I was.
 11 Q By whom?
 12 A Herschel Vinyard.
 13 Q Did you have a history with Mr. Vinyard?
 14 A We knew each other. I've never worked with
 15 him before. We had mutual friends that have worked
 16 together. So I knew of him. I knew of his reputation
 17 in the community.
 18 But as far as a personal relationship, no, but
 19 professionally we did know each other, yes.
 20 Q Was the outreach a phone call or --
 21 A Initially, yes. Initially, he made a phone
 22 call and asked me if it's something I would be
 23 interested in considering doing.
 24 Q Did you come in and interview for it, or was
 25 this a you would like it and take the job?

1 A No. Eventually I did come in for an
 2 interview. We met off site and sat down and had a
 3 conversation in person before I accepted the position.
 4 Q Did you interview with anyone else?
 5 A The same time that I met in person with
 6 Mr. Vinyard -- and I'm sorry. I don't recall if I met
 7 with Mr. Vinyard once or multiple times. But I do
 8 recall meeting with Mr. Vinyard and then Mr. Aaron Zahn.
 9 That was the first time I had met Mr. Zahn.
 10 Q Was that meeting in his office at JEA?
 11 A No, it was not. It was at Super Food which is
 12 a restaurant.
 13 Q Can you -- it's not terribly long ago, so
 14 might you be able to relate the substance of your
 15 discussions with Mr. Zahn at the time?
 16 A Yeah. So Mr. Vinyard and I had already sort
 17 of talked about what the opportunities might be and he
 18 had said, of course I want you to meet Mr. Zahn.
 19 So we sat down and met. It was a 30-minute,
 20 at most, meeting with him, and he explained the
 21 opportunity at JEA, whether or not it was something I
 22 might be interested in as far as being government
 23 affairs.
 24 And I was asking questions about -- at the
 25 time they had a -- I don't remember if he was still

1 there at the time, I think he was, but they had a couple
 2 of folks that were working in that group, and I was
 3 asking questions about what those folks' roles were and
 4 how my role in this position would interchange with
 5 those folks.
 6 One of those persons was moving on to another
 7 area. So I asked questions about, you know, why was he
 8 leaving, why was he transferring to another area within
 9 JEA. And he answered questions of that nature.
 10 They talked about -- briefly about their
 11 strategic planning, about potentially changing the
 12 charter, and things that I might be working on as I went
 13 over to JEA.
 14 Q If you came in on July 8th, when would this
 15 meeting with Mr. Zahn have taken place?
 16 A I don't know the exact date. I believe it to
 17 be sometime in June.
 18 Q Can we back up to the first meeting with
 19 Mr. Vinyard?
 20 A It was a phone call, yes.
 21 Q I thought you met with him personally?
 22 A So I don't recall if I met with Mr. Vinyard
 23 separately from the meeting with Mr. Zahn. I do recall
 24 the very first conversation that I had with Mr. Vinyard
 25 about potentially going to JEA was a phone call that he

1 made to me.
 2 Q And it's possible that the next meeting was
 3 with the two of them at Super Food?
 4 A It is, and I'm trying to remember if I met
 5 with Herschel in between those two meetings, and I'm
 6 just -- I'm sorry. I don't remember that clearly
 7 whether or not I did.
 8 Q Do you recall whether there was an exchange of
 9 emails in between the first outreach and the meeting?
 10 A I don't recall specifically. I worked for the
 11 City so at the time my email was easily available.
 12 I don't recall.
 13 Q That's a -- that's a helpful point. Would any
 14 of these communications have been through your City
 15 email?
 16 A Probably not. I know that the offer letter
 17 that I eventually got did come through my personal email
 18 address.
 19 Q Did it come from Mr. Vinyard?
 20 A No. It came from an HR person at JEA, and I
 21 don't recall that person's name.
 22 Q Did you replace somebody?
 23 A Eventually, yes. I replaced Mike Hightower.
 24 So during the conversations that we were
 25 having, when we initially began our conversations,

1 Mr. Hightower was still employed at JEA. By the time
 2 that I went to work for JEA, he had retired.
 3 Q Was Gerri Boyce still there?
 4 A Not that I -- I don't believe so. I don't
 5 believe we overlapped at all.
 6 Q So she was not your assistant --
 7 A Huh-uh. No, no, and that -- they never worked
 8 in the group that I was in.
 9 Q Maybe I misunderstood. I thought she assisted
 10 Mr. Hightower.
 11 A She never assisted me. She was -- she was in,
 12 I believe -- and I don't know this to be a fact so I
 13 shouldn't speculate --
 14 Q No, you can -- you can qualify --
 15 (Brief interruption.)
 16 BY MR. POWELL:
 17 Q Go ahead and qualify anything you want to.
 18 A So I believe the person that replaced Gerri is
 19 Gina Kyle, and Gina has never reported to me. She's
 20 been there the whole time I've been there, and she's
 21 always reported -- I don't know who her direct line of
 22 report is, but it's into Kerri Stewart's group. So it
 23 was never into the group that I worked with.
 24 Q Were you a direct report to Mr. Zahn?
 25 A No.

