

Hodges, Harteau rift reflects poorly on city

A classic line from the movie “Cool Hand Luke” applies to an ongoing disagreement between two key city leaders in Minneapolis: “What we’ve got here is failure to communicate.” Big time.

That failure, between Minneapolis Mayor Betsy Hodges and Police Chief Janeé Harteau, erodes confidence in city leadership. And it raises questions about whether the two can effectively collaborate to address public safety issues in the future.

The latest episode in their ongoing rift came last week when Hodges overturned Harteau’s selection of police Lt. John Delmonico for a senior command position. The chief announced that Delmonico was her choice to lead the department’s Fourth Precinct on the North Side. Hodges disagreed with that decision and stepped in to overturn it.

In a statement, the mayor said: “At this moment in the life of north Minneapolis, we need another kind of leadership ... to build trust and transform relationships between police and community. Therefore, I have informed Chief Harteau that he [Delmonico] will not serve as inspector of the Fourth Precinct.”

Delmonico was president of the Minneapolis Police Federation, which represents the city’s 850 officers, from 1999 to 2015. Two years ago, he was defeated in the police union election. That, Hodges said, was one concern she had about his appointment; she wasn’t sure he had enough confidence from rank-and-file cops to run the precinct.

In addition, Delmonico was a central figure in the “Pointergate” incident in which he alleged that the mayor was flashing gang signs in a photograph with a black man named Navell Gordon. The allegation prompted an angry reaction, especially on the North Side.

It’s worth noting that this is the only time that the two leaders have publicly disagreed on a police staff appointment. The chief has made dozens of other staff changes during her tenure with the mayor’s approval.

But this is not the only time that difficulties between the two have come under scrutiny. When Hodges took office, it was widely known that she was considering replacing Harteau, who had been appointed by Hodges’ predecessor, R.T. Rybak. In addition, some downtown business owners and residents have questioned whether the two have been able to develop a unified approach to safety issues.

And a March 2017 federal report said the strained relationship between the two was a chief cause for police confusion in the aftermath of the Jamar Clark shooting on the North Side. Both leaders downplayed the report’s findings.

The continuing tension doesn’t reflect well on either leader, and it erodes confidence in city leadership generally. Much of the discussion about Delmonico’s appointment took place in a series of texts between Hodges and Harteau — not the most professional way to handle an important appointment.

In her own statement, Harteau said: “I don’t feel this situation should be played out in the public any further. As in the past, I know the mayor and I will work together to find a viable solution.”

We hope that’s the case. Minneapolisans deserve better from both.