



CITY OF NEW ORLEANS

DEPARTMENT OF CITY CIVIL SERVICE
SUITE 900 – 1340 POYDRAS ST.
NEW ORLEANS LA 70112
(504) 658-3500 FAX NO. (504) 658-3598

CITY CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION
BRITTNEY RICHARDSON, CHAIRPERSON
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DIRECTOR OF PERSONNEL

Tuesday, December 16, 2025

Clarence Roby, Jr.
1812 Hancock Street
Gretna, La. 70053

Re: **Shannon Oldfield-Blanks VS.
Department of Public Works
Docket Number: 9743**

Dear Mr. Roby:

Attached is the decision of the City Civil Service Commission in the above-referenced appeal.

This is to notify you that, in accordance with the rules of the Court of Appeal, Fourth Circuit, State of Louisiana, the decision for the above captioned matter is this date - 12/16/2025 - filed in the Office of the Civil Service Commission at 1340 Poydras St. Suite 900, Orleans Tower, New Orleans, Louisiana.

If you choose to appeal this decision, such appeal must conform to the deadlines established by the Commission's Rules and Article X, 12(B) of the Louisiana Constitution. Further, any such appeal shall be taken in accordance with Article 2121 et. seq. of the Louisiana Code of Civil Procedure.

For the Commission,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Doddie K. Smith".

Doddie K. Smith
Chief, Management Services Division

cc: Clinton R. Hathaway
Elizabeth A Weigand
Jay Ginsberg
Shannon Oldfield-Blanks
14 English Turn Dr. New Orleans LA 70131
file

**CIVIL SERVICE COMMISSION
CITY OF NEW ORLEANS**

SHANNON OLDFIELD-BLANKS
Appellant

Docket No. 9743

v.

DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS,
Appointing Authority

DECISION

Appellant, Shannon Oldfield-Blanks, brings this appeal pursuant to Article X, Section 8 of the Louisiana Constitution and Civil Service Rule II, Section 4.1 seeking review of the letter of reprimand issued by Interim Chief Executive Officer Joseph Threat on May 27, 2025. (Ex. HE-1). At all relevant times, Appellant was a permanent employee serving as Deputy Director of the Department of Public Works (DPW). (Tr. at 71).

A Hearing Examiner, appointed by the Commission, presided over a hearing on July 29, 2025, and August 25, 2025. At this hearing, both parties had an opportunity to call witnesses and present evidence.

The undersigned Commissioners have reviewed and analyzed the entire record in this matter, including the transcript from the hearing, all exhibits submitted at the hearing, the Hearing Examiner's report dated November 13, 2025, and controlling Louisiana law.

For the reasons set forth below, Ms. Oldfield-Blanks's appeal is DENIED.

I. FACTUAL BACKGROUND

DPW hired Ms. Oldfield-Blanks, a licensed professional engineer, as the Deputy Director on October 24, 2023, and she currently serves in this role. (Tr. at 71; Ex. Appellant-1). Ms. Oldfield-Blanks reports to Clinton "Rick" Hathaway, the Director of DPW. (Tr. at 72, 98). Rick

Hathaway reports to Joseph Threat, the Interim Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and Deputy CAO for Infrastructure and Resilience. (Tr. at 97).

Ms. Oldfield-Blanks supervised eight DPW divisions, including the Maintenance Division, and she was also serving as Budget Coordinator and Communications for DPW. (Tr. at 11). Ms. Oldfield-Blanks testified that there were “a lot of vacancies” in leadership roles in the divisions she managed. (Tr. at 72). In two divisions, Parking and Ground Transportation, the position of administrator was vacant. (Tr. at 72-73). Ms. Oldfield-Blanks also assisted with Traffic Engineering, as the position of Chief Traffic Engineer was vacant. (Tr. at 72-73; Ex. Appellant-1).

The Maintenance Division “manages the repair, resurfacing, and maintenance of roadways and other public rights-of-way.” (Ex. DPW-1 at 6). The Maintenance Division also “oversees stormwater management.” (Ex. DPW 1 at 6-7). The Maintenance Yard is located at 633 South Norman C. Francis Parkway. (Ex. DPW-1 at 7). Ms. Oldfield-Blanks’s office is at City Hall. (Tr. at 58).