1 Q Did you report to Ms. Dykes?
 2 A No. I reported to Herschel Vinyard.
 3 Q We've asked you to come in because we made a
 4 decision earlier this week to try to talk to as many of
 5 the senior leadership team members as we could.
 6 And you qualify as that; correct?
 7 A Yes.
 8 Q When you met with Mr. Zahn at the Super Food,
 9 you mentioned that he mentioned -- he talked about
 10 opportunities for you at JEA.
 11 Can you elaborate on, what he might have
 12 explained by that?
 13 A Oh, gosh. Let me think back. I don't
 14 remember a lot of the specific details of the
 15 conversation. I do remember him talking about going to
 16 work for JEA, it can be a very exciting time there.
 17 There's -- you know, there's things -- there's strategic
 18 planning that the board has been going through. There
 19 may be opportunities to work on changing the charter.
 20 He just very generally talked about the -- I
 21 remember him telling me a story about replacing his
 22 water heater, about how the trend in the electric
 23 industry was going towards more and more folks coming --
 24 using less electricity, and so talking about the
 25 challenges and how they might eventually solve some of

1 those challenges, but not in great detail. Again, it
 2 was a very short meeting. It was about a half hour.
 3 Q Do you recall whether there was any discussion
 4 in that meeting about selling JEA?
 5 A No, there was not. Not to my -- not to my
 6 recollection.
 7 Q Privatization of JEA?
 8 A Not to my recollection.
 9 Q Any discussion of a recapitalization event?
 10 A Not to my recollection.
 11 Q Now, you're smiling because I think you're
 12 hearing all these terms and they're not surprises to
 13 you.
 14 When did you start hearing of things like
 15 recap events and privatization --
 16 A After I had already been working for JEA, and
 17 I don't know how long I had been there, but it was
 18 sometime in July after -- probably two or three weeks
 19 in. It could have been, give or take, a few days, but
 20 sometime in that time frame. So I had already started
 21 working there before I heard of those terms.
 22 Q Would those terms have started coming your way
 23 before or after the July 23rd board meeting?
 24 A Probably before, but not too long before.
 25 Q Did you participate in preparing the

1 presentation materials to the board for the July 23 --
 2 A I did not.
 3 Q -- meeting?
 4 A I don't recall that at all.
 5 Q Did anybody explain the PUP to you before the
 6 July 23 meeting?
 7 A I do not recall the PUP even being discussed
 8 with me before that meeting.
 9 Q Do you recall a time when the PUP was
 10 discussed with you?
 11 A I recall the long-term incentive plan being a
 12 part of what was approved at the board meeting, but I
 13 certainly didn't have an understanding of the details of
 14 that. There were a lot of things that were happening at
 15 that time.
 16 I can't tell you with any certainty the first
 17 time I recall the PUP being discussed with me, or if it
 18 really ever was in great detail. The first time that I
 19 remember having a little bit more knowledge of the PUP
 20 was attending a meeting with the City Council auditors,
 21 and that -- I believe that was around October 31st.
 22 And I was asked to attend the meeting because
 23 I was trying to help facilitate communications with the
 24 council auditors in my role. And so I was asked if I
 25 would attend the meeting with Mr. Vinyard and

1 Mr. Wannemacher, and I sat in on that meeting and
 2 listened. And that time was the first time I really
 3 recall a lot of details of the PUP, and really even
 4 then, not a whole lot of details. I did not have a good
 5 understanding of it.
 6 Q At that meeting do you recall whether the --
 7 there was any information shared by -- you said
 8 Mr. Wannemacher and Mr. Vinyard were there?
 9 A Uh-huh.
 10 Q Mr. Zahn was not at this meeting?
 11 A No, he was not.
 12 Q Any information shared by either
 13 Mr. Wannemacher or Mr. Vinyard with the City Council
 14 auditor about the value of the PUP units?
 15 A I don't recall that at all.
 16 Q Under different scenarios?
 17 A I don't recall that.
 18 Q Is it fair to say that your first information
 19 about the high-end potential value of the performance
 20 units came in the form of the City Council auditor's
 21 report to the City Council?
 22 A I think that would be fair to say.
 23 Q And did you read it in the paper?
 24 A Did I read it in the paper? I'm sure I read
 25 it in the paper. I believe the council auditor

