

Medina to pay fired cop \$1.7 million

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The city of Medina will pay \$1.7 million to a former police lieutenant who the courts have found was wrongfully terminated in 2006 after making racially derogatory comments about the former police chief.

By [Lynn Thompson](#)

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The city of Medina will pay \$1.7 million to a former police lieutenant fired in 2006 for making racially derogatory comments about the then-Asian-American police chief. The settlement agreement with the city awards Roger Skinner back pay and lost benefits through 2010, when he would have been eligible to retire.

The city will pay the money out of its general-fund reserves. Its municipal insurance policy does not cover appeals of disciplinary decisions, said Kathleen Haggard, attorney for Medina.

Skinner was fired