Mr. Threat testified that the Deputy Director of DPW is “day-to-day operation of and management and oversight of all of those functions of providing goods and services throughout the city.” (Tr. at 98). The Deputy Director of DPW is responsible for “potholes, minor drainage, vac trucks, traffic lights, streetlights, removal of debris” and “physical security support.” (Tr. at 98).

Earl Fox, III, the Chief Internal Auditor, testified that Ms. Oldfield-Blanks inherited a “dysfunctional system” in the Maintenance Division. (Tr. at 45). Of the eight divisions Ms. Oldfield-Blanks managed, “there were two or three that were extremely dysfunctional, problematic.” (Tr. at 45).

DPW Maintenance employees and the union representing these employees, The American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), complained about unqualified members of leadership, a hostile work environment, and abuse of the timekeeping system. (Tr. at 112; Ex. HE-1). As a result of these complaints, on September 20, 2024, City Councilmember J.P. Morrell requested that Mr. Hathaway appear before the City Council Governmental Affairs Committee for a public hearing on October 9, 2024, about “serious and urgent personnel concerns” in the Maintenance Division. (Tr. at 7; Ex. 1 to Ex. DPW-1). Following the complaints and this correspondence from Councilmember Morrell, Mr. Threat sought permission from the CAO for the Office of Internal Audit to investigate the complaints from AFSCME and employees about the Maintenance Division. (Tr. at 13, 113). Mr. Fox began his investigation into the working conditions and safety within DPW on September 26, 2024. (Ex. DPW-1 at 4; Tr. at 6).

Following the City Council Governmental Affairs meeting that Mr. Threat attended¹ on October 9, 2024, a “media blitz” ensued. (Tr. at 112). Mr. Threat testified that “I was in the newspaper. Everybody was in the newspaper. It was political; it was public.” (Tr. at 100).

Mr. Fox issued a 64-page report on April 8, 2025, with a number of exhibits. (Ex. DPW-1). Mr. Fox interviewed 25 witnesses and reviewed videos and voluminous documents. (Ex. DPW-1 at 10-13). Mr. Fox found “operational deficiencies in the maintenance yard.” (Tr. at 7). Originally, there were three levels of supervision at the Maintenance Yard below Ms. Oldfield-Blanks. (Tr. at 9-10). Ms. Oldfield-Blanks directly supervised the Principal Engineer, who was in charge of the entire site. The Principal Engineer supervised the Superintendent. (Tr. at 20). Four Supervisors reported to the Superintendent. (Tr. at 20).

¹ The video of the October 9, 2024, Governmental Affairs meeting is publicly available at [Governmental Affairs Committee - Oct 9th, 2024](#).

Following the departure of Eric Kelly, the Principal Engineer, Jerome Casby, Superintendent, took over supervision of the Maintenance Yard, reporting directly to Shannon Oldfield-Blanks. (Tr. at 19-20). Four supervisors report to Mr. Casby. (Tr at 19-20). Mr. Fox testified that Mr. Casby became “the highest ranking person on the yard,” but he “lacked leadership skill.”² (Tr. at 19, 30). For example, Mr. Fox substantiated the most shocking allegation, that Mr. Casby “stated to a third-party co-worker, Jeremy Kraft, ‘I am going to get that Fat Bitch!’ in reference to Ms. Toinette Johnson.” (Ex. DPW-1 at 30). In a recorded meeting with Mr. Casby, Mr. Kraft, Mr. Kelly, and Ms. Johnson, Mr. Casby stated “*If I did say that I told that to you, not her.*” (Ex. DPW-1 at 30) (emphasis in original). Another recording established that Mr. Casby referred to Vashon Watson as a “mother fucking asshole trying to call me.” (Ex. DPW-1 at 37). Mr. Fox concluded that Mr. Casby “acted inappropriately, disrespectfully, and in a retaliatory manner” and used “profane and derogatory language.” ((Ex. DPW-1 at 30). Mr. Fox further concluded that “Mr. Casby’s ongoing supervisory role and leadership presence, combined with this conduct, compromise the integrity of the workplace and demonstrate behavior that is unacceptable in the DPW and CNO workforce.” (Ex. DPW-1 at 30). Although Mr. Hathaway suspended Mr. Casby for four days by letter dated November 17, 2025,³ Mr. Casby continues to supervise some functions at the Maintenance Yard. Further, before his departure, Mr. Kelly also had “performance deficiencies.” (Tr. at 33; Ex DPW-1 at 40-42). Mr. Fox testified that Ms. Oldfield-Blanks failed to address these shortcomings of leadership at the Maintenance Yard. (Tr. at 36).

