

City Manager's Statement Regarding the Employment of Mr. John Wilkes

November 2, 2006

Effective at the end of business tomorrow, November 3, the employment contract between the City of Sarasota and John Wilkes, Executive Director of the Van Wezel Performing Arts Hall, will be terminated. As you are no doubt aware, recent internal audits, conducted independently from the operation of the City Manager's Agency, detailed a number of discrepancies in reporting and misuses of resources by Mr. Wilkes on such things as vehicle mileage records, outside employment, and travel and entertainment expense reimbursements. While some have argued that each of these things should be considered "minor", in their sum total they represent a consistent pattern of disregard for the most fundamental responsibility of a public official, which is the proper stewardship of the public assets with which we are entrusted.

Mr. Wilkes' contribution to the Van Wezel and its successes is noted and much appreciated by the Sarasota community. The many supporters who have spoken out in support of Mr. Wilkes in recent weeks have given clear voice to that appreciation. Personally, I wish Mr. Wilkes well as he moves on to the next chapter in his career. There is no level of past success, however, that relieves the individual from the simple standards of accountability that come with the role of public servant.

Beginning Monday November 6 Mr. John Wesley White, former Sarasota County Administrator, will assume the role of Acting Executive Director of the Van Wezel, to serve until a search process is completed for a permanent Executive Director. Mr. White, who is present today for this conference, is a nationally known and respected public administrator, and also a Senior Fellow of the International City/County Management Association. His presence will bring stability and leadership to the transition process.

In closing, I want to emphasize one point in particular. Much has been both written and said recently that the issues that have led to today's action are a function of the inappropriate application of artificially strict bureaucratic rules and regulations to an entity that requires a different type of oversight to operate. Let me be perfectly clear on this point: The poor judgements and inattentive follow-up that ultimately led to today's action were in no instance born of some special necessity of the Hall as a creative organization, and the record is clear in that regard.

Thank You.