1 submitted his report potentially via email, and I may
 2 have read his report before reading it in the paper, but
 3 I don't remember the chain of events specifically --
 4 Q What was your reaction to that report?
 5 A I was wondering if it was accurate. Just
 6 curious, like, it just seemed -- there was a lot of
 7 conversation around the plan not being finalized in the
 8 office. And so my reaction was more of -- I really
 9 didn't know how to react to that. It was -- it was -- I
 10 was curious as to what the final plan would have looked
 11 like, and I kept being told that -- that wasn't the
 12 final plan.
 13 Q Who kept telling you that?
 14 A Mr. Wannemacher and Mr. Vinyard.
 15 Q How recently did either or both of them
 16 indicate to you that the PUP plan was not final?
 17 A As recently as the date of the City Council
 18 hearing that they recently held.
 19 Q Monday, December 16th?
 20 A If that was the date of that meeting, yeah.
 21 Q I'm sorry. I'm going to have to step back a
 22 few months --
 23 A Please.
 24 Q -- to you're now at -- you arrive at JEA.
 25 A Okay.

1 Q Mr. Hightower is gone. He's not there to
 2 transition you; correct?
 3 A Huh-uh. That's correct.
 4 Q What was -- what was put on your desk from the
 5 start?
 6 A I went to -- the first couple of days, I went
 7 to their new hire class. So I was in a class for -- a
 8 lot of apprentices were in that class. So just learning
 9 how to use the time system, all of that in the first
 10 week, was my really first week at the office.
 11 And then beyond that, it was -- the first
 12 thing that I was tasked with was the pension
 13 legislation, so working with the City Council on
 14 ensuring that they understood and worked with them on
 15 the pension legislation. First thing that I remember
 16 anyway.
 17 Q And did you have anything to do with any of
 18 the agenda items for the July 23 meeting?
 19 A No. I do not recall having anything to do
 20 with those agenda items.
 21 Q Do you know whether Mr. Zahn or Wannemacher or
 22 Vinyard shared any information regarding the valuation
 23 of the PUP units and the projections after the July 23
 24 board meeting?
 25 A I don't recall that.

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1 Q Well, you don't recall -- they didn't share it
2 with you.
3 Are you aware that they shared detailed
4 information with anybody?
5 A I am not aware of that.
6 Q Between the July 23 board meeting and your
7 October 31 meeting with the auditors, had City Council
8 reached out for any information on the PUP?
9 A Oh, goodness. I don't remember. I don't
10 remember anybody reaching out. I'm not saying they
11 didn't, but I can't remember that sitting here right
12 now.
13 Q Do you recall a number of \$3.4 million annual
14 attributed as -- or associated with the annual cost of
15 the PUP being an understood value as of July 23?
16 A I didn't recall that. The first time I heard
17 that again, or for the -- really for the first time was
18 at the most recent discussion at the board meeting where
19 they recalled it -- or wait. Maybe it was -- yeah it
20 was at the December board meeting.
21 Q So you don't recall -- and let me start that
22 over.
23 Do you remember whether Councilman Becton or
24 his EC reached out to you after the July 23 meeting for
25 any information about the PUP?

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1 A I remember him -- I believe he asked me for a
2 copy of all the resolutions that were passed at the
3 board meeting, and so I sent him a copy of the
4 resolutions that were passed. But I don't remember
5 specifically whether or not they were asking about the
6 PUP.
7 Q Your employment agreement you had -- did you
8 have an employment agreement?
9 A I did, but not when I first started at JEA.
10 Q When did it --
11 A July 23rd, if I'm not -- it was either
12 July 23rd or July 24th, sometime after the board
13 meeting.
14 Q And did you -- were you involved in the
15 assembling of that document?
16 A No. No, sir, I was not.
17 Q When were all the details and ramifications
18 made known to you after the July 23 meeting?
19 A The contract was handed to me sometime after
20 that meeting to review and to sign, and no one sat down
21 and went through the details of that with me, per se,
22 that I recall.
23 Q Has anybody reviewed it with you since ever?
24 A Not that I can remember.
25 Q Have you taken it to anybody and had it

Page 23

1 explained to you?
2 A No, sir, I haven't.
3 Q And at this point it's a moot point as far as
4 you're concerned; right?
5 A As far as I'm concerned, it is.
6 Q Were you -- well, it's not a -- I know --
7 I assume that in the course of even your short
8 period of time there you had to respond to various
9 public records requests?
10 A I did not respond to public records requests.
11 I answered questions from the council auditors, and I
12 answered questions from the council members, council
13 aids, but public records -- official public records
14 requests would go through a different channel.
15 Q Right. Did you -- nonetheless, were you --
16 did the public records group at JEA ever reach out to
17 you to provide records to them so that they could fill a
18 public records request?
19 A Maybe. I don't remember specifically. I
20 mean, I -- I'm sorry. I don't remember.
21 Q Do you remember ever having any conversations
22 with Mr. Zahn about the public records process in
23 general and JEA's obligations to comply with the Florida
24 Public Records --
25 A I don't remember having a conversation with