³ The Personnel Director receives a copy of all formal discipline of classified employees. Civil Service Rule IX, Section 1.3.

Ms. Oldfield-Blanks testified that she was unaware of Mr. Casby's deficiencies until she received the investigative report. (Tr. at 89).

Mr. Fox found that other employees suffered no discipline for misconduct. (Tr. at 20). For example, employees left the yard with trucks loaded with asphalt and then returned to the yard with a full load of asphalt. (Tr. at 20). Employees were sleeping during work hours, according to video reviewed by Mr. Fox. (Tr. at 22-23). Ms. Oldfield-Blanks testified that the employees were sleeping during breaks and lunch. (Tr. at 76-77).

Mr. Fox also testified about the lack of discipline of Emile Riley, a supervisor. Mr. Riley allowed all the employees under his supervision to go home in advance of Hurricane Francine without Mr. Casby's approval. (Tr. at 27, 87). According to a grievance filed by a laborer, Mr. Riley also had a verbal altercation with the laborer in advance of Hurricane Francine, calling him a "stupid ass." (Tr. at 27-28; Ex. DPW-1 at 34). Mr. Fox testified that Ms. Oldfield-Blanks should have been aware of this misconduct, as she was responsible for the "whole operation." (Tr. at 42).

Based on the "systemic issues," Mr. Fox expanded his investigation to the business environment of the Maintenance Division. (Tr. at 7). Mr. Fox noted to lack of a policy and procedure manual in effect at the time of the investigation. (Ex. DPW-1 at 43-44). Mr. Fox also found a lack of documentation by the employees in the Maintenance Division. (Tr. at 43). For example, employee grievances were not forwarded to Human Resources. (Tr. at 43-44). The division also failed to maintain accurate and complete training logs. (Ex. DPW-1 at 44).

After he received the investigative report, Mr. Threat issued a letter of reprimand to Mr. Hathaway and Ms. Oldfield-Blanks. (Tr. at 99). Mr. Threat testified it would have been "disjointed" for him to issue a letter of reprimand to Mr. Hathaway and then instruct Mr. Hathaway to issue a letter of reprimand to Ms. Oldfield-Blanks. (Tr. at 104-05).

II. ANALYSIS

A. Legal Standard for Commission's Review of Discipline

“Employees with the permanent status in the classified service may be disciplined only for cause expressed in writing. La. Const., Art. X, Sec. 8(A).” *Whitaker v. New Orleans Police Dep’t*, 2003-0512 (La. App. 4 Cir. 9/17/03), 863 So. 2d 572 (quoting *Stevens v. Dep’t of Police*, 2000-1682 (La. App. 4 Cir. 5/9/01)). “Legal cause exists whenever an employee’s conduct impairs the efficiency of the public service in which the employee is engaged.” *Id.* “The Appointing Authority has the burden of proving the impairment.” *Id.* (citing La. Const., art. X, § 8(A)). “The appointing authority must prove its case by a preponderance of the evidence.” *Id.* “Disciplinary action against a civil service employee will be deemed arbitrary and capricious unless there is a real and substantial relationship between the improper conduct and the “efficient operation” of the public service.” *Id.* “It is well-settled that, in an appeal before the Commission pursuant to Article X, § 8(A) of the Louisiana Constitution, the appointing authority has the burden of proving by a preponderance of the evidence: 1) the occurrence of the complained of activity, and 2) that the conduct complained of impaired the efficiency of the public service in which the appointing authority is engaged. *Gast v. Dep’t of Police*, 2013-0781 (La. App. 4 Cir. 3/13/14), 137 So. 3d 731, 733 (quoting *Cure v. Dep’t of Police*, 2007-0166 (La. App. 4 Cir. 8/1/07), 964 So. 2d 1093, 1094).

