

Pittsburgh fails to meet everyone's definition of 'livable'



By [Nafari Vanaski](#)

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A handwritten letter from a reader indicated she understood a bit too well my column last week about behind-the-scenes behavior by some city employees. The ending was jarring:

"I have been harassed over 20 years and still get threatened. I remain anonymous because I am older and alone and an easy target. Welcome to life in Pittsburgh."

Another reader left a voice mail: "A lot of Pittsburghers are used to the old norm," he said, adding that he and another black neighbor "had troubles" with city officials in his Lawrenceville neighborhood.

From Donna: "There's a culture of corruption in Allegheny County and in the city of Pittsburgh, and it's good to see someone speak so candidly about it."

There's a theme here: city officials proudly touting Pittsburgh's selection as one of the most livable places in the nation and a destination for conventions. Yet there are residents who are afraid to sign their name to a letter because of potential retribution from some — repeat, some — city employees.

A majority of city residents who do summon the nerve to complain about a city employee may not be threatened or intimidated, but they may be ignored, which can be just as upsetting. Perhaps their complaint didn't qualify as enough of a problem to warrant immediate attention or the money wasn't there to resolve it.

Now let's suppose you've had the good fortune to never be affected by questionable practices by any city employee. How does somebody else's problem affect you?

Not at all, you're thinking. Because by this time next year, we'll have a new mayor and likely a new police chief. Everything will change then, right?

The exploits of former police Chief Nate Harper, along with questions about Mayor Luke Ravenstahl's behavior, should make city officials take a closer look at the way they're doing business going forward, right?

Well, consider the Tribune-Review report on Wednesday that it could cost taxpayers \$120,000 to take a closer look at the city's cash management problems, along with tracking down all of the \$70,000 from a secret police fund involving Harper.

That's the price we might have to pay to end shady dealings within a department that is supposed to enforce the law. We are at the point where we can't govern ourselves and need an outside consultant to figure out what went wrong.

What about the Munhall man whose car was towed by a valet service that was allowed to do so through a variance granted by our very own police department? He was parked on a public street in Market Square, so how can anyone explain how a private service can cite people for parking in a legitimate spot?

If he hadn't fought it, the Munhall man would be looking at about \$200 in fines. But fortunately, a judge found that he wasn't at fault, and the city police are taking a closer look at valet parking services.

Speaking of the police, I got another letter this week, too, from a former zone commander for my neighborhood. She offered a heartfelt apology and said she wished she had known about what we'd been through.

She said she was transferred to another zone commander spot after complaining about a supervisor in the Public Works Department. He, meanwhile, was promoted.

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