Page 24

1 Mr. Zahn.
2 Q Did you have any involvement in the
3 preparation of materials that were included in billings
4 to JEA customers after the July 23 meeting?
5 A I did not.
6 Q Did Mr. Zahn ever direct you to take any
7 action in the -- in your course of your official duties
8 that was a contravention of Florida law?
9 A Not that I'm aware of.
10 BY MS. HARRELL:
11 Q You mentioned answering the questions from the
12 council auditors.
13 When did you receive -- did you get questions
14 from the council auditors on more than one occasion?
15 A Yes.
16 Q How many times?
17 A I don't know the answer to that.
18 Q Less than ten?
19 A I really don't know. They would filter
20 questions sometimes through me and Ryan and ask
21 questions, and I would then go find the appropriate
22 person to have the answer provided back to them.
23 Q Okay.
24 A So I wasn't always the keeper of the
25 information. I was just trying to help make sure that

1 they got the answers to their questions.
 2 Q Do you know if the council auditors would send
 3 questions to anyone at JEA other than you?
 4 A I know initially they did, yes.
 5 Q Who would they send them --
 6 A When I first started there, they would go to
 7 any number of people, and I don't know specifically who.
 8 I know Ryan would get them sometimes. I know different
 9 people in finance would get questions depending on what
 10 they were working on, whether it be an audit or whatnot,
 11 budget. But I don't know specifically who all they
 12 would send them to directly.
 13 Q Do you remember getting a series of questions
 14 about the PUP?
 15 A I do, yes.
 16 Q Did you -- did you get more than one set of
 17 questions about the PUP from the council auditor's
 18 office?
 19 A I don't remember if we got more than one. I
 20 know they sent a follow-up email after October 31st
 21 outlining their questions, yes.
 22 Q Okay. And did they send that email to you?
 23 A Don't know if they sent it to me or copied me.
 24 I'm not -- I don't remember, but I know they sent it to
 25 Ryan, and whether I was on the "to" line or the "cc"

1 line, I don't recall that.
 2 Q Were the questions directed to you or to Ryan
 3 or just to whoever could answer them?
 4 A I felt like they were directed to Ryan,
 5 because I felt like the auditors knew that I was not
 6 able to answer those questions. So I didn't -- even if
 7 I was in the "to" line, I wasn't assuming they were
 8 directed to me personally to answer because I didn't
 9 have the knowledge to answer them.
 10 Q Did you ever talk to Ryan about answering
 11 those questions?
 12 A I did, yes.
 13 Q And what was that conversation?
 14 A So at some point, and I don't remember exactly
 15 when, I was told the plan was not going to happen. It
 16 was being canceled. And so a lot of those questions
 17 would have been worked through the details if they'd
 18 have continued the implementation of the plan.
 19 And so he was going to respond, and I believe
 20 he did subsequently, that the plan was being canceled,
 21 and so that was, in his eyes, I think the end of that.
 22 Q And did you ever do any kind of follow-up
 23 response to those questions?
 24 A I did. So eventually we did provide -- I
 25 believe it was maybe the day of the hearing, we --

1 Q The --
 2 A -- provided --
 3 Q -- Diamond-Salem hearing?
 4 A The Diamond-Salem hearing.
 5 We provided the answers to those questions, or
 6 to the best of Ryan's and the attorney's ability to
 7 answer those questions.
 8 Q Okay. Did you work with Ryan to provide those
 9 answers?
 10 A Ryan and the attorneys as well, so Kevin
 11 Hyde -- I'm trying to think of who else would have
 12 helped answer those questions.
 13 Ryan for sure. Kevin. Maybe Herschel. I
 14 don't remember if he gave me input or not. I think it
 15 was mostly Ryan and Kevin.
 16 Q Did you have a meeting to put the answers
 17 together?
 18 A Well, we met a couple different times. So
 19 just asking questions to Ryan. I believe I had a phone
 20 call with Ryan for some of them, and then we did meet to
 21 finalize the answers to the questions.
 22 Q Do you remember when you met?
 23 A I don't remember the specific date.
 24 Q Would it have been a calendared meeting in
 25 Outlook that invites would --