1. The Appointing Authority must show the discipline was commensurate with the infraction

The Commission has a duty to decide independently from the facts presented in the record whether the appointing authority carried its legally imposed burden of proving by a preponderance of evidence that it had good or lawful cause for disciplining the classified employee and, if so,

whether such discipline was commensurate with the dereliction. *Durning v. New Orleans Police Dep't*, 2019-0987 (La. App. 4 Cir. 3/25/20), 294 So. 3d 536, 538, *writ denied*, 2020-00697 (La. 9/29/20), 301 So. 3d 1195; *Abbott v. New Orleans Police Dep't*, 2014-0993 (La. App. 4 Cir. 2/11/15); 165 So.3d 191, 197; *Walters v. Dept. of Police of the City of New Orleans*, 454 So. 2d 106 (La. 1984). The appointing authority has the burden of showing that the discipline was reasonable and not arbitrary or capricious. *Neely v. Dep't of Fire*, 2021-0454 (La. App. 4 Cir. 12/1/21), 332 So. 3d 194, 207 (“[NOFD] did not demonstrate . . . that termination was reasonable discipline”); *Durning*, 294 So. 3d at 540 (“the termination . . . deemed to be arbitrary and capricious”).

B. DPW has Carried its Burden of Showing Cause for Discipline

DPW met its burden of showing cause for the discipline issued to the appellant. It is undisputed that classified employees may be disciplined for poor performance. *Hampton v. Dep't of Fire*, 2016-1127 (La. App. 4 Cir. 5/3/17), 220 So. 3d 111, 112 n.2-113 (termination following failure to improve performance after 90 days), *James v. Sewerage & Water Bd.*, 505 So. 2d 119, 122 (1987) (reversing Commission’s grant of appeal of five-day suspension for unsatisfactory job performance). Civil Service Rule IX, Section 1.1 authorizes an Appointing Authority to discipline a classified employee who is “unable or unwilling to perform the duties of his/her position in a satisfactory manner . . . or has omitted to perform any act it was his/her duty to perform.”

Although Ms. Oldfield-Blanks inherited a dysfunctional Maintenance Division and may not have been aware of all the misconduct and deficiencies factually developed before the Hearing Examiner, Ms. Oldfield-Blanks was responsible as the Deputy Director for management of this division. (Tr. at 42, 53). Importantly, Ms. Oldfield-Blanks failed to provide effective supervisory oversight. (Tr. at 105-06, 135). Ms. Oldfield-Blanks did not address the numerous problems in the

Maintenance Division in a timely manner. It is very important that supervisors do their job. For our City to move forward and do what it is obligated to do for the welfare of all citizens who rely upon effective daily City services, City supervisors must do their job as required. According to Mr. Threat, the appellant was failing to what was expected of her. “The Commission may not merely substitute its judgment for the appointing authority's judgment.” *Abbott v. New Orleans Police Dep't*, 2014-0993 (La. App. 4 Cir. 2/11/15), 165 So. 3d 191, 197; *Rivet v. Dep't of Police*, 2018-0229 (La. App. 4 Cir. 10/24/18), 258 So. 3d 111, 116; *Harris v. Dep't of Fire*, 2008-0514 (La. App. 4 Cir. 7/16/08), 990 So. 2d 54, 61.

To the extent Ms. Oldfield-Blanks takes the position that Joseph Threat lacked the authority to discipline Ms. Oldfield-Blanks, the Commission rejects this argument. The appellant's immediate supervisor, Director Hathaway, reports directly to Mr. Threat. Given the below referred to definition of “Appointing Authority,” the Interim Chief Administrative Officer and Deputy Chief Administrative Officer of the City clearly constitutes an Appointing Authority.

Civil Service Rule I, Section 1, paragraph 5 defines the “Appointing Authority” as “any officer, board, agency, commission, or person having the power to make appointments to positions in the city service.” In this case, Mr. Threat testified that he hired Ms. Oldfield-Blanks as the Deputy Director of DPW. (Tr. at 101). Therefore, in addition to his supervisory position over the Director, Mr. Threat also meets the definition of an Appointing Authority, because Mr. Threat appointed at least one classified employee at DPW.

