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Aurora City Hall needs oversight, not micromanagement

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Aurora has reached the stage where reform must prove it can survive success. That may sound strange in a city still carrying the weight of police controversies, consent decree reports, court rulings, and public anger. But this is precisely the moment when Aurora must decide what accountability is for.

Note



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Is accountability a means of restoring public trust? Or is it a tool for political power?

The consent decree that followed the death of Elijah McClain imposed outside supervision, new policies, training, measurements and expectations. Whatever one thinks of the decree itself, it forced Aurora to confront failures that could not be ignored. Serious cities look at facts, correct deficiencies, measure progress and build systems that outlast the crisis that produced them.

Now Aurora is creating an Office of Public Safety Accountability. Properly designed, such an office can review serious incidents, monitor patterns, evaluate policies, examine complaints and help ensure that police, fire, dispatch and detention functions operate with professionalism and discipline.

No serious person should object to public safety being accountable.

The real question is accountable to what. Note

Accountable to law, evidence, professional standards, and the public through properly elected institutions? Yes.

Note

Accountable to political moods, activist pressure, factional demands, or ideological suspicion? No.

That is the line Aurora must not cross. Public safety accountability must not become a euphemism for political control over the city's operating structure. It must not become an instrument by which a council majority substitutes its preferences for the professional judgment of the city manager, city attorney, police chief, fire leadership, or other key administrators.

Note

Oversight is not management. Policy direction is not administrative interference. Democratic governance is not the same thing as a faction gaining power and bending every institution to its will.

That tension has become harder to ignore.

In recent months, Aurora has seen

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efforts to use emergency resolutions where the emergency was, at best, unclear. It has seen pressure for out-of-cycle performance reviews of key city leaders. It has seen a growing appetite among some council members to reach beyond policymaking and into administration itself.

These actions may be dressed in the language of accountability, transparency, compassion, or justice. But language does not settle the question. Purpose does. Note

A true emergency requires immediate public action because delay would cause real harm. It is not a political shortcut, a way to avoid deliberation, or a tool for manufacturing urgency around an ideological priority. When everything becomes an emergency, the word loses meaning.

The same is true of performance reviews.

City leaders should be evaluated and held to standards. But reviews should be orderly, principled, and tied to actual performance — not used as leverage because a council majority dislikes a decision, resents independent advice, or wants to send a warning.

A council that turns personnel oversight into political pressure does not strengthen accountability. It weakens trust.

Aurora's form of government depends on a distinction too many people now casually ignore. The council sets policy. The city manager administers the city. The city attorney gives legal advice. Public safety leaders run departments within the law, under policy, and subject to review.

This separation is not a technicality. It is a safeguard. It protects the public from arbitrary government, employees from political retaliation, and the city from impulsive decision-making. It also protects elected officials from confusing power with wisdom. Note

Any governing majority can begin to believe that winning an election entitles it not merely to govern, but to dominate. Aurora should resist that instinct.

The city needs accountability. But accountability must be institutional, not theatrical. It must be grounded in rules, not anger. It must criticize police without assuming police guilt, hear community pain without allowing pain to become policy by itself, and identify misconduct without converting difficult public safety decisions into political prosecutions.

That balance matters because public safety is not an abstraction. When officers hesitate in dangerous circumstances, citizens can be harmed. When police are treated as political suspects, recruitment and retention suffer. When chiefs are second-guessed by ideology, command clarity weakens. When public safety leaders operate under political ambush, the system becomes less stable.

The people who pay the price are residents waiting for help: the mother calling 911, the business owner dealing with theft, the senior afraid to walk to the store, the victim hoping someone still believes the law exists for them too.

This is why Aurora must be careful. A city can acknowledge past failures without placing its future under permanent suspicion. It can build oversight without building a political weapon. It can reform public safety without demoralizing the people asked to provide it.

Justice requires memory. But it also requires discipline.

The new Office of Public Safety Accountability should be structured around that discipline. Its mission should be clear. Its authority should be defined. Its findings should be evidence-based. Its processes

should be transparent. Its work should inform policy, not serve political narratives.

Most importantly, it should not become a backdoor for council members to exercise administrative control they do not possess directly.

Aurora has already lived through years of distrust. It should not institutionalize distrust as a governing philosophy.

Aurora can emerge from the consent decree era as a stronger city. But only if reform matures into institutional integrity rather than decays into political capture.

The public should insist on this: accountability, yes.

Control disguised as accountability, no.

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