1 A I don't know. I don't know.
 2 BY MR. POWELL:
 3 Q Can I ask why you left JEA?
 4 A Sure. So this is -- I'm trying -- I know
 5 your -- my children are the most important thing in my
 6 life, and this has been a very time-consuming position.
 7 And so it's helped me take a step back and realize the
 8 most important thing to me is my kids, and I want to be
 9 there for them. And I feel like this is -- where I'm
 10 going is a better fit for me to be able to do that,
 11 so ...
 12 BY MS. HARRELL:
 13 Q I'm still back on the questions from the
 14 council auditor.
 15 A Yeah, please.
 16 Q Did you ever have a conversation with Ryan
 17 about why they hadn't been answered before?
 18 A Yeah, because -- and the answer was because we
 19 weren't implementing the plan, and that -- a lot of
 20 those questions would have been worked out through the
 21 final version of the plan. That was the answer I was
 22 given.
 23 Q Okay. And did somebody from JEA convey that
 24 to the council auditor?
 25 A I don't know. Possibly Ryan, when he answered

1 the questions that -- or when he responded that they
 2 weren't implementing the plan, but I don't know how much
 3 detail he gave in his answer. Whether he did it
 4 verbally or in writing, I don't know that.
 5 BY MR. POWELL:
 6 Q When you met with the auditors on the 31st of
 7 October, they didn't inform the auditors at that point
 8 that they weren't implementing the plan, did they?
 9 A They didn't and -- yeah, they didn't.
 10 Q When did you first learn that the plan was not
 11 going to be implemented?
 12 A Several days after that meeting. I don't
 13 remember the exact date, but it was after that meeting.
 14 Q Would that have been in the form of an email
 15 from Mr. Wannemacher?
 16 A I don't think so. But I don't know if he
 17 emailed me or not.
 18 Q And would it have been either Wannemacher or
 19 Mr. Vinyard who told you that?
 20 A It would have been one of those two, yes.
 21 Q But at least as of October 31, there was no --
 22 as far as you know, no decision had been made not to
 23 implement the plan?
 24 A Not that I'm aware of. I know that they had
 25 requested some opinions to the -- I don't think it was

1 the State Attorney's office. I think it was the
 2 Attorney General's Office. And so they were -- they
 3 said they would not implement the plan unless and until
 4 they got an opinion back from the Attorney General's
 5 Office, I believe it was.
 6 Q And you've said a couple of times that it was
 7 represented to you that the PUP plan was not final --
 8 A Uh-huh.
 9 Q -- or that it was a draft --
 10 A Or that they were still working through the
 11 implementation. Ryan made a comment at one point
 12 that -- I guess he had had subsequent conversations with
 13 the auditors, I don't know verbally or in writing, but I
 14 wasn't really in the loop on it -- about some things,
 15 and he had said that they were incorporating some of the
 16 auditor's initial responses into the final draft, that
 17 they had good points, they were making, you know, points
 18 that they would incorporate into the final draft.
 19 Q Do you know whether there -- where the
 20 preparations stood as of October 31 to put this -- put
 21 this plan into operation in terms of mailing out to JEA
 22 employees information and opportunities to elect and to
 23 get into the PUP?
 24 A On October 31, at the time I was not aware of
 25 any plans or any communications to the --

1 Q Did you subsequently become aware?
 2 A So subsequently when the City Council auditors
 3 asked for all the information to be -- not the auditors.
 4 I'm sorry.
 5 When the City Council members were preparing
 6 for their hearing and they asked for information to be
 7 provided, everything that had been prepared on the PUPs,
 8 at that point when we turned that over -- and I looked
 9 through all of that information out of curiosity and saw
 10 that there was a sort of employee handbook. Now, that
 11 was the first time I had ever seen that or was made
 12 aware of that document.
 13 Q That is in preparation for the December 16
 14 meeting; correct?
 15 A That is correct.
 16 Q And do you know who prepared those employee
 17 handbook materials?
 18 A I don't. I don't know for sure. I think it
 19 may have been Pillsbury or another one of the law firms,
 20 but I don't know that with certainty.
 21 Q Did you have any direct communications with
 22 any of the lawyers at Pillsbury?
 23 A No, I did not. Was he a Pillsbury -- I don't
 24 believe I did. There was an attorney that came in, and
 25 I'm sorry, I don't know who he was with and he did a

1 brief co-op preview for Council Member Becton. We
 2 coordinated that. And I don't know if he was with
 3 Pillsbury or not.
 4 But that was the only attorney -- he may have
 5 been with -- I don't know who he was with, but it wasn't
 6 related to the PUPs. He was giving Councilman Becton a
 7 co-op preview.
 8 Q And is the employee handbook information
 9 included with what you sent over to the --
 10 A What JEA sent over to --
 11 Q -- the auditors?
 12 A It was sent over to council -- the council --
 13 Council Member Diamond and Council Member Salem had put
 14 a letter out asking for all the information, and that
 15 was included. And I call it an employee handbook. It
 16 may not have been an employee handbook.
 17 Q I do understand that --
 18 A I think it was like frequently asked questions
 19 or something to that effect, so I don't want to mislabel
 20 it.
 21 Q Well, I'm looking for materials that would
 22 have been sent to employees in December --
 23 A In December.
 24 Q -- that would have informed them, here's this
 25 plan, here's this opportunity, here's what you need to

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1 do to participate.