DPW has shown the occurrence of the complained-of conduct.

The appellant's lack of oversight and discipline of subordinates impaired the efficient operation of DPW. The record shows that there were incidents of disrespectful, profane, and retaliatory treatment of employees at the Maintenance Yard. The appellant's lack of oversight

affected the working conditions of employees at the Maintenance Yard. In addition, the appellant's failure to discipline employees for misconduct, such as sleeping on the job, necessarily impaired the ability of DPW to deliver services. Ms. Oldfield-Blanks does not deserve a pass on discipline, and for us to do so sends the wrong message as to what we in this City should expect of our supervisors.

1. The letter of reprimand is commensurate with the infraction

The letter of reprimand is commensurate with the infraction. Ms. Oldfield-Blanks had a heavy workload and a difficult assignment. Therefore, the least severe penalty is appropriate given all of the factual circumstances set forth in the record before us.

Ms. Oldfield-Blanks' appeal is DENIED.

WRITER:

Mark Surprenant, Commissioner

Mark Surprenant, Commissioner (Dec 15, 2025 15:42:19 CST)

MARK SURPRENANT, COMMISSIONER

CONCUR:

Ruth Davis, Commissioner

Ruth Davis, Commissioner (Dec 16, 2025 00:14:39 CST)

RUTH DAVIS, COMMISSIONER

DISSENT BY VICE-CHAIRPERSON KORN

I agree with the Hearing Officer that the Commission should grant this appeal because DPW has failed to show cause for the discipline of Ms. Oldfield-Banks.

Classified employees may be disciplined for performance under City Policy Memorandum No. 83 (R): Standards of Behavior for City Employees. Section II(F) states "Each Employee, because of the job assignment, has certain required duties and must assume certain responsibilities.

Each employee has a job to do and must do that job. Failure to perform these duties or take these responsibilities is neglect of duty.” Civil Service Rule IX, Section 1.1 authorizes an Appointing Authority to discipline a classified employee who is: “unable or unwilling to perform the duties of his/her position in a satisfactory manner...or has omitted to perform any act it was his/her duty to perform.” DPW did not show that Ms. Oldfield-Blanks was unable or unwilling to perform any of her job duties. Nor did they show that she omitted to perform any act it was her duty to perform. Mr. Threat disciplined Ms. Oldfield-Blanks even though he testified that *“I know that Shannon and Rick were doing their best to make changes in the department.”* (Tr. at 100). This is clearly counter to the intent of Civil Service Rule IX.

Mr. Threat also conflates performance management with discipline. He said: *“I felt like any other type of discipline, like an improvement plan, or any other type of discipline, you know, like leave without pay, wasn’t warranted at the time of this for Shannon, so Rick is dealing with that department.”* (Tr. at 103-104) (emphasis added). He also suggested that he might rescind the discipline: *“[A]t some point I could scratch that letter if the department came back on track.”* (Tr. at 103). Letters of Reprimand are part of an employee’s permanent record and cannot be “scratched.” An improvement plan is not discipline.

When asked how Ms. Blanks’ conduct negatively impacted the Department of Public Works, Mr. Threat stated: *“Like I said, I was not Ms. Blanks’ day-to-day supervisor; I was Rick’s supervisor. I checked in with Rick daily, unless we went into some major operations, whether it be hurricane or Super Bowl or whatever. With Shannon, it was snow removal. So I did not have daily interactions; I was not Shannon’s direct supervisor, so I only had intermittent -- we saw each other once or twice a day or once or twice a week; I would ask her how things were going.”* Ms. Oldfield-Blanks’ supervisor was Mr. Hathaway. We do not know what Mr. Hathaway thought of her

performance, what grievances she had seen and what the grievance procedures were, what tasks and priorities he assigned or how her conduct may have negatively impacted the department. The Letter of Reprimand was given based only on the report of a third party auditor. (Tr. at 121)

Mr. Threat essentially used a letter of reprimand as a performance planning session. *See* Civil Service Rule 11, Sections 1.5(i), 1.9. A performance planning session may be conducted when “[t]he Evaluating Supervisor deems a performance planning session is appropriate.” Civil Service Rule 11, Section 1.5(i). The audit results provided information to management that was previously unknown and presented an opportunity to provide guidance on where to focus Ms. Oldfield-Blanks’ time. Mr. Threat listed four recommendations from the investigative report to be implemented immediately. (Ex. HE-1). Mr. Threat requested monthly written status reports on the development of Operating Procedures for the Maintenance Division and a deadline for implementation of three months. (Ex. HE-1). If Ms. Oldfield-Blank does not meet expectations, she could receive a poor performance rating and potentially a performance improvement plan.

