

LOCAL NEWS

Fired building official sues Pontiac



Pontiac City Hall, 47450 Woodward Ave. in Pontiac. (Peg McNichol / MediaNews Group)



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Pontiac's former building official, Bruce Eck, has sued the city for wrongful discharge. He was fired in March after a dispute with his supervisor. The lawsuit asks for a jury trial and seeks a minimum award of \$25,000.

“Due to our policy, we don't comment on pending litigation,” said Pontiac spokeswoman Paula Bridges.

Eck's attorneys, Deborah Gordon and Morry Hutton, said Eck was scapegoated by the city in the wake of three abandoned children's rescue from an unregistered rental home on Lydia Lane in Pontiac's Stonegate Pointe neighborhood.

“It's unfortunate that the city of Pontiac has now lost an invaluable public servant and extremely experienced building officials with excellent credentials,” Gordon said. “He was fired because he refused to go along with what he believed to be an illegal directive.”

City records show an [April 2020 blight ticket for Lydia Lane](#) and an unregistered rental complaint. Inspectors visited the home four times in 2020 without resolving the rental complaint. Inspectors returned in February 2022 and April 2022. The owner had not registered the rental. No progress check was scheduled or made, which could have saved the children earlier, [Eck told The Oakland Press](#) in March.

The children were rescued in February after a maintenance worker went to see if the occupants had moved after not paying rent for several months. The [children's mother](#) is in Oakland County Jail, facing multiple charges.

Eck was hired in November 2023 and had been archiving old and expired records in the city database that tracks taxes, assessments, code enforcement visits and tickets as well as construction permits. He and his deputy, Dennis Szymanski, deleted 7,000 long-expired permits from the city's database.

Eck wanted to create reports on active issues so they could be tracked and addressed.

But his boss, Community Development Director Rachel Loughrin, told him to reactivate the old permits and require inspections. Eck asked a city attorney for a legal opinion on the order.

On March 3, Loughrin claimed in a disciplinary action form that Eck pursued personal legal advice from the city attorney. Eck said he made the request in his official capacity. He refused to sign the document and was fired.

City of Pontiac		Disciplinary Action Form	
Employee's Name:	Bruce Eck	Date of Hire:	
Department:	Community Development	Job Title:	Building Official
Infraction	<input type="checkbox"/> Attendance/Tardiness <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Insubordination <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Quality of Work <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Violation of policy/procedure <input type="checkbox"/> Safety violation <input type="checkbox"/> Other: <input type="checkbox"/> Quantity of Work <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other		
Date(s) of infraction:	2.24.25 – 3.03.25		
Details of Infraction (below): On 2.24.25, Bruce told me that he closed out 800 building permits without verifying that they should be closed. I told him that he needs to reopen those permits and notify all property owners that there is/are open permit(s) on their property. Bruce then contacted Jake Mertes at the Kelly Firm via email and telephone, to ask Jake if he has to do what I told him to do. Jake advised Bruce that the building code does not allow him to tell me that he does not have to follow my instructions, whether he likes them or not. 02.27.25 – Bruce and Dennis met with Khalfani to discuss this same issue. They shared with Khalfani that it was actually 7,000 permits that they closed out without any sort of verification before doing so. Why Bruce told me a substantially lower number, I have no idea. 02.27.25 – I sent Bruce an email asking him where he is on reopening the permits and looking into the status of each of them. He responded with the following via email, "Have not started on this project. I have several questions that need to be discussed. I'm uncomfortable with starting this process until I get clear direction from our legal team. I have forwarded to Jake and have not heard back from Jake as of today. As the lead Building Official, I will not be moving forward on this project until all questions I have are satisfied and I feel comfortable on this issue." It is disturbing to me that Bruce is comfortable with this response following what we just witnessed at [REDACTED] Lydia. He is beyond lucky (at least from a media standpoint) that none of the permits that he blindly closed were associated with that address. 03.03.25 – Bruce told me in a staff meeting today that he is not going to do the work that I told him to do. He was actually yelling at me in the meeting in front of all of my other managers. He then mentioned that he is waiting for an email back from Jake on the matter. I advised Bruce that the Kelly Firm is not his personal law firm and that he cannot use City of Pontiac taxpayer dollars to obtain legal advice for himself. A discussion ensued and Bruce asked me "who the [REDACTED] I think I am" and said that he does not have to do what I tell him to do because he is the Building Official and I am just the Community Development Director. To which I responded "I am your boss, that is who the [REDACTED] I am." Following this discussion I spoke directly with Mr. Mertes at the Kelly Firm and he told me that this is not the first time that Bruce has reached out to him for personal legal advice and that not using tax payer money for personal purposes is "definitely something that he does not understand".			
Has this or a similar infraction occurred before?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No (If yes, provide details previous disciplinary action below or attach documentation/previous disciplinary action form.)		

Eck, a certified building official, building plan reviewer, and building inspector, worked as West Bloomfield Township's building director for 19 years and Dearborn's safety official for a decade. He is a board member for the Southeast Michigan Building Officials and Inspectors Association, which sets professional standards for and trains building officials and code inspectors. He told The Oakland Press he has never been fired or disciplined in his career.

Gordon and Hutton said they don't believe Loughrin knew the proper way to address the invalid permits.

Defendants in the lawsuit include the city and Loughrin, in her personal and official capacities. They have 28 days to respond to the lawsuit, which was assigned to Sixth Circuit Court Judge Nanci Grant.

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