2 A I never -- don't recall ever receiving

3 anything like that as an employee. The only thing I

4 ever recall going out about PUPs to the employees was

5 Currents which is like the little internal newsletter.

6 And I think -- I don't know if they sent one out in July

7 or not. We get a lot of Currents and --

8 Q I misspoke. I'm not suggesting that the

9 sign-up materials were ever sent. I'm just trying to

10 determine whether you ever saw what would amount to,

11 here's the plan, here's what you need to do to sign up.

12 A I did not.

13 Q That did not go out?

14 A I did not see that. Not to my recollection.

15 BY MS. HARRELL:

16 Q So with regard to the questions about the PUPs

17 from the council auditor's office, there was initially a

18 decision made, it sounds like by Ryan, that the PUP's

19 not going forward, we don't need to answer these?

20 A I don't want to misconstrue that I think he

21 made the decision. I don't know who made the decision.

22 Q Okay. But somebody at JEA --

23 A Somebody made the decision the PUP was not

24 moving forward, and I don't know who that person was.

25 Q Right. And since it wasn't moving forward,

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1 that was used as the reason to not respond to the

2 City -- to the council auditor's questions?

3 A That was -- that was the reason qualified by a

4 lot of the answers to these questions we were still

5 working through finalizing. And so why spend the time

6 finalizing the answers to the questions to implement a

7 plan that we're not going to implement.

8 So we would have to take the time -- "we" not

9 being me, but "we" being somebody at JEA, whether it's

10 Ryan or the attorneys, to continue working through the

11 implementation. We're not going to implement the plan

12 so we're -- so why figure out the answers to these

13 questions, was the --

14 Q Okay. But at some point a decision was made

15 to provide answers?

16 A At some point, yes.

17 Q And then you provided those, you think, the

18 same time as the Diamond-Salem meeting?

19 A I do, yeah. I believe that was the timing.

20 Q So why the change?

21 A So the -- when the Salem-Diamond meeting was

22 scheduled, a lot of the council members were saying

23 why -- why haven't you answered the questions? Even

24 though you're not implementing the plan, I think the

25 internal thought was, they're not implementing the plan,

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1 so why spend the time. And obviously as they moved

2 forward and they still were asking questions and they

3 wanted questions [sic], it was -- the thought was, well,

4 they still want to see the answers to these questions,

5 even though the plan isn't implemented.

6 So whereas they may have previously thought it

7 wasn't worth spending the time to answer, given that

8 they were still asking questions, it was a change of

9 thought of, okay, it is -- you know, these questions

10 probably should be answered, so ...

11 Q And were you responsible for submitting those

12 once they were answered?

13 A I did send them over to the council members,

14 yes. I emailed them over.

15 Q How often did you have meetings with

16 Aaron Zahn?

17 A Not very often.

18 Q And by that I mean just, did you ever have

19 one-on-one meetings?

20 A Not frequently. I know we had lunch once.

21 I'm trying to think of any other one-on-one meetings.

22 Not regularly scheduled meetings, no. I mean

23 conversations here and there, but no, like, official

24 standing meeting or anything like that.

25 Q You said, I think, one of your interview

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1 lunches or something, one of the items of discussion was

2 potentially changing the charter?

3 A Uh-huh.

4 Q Why was that going to be an issue? Why was

5 the charter needing to be changed?

6 A I didn't know at the time because I was

7 obviously not there yet and didn't fully understand

8 everything that they were working on, but later on

9 having worked there, there were a lot of things that I

10 understood that the charter limited JEA's ability to do,

11 and I can't really tell you specifically today what

12 those were.

13 But if you change the charter, they kept

14 referring back to things like the natural gas franchise

15 and doing things to grow JEA's business, but that

16 would -- that we're currently limited by things not just

17 in the charter but also in the state constitution, and

18 things that they could do to potentially address some of

19 the problems moving forward with JEA's potential revenue

20 issues if they could change some of those things.

21 Q And as the government affairs person, that

22 would be in your scope --

23 A To assist with that, sure. Yeah.

24 Q So you would let them know how to -- how they

25 could go about making the charter changes and the

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1 constitution?

2 A Certainly with the help of attorneys --

3 Q Sure.

4 A -- yeah, but yeah.

5 Q So did you have any input -- or are you

6 familiar with the present -- the slides that were

7 presented at the July 23rd board meeting about -- there

8 was a status quo scenario --

9 A Yeah.

10 Q -- a traditional utility response --

11 A Right.

12 Q -- scenario, there was a traditional utility

13 response scenario with some changes, for instance, it

14 was charter --

15 A Yeah.

16 Q -- and things like that, and then the recap --

17 A Uh-huh.

18 Q -- privatization --

19 A Yeah.

20 Q -- all that.

21 Are you familiar with all that?

22 A Yeah. To some extent, yes.

23 Q Did you provide any input with regard to the

24 charter changes?

25 A I did not. So I began on, like I said,

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1 July 9th and that presentation was July 23rd. I don't

2 recall -- now, whether or not I saw it before the

3 meeting, I just don't remember. I might have, but I

4 don't recall.

5 I certainly don't think I provided any input

6 into the preparation of that. I was very new to JEA at

7 the time and wouldn't have had the knowledge to

8 contribute even to that presentation had I been asked.

9 Q Was Mike Hightower still there --

10 A He was not.

11 Q -- at the time?

12 Did you ever have any conversations with him

13 about transitions --

14 A I did not.

15 Q -- in the new position?

16 A No.

17 Q Did you ever have any conversations with him

18 in general about working at JEA?

19 A I did not.

20 Q So y'all didn't overlap at all?

21 A We did not.

22 Q Were you -- I know we talked earlier about

23 meetings with Aaron Zahn and how you didn't really have

24 a whole lot of one on one. But were there a lot of

25 senior leadership team meetings where he was present?

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1 A So the couple of meetings that I know they had

2 regularly, I didn't always attend them. When I first

3 started there was, like, a business-type meeting

4 where -- it was not just senior leadership, but it

5 was -- you know, the organization would meet. And I

6 don't know if he was there or if Melissa ran that, but

7 it was more of an operations-type meeting, and I sat in

8 on that, I think, maybe once when I first got there.

9 There was -- there was -- gosh. There was not

10 a lot of meetings. There was a Monday morning call.

11 There was a safety call on Monday mornings where people

12 would call in. Then there was another Monday morning

13 call where people from the senior leadership team would

14 kind of report on what they had going on for the week,

15 so whether it be -- I mean all areas; so energy,

16 utility -- you know, water.

17 Not everybody would always be on the call that

18 week, and they'd just give a high-level overview of any

19 issues they had in their area for the team. I'm trying

20 to remember.

21 I don't recall specific other SLT-only

22 meetings. Occasionally he would, you know, pull in and

23 say, oh, I've got an update on this or that, and give a

24 quick meeting, but nothing regularly scheduled. So

25 nothing -- I know after the July 23rd meeting, he called

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1 everybody in and gave the contracts. I don't know if

2 they gave them to us there or individually after that

3 meeting. But talked about that -- the results of the

4 July 23rd meeting and that everybody was going to get an

5 employment contract at that point.

6 BY MR. POWELL:

7 Q When you were hired on, were you informed that

8 there would be an employment contract --

9 A No.

10 Q -- to follow?

11 A No. No.

12 Q And I know that you have said that you were

13 basically unaware of the PUP plan until after the

14 July 23 meeting. Is --

15 A That's correct.

16 Q -- that fair to say?

17 A That's fair to say.

18 Q And as well at that meeting the ITN was

19 approved; correct?

20 A The ITN was approved at that meeting? I think

21 so.

22 Q All right. Between the July 23 meeting and

23 your departure, did -- up until the point that the plan

24 was shelved --

25 A Okay.

10 (Pages 37 to 40)

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1 Q -- so I guess we can use your October 31
 2 meeting as our --
 3 So from July 23 to October 31, during that
 4 period of time, did you develop an understanding through
 5 your working with Mr. Zahn and Mr. Vinyard and
 6 Mr. Wannemacher that the prevailing thought among the
 7 senior leadership team was that JEA would definitely be
 8 sold pursuant to the ITN?
 9 A No. Definitely be sold pursuant? No.
 10 Because there were so many steps that would have to take
 11 place before JEA could even -- before that could happen,
 12 and I don't know how anybody could have --
 13 Q How about a prevailing desire that JEA be sold
 14 pursuant to the ITN among the senior leadership team?
 15 A I personally didn't feel that way, and I
 16 hesitate to speak for anybody else --
 17 Q No. I'm only asking for your --
 18 A -- so ...
 19 Q -- perception based upon observations and
 20 discussions.
 21 A Yeah. So yeah, I don't want to speak for
 22 anybody else, for sure.
 23 Q Speaking for yourself, you had not formed that
 24 impression?
 25 A I had not formed that impression.