DPW’s own witnesses testified about the herculean task Ms. Oldfield-Blanks undertook in 2023. Reflecting the difficulty managing DPW, three different individuals have served as Director of DPW since 2021, with two individuals serving about one year in the role. (Ex. DPW-1 at 41-42). As the majority notes, Mr. Fox testified that Mr. Oldfield-Blanks inherited a Maintenance Division and at least one other division of DPW that were extremely dysfunctional and problematic. (Tr. at 45). According to Mr. Threat, Ms. Oldfield-Blanks became Deputy Director over a city department that was in “disarray.” (Tr. at 72-73). In addition to managing eight divisions of DPW and providing increased support after the departure of leadership, Ms. Oldfield-Blanks testified she performed the duties of the positions of Communications and Budget Coordinator (both direct reports to the Director). (Tr at 11).

Ms. Oldfield-Blanks was hampered by vacancies. She testified that the administrators of at least three divisions under her supervision became vacant, requiring her to perform extra job duties. (Tr. at 72-73, 101-02). She provided engineering support for the Traffic Division when the Chief Engineer departed. (Tr. at 125). She assumed duties of the Parking Administrator and the Ground Transportation Bureau Administrator. (Tr. at 72). To address this issue, on July 15, 2024, Ms. Oldfield-Blanks emailed Brandye DeLarge to request the funding of positions for DPW. (Ex. Appellant-2). At Mr. Threat's request, Ms. Oldfield-Blanks drafted a memo in support of this request. (Tr. at 137). On July 18, 2024, Mr. Threat requested funding for 19 positions, including Ms. Oldfield-Blanks's description of positions for DPW. (Tr. at 137; Exs. Appellant-3, Appellant-4). Ms. Oldfield-Blanks testified that some, but not all, of the DPW positions were funded. (Tr. at 137).

As for the employee misconduct, Ms. Oldfield-Blanks did not work on the site of the Maintenance Yard, and she testified she was unaware of Jerome Casby's conduct. There was no evidence presented that indicated she was aware of any of the misconduct or bullying found in the audit. She also testified that she was unaware of employees sleeping on the job. After viewing videos from the audit, she did not agree with the auditor that employees were sleeping on the job. All instances from "Sansara" of employees closing their eyes during the work day occurred on sanctioned breaks, either lunch or afternoon and did not constitute sleeping on duty. (Tr. at 76-78).

The discipline of Ms. Oldfield-Blanks appears to be politically motivated. Following the City Council Governmental Affairs meeting that Mr. Threat attended on October 9, 2024, a "media blitz" ensued (Tr. at 112). Mr. Threat testified that "I was in the newspaper. Everybody was in the newspaper. It was political; it was public." (Tr. at 100). Strictly because of publicity and political pressure related to the misconduct of employees in the Maintenance Division, the Interim Chief

Administrative Officer felt compelled to discipline somebody. Ms. Oldfield-Blanks, the Deputy Director of DPW, was made a scapegoat. Discipline for performance should be confined to cases where there are specific tasks that are intentionally and repeatedly not done. In this case, there are no specifics on what supervisory functions she did not perform, questions of whether she was aware of certain issues, and no idea of what priorities or authorities she was given. Discipline was issued based only on the result of a third-party audit, not any direct supervisory observations.

Discipline is not only completely inappropriate in this case but is also counterproductive to performance improvement. When an employee is apparently capable and trying to do her best and is not provided adequate guidance and resources to do the job, the city should work with her, setting priorities, provide training if needed, getting adequate resources and providing feedback.

I would grant Ms. Oldfield-Blanks' appeal.



John Korn, Vice-Chairperson (Dec 15, 2025 14:52:05 CST)

JOHN KORN, VICE-CHAIRPERSON