

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 9, 2025

Cedar Rapids, Iowa
Contact: Bob Teig, 319-432-4695

APPEALS COURT AGAIN SAYS CEDAR RAPIDS CITY COUNCIL HELD ILLEGAL MEETING

Seven Council Members Violated Iowa Open Meetings Law

For the second time, the Iowa Court of Appeals has said that seven Cedar Rapids City Council members violated Iowa's open meetings law in April 2021 when they used a closed meeting to interview Alissa Van Sloten for a job as city clerk. Van Sloten, a longtime city employee who was serving as interim city clerk, had asked for a closed meeting under a code section that allows closure to prevent "needless and irreparable injury" to someone's reputation.

Bob Teig, a retired Assistant United States Attorney from Cedar Rapids, sued under Iowa's Open Meetings law, and a district court judge dismissed the case even after finding there was nothing that would have harmed Van Sloten's reputation. The Court of Appeals first reversed in a December 4, 2024, decision that said Council members Brad Hart, Tyler Olson, Ann Poe, Patrick Loeffler, Dale Todd, Scott Olson, and Ashley Vanorny violated the law.

Teig asked the Court to reconsider part of its December decision and argued damages should have been decided first by the district court. The Court of Appeals agreed today, modified its first decision, and sent the case back to the district court to decide whether the defendants should pay statutory damages. The Court also ordered that the recording of the closed meeting be made public.

The City Council members also had asked the Court to reconsider its original decision. They claimed a person requesting a closed meeting is not required to disclose specific negative information that could harm them; all they have to do is make the request. Today's opinion again rejects that argument and says the Council members violated the law when they failed to even attempt to find out what information justified closing the interview. The Court said, "the Council failed to ask any questions as to why Van Sloten's request was necessary. Not one. And that is troublesome . . ."

"The City Council members are using taxpayer money for their legal defense, and they should stop," said Teig. "A good leader will admit when they do something wrong, fix it, and move on. But these public servants already asked the Supreme Court to take over the case once, and they probably will do it again. Would they do that if they didn't have a public pocket to pick from?"

The Court of Appeals decision is at:

<https://www.iowacourts.gov/courtcases/21980/embed/CourtAppealsOpinion>.