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1 MR. POWELL: Adina?
 2 MS. TEODORESCU: Nothing.
 3 MR. POWELL: You good?
 4 MS. HARRELL: I've got a couple.
 5 BY MS. HARRELL:
 6 Q You said it was a time-consuming position and
 7 that's why you left. That's not to say you get to slack
 8 in your current position --
 9 A And that's why I hesitate to say that.
 10 Obviously I've been -- I've worked for the City in
 11 various capacities for 17 years, and I've always given
 12 it my all and I always will.
 13 But obviously council meets every other week
 14 until late hours in the evening. There's committee
 15 meetings that I would be responsible for attending. And
 16 so at the end of the day, you didn't have a chance to
 17 always check your email or just kind of do your sort of
 18 administrative-type jobs. So I would bring that home
 19 with me a lot of times and try to catch up on things at
 20 home.
 21 And I won't say what my daughter said
 22 because -- but, you know, it was -- it was taxing on
 23 them to -- for me to, you know, be present but not
 24 present, if that makes sense, so ...
 25 Q Was the atmosphere -- the working atmosphere

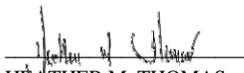
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1 different at JEA than at the Tax Collector's Office?
 2 A Oh, yes. Yes.
 3 Q How?
 4 A It was more stressful. It was definitely more
 5 stressful. I was one person dealing with 19 council
 6 members. I mean, it was a lot. It was a lot of work.
 7 Q Were there other stressful things happening?
 8 Did it just seem --
 9 A For me it was just -- it was a lot. It was
 10 just a lot. It was just a lot.
 11 BY MR. POWELL:
 12 Q More than you signed up for?
 13 A I would say that. It was --
 14 Q It happens.
 15 A It was definitely not what I thought I signed
 16 up for.
 17 BY MS. HARRELL:
 18 Q Once you started there in July, from the time
 19 you left, how was your working relationship with
 20 Herschel Vinyard?
 21 A It was good. It was good, yeah.
 22 Q What about with Aaron Zahn?
 23 A It was okay. It was okay.
 24 Q Did you ever witness him yelling at anybody?
 25 A I didn't -- I wouldn't say yelling at

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1 somebody. I definitely, you know, recall him being
 2 passionate and maybe not yelling directly at somebody,
 3 but being passionate.
 4 Q About what?
 5 A I don't remember specifically. I don't
 6 remember the issue.
 7 Q Was he just yelling in general or --
 8 A Not yelling in general, just -- I just
 9 remember, you know, sometimes he would be maybe a little
 10 more frustrated than, you know, other times. And I
 11 don't think he was directing it necessary -- I never
 12 felt that directed toward me, so ... I want to be clear
 13 about that.
 14 Q Was it directed toward anybody in your
 15 immediate sphere?
 16 A Not that I recall, no. I more recall the
 17 emotion of it than I do the specifics of it, so ...
 18 BY MR. POWELL:
 19 Q Was the emotion of it directed to the
 20 limitations and strictures imposed on an entity that's a
 21 part of government?
 22 A I really don't remember specifically, and I
 23 don't want to put words in his mouth or thoughts in his
 24 head, so I think I'll just leave it at that.
 25 MR. POWELL: I guess that's where we'll leave

1 it.
 2 MR. NINS: All right.
 3 MR. POWELL: Let's wrap it.
 4 MR. NINS: Well, I do have a disclosure to go
 5 over before we discontinue the interview.
 6 Do you have anything else to offer about what
 7 we've discussed today?
 8 THE WITNESS: Not at this time, I don't.
 9 MR. NINS: Okay. As this is an ongoing Office
 10 of General Counsel investigation, you're being
 11 advised not to discuss this case with others.
 12 Can you agree to that, ma'am?
 13 THE WITNESS: Yes, I can.
 14 MR. NINS: Okay. Great. The interview has
 15 now concluded.
 16 (Sworn statement concluded at 2:56 p.m.)
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1 CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER
 2
 3
 4 STATE OF FLORIDA
 5 COUNTY OF DUVAL
 6
 7
 8 I, HEATHER M. THOMAS, Court Reporter and
 9 Notary Public, State of Florida, was authorized to
 10 and did stenographically report the foregoing
 11 proceedings; and that the transcript, pages 4
 12 through 46, is a true and accurate record of my
 13 stenographic notes.
 14 I further certify that I am not a
 15 relative, or employee, or attorney, or counsel of
 16 any of the parties' attorney or counsel connected
 17 with the action, nor am I financially interested in
 18 this action.
 19
 20 DATED this 1st day of January, 2020.
 21
 22 
 23 HEATHER M. THOMAS
 24 COURT REPORTER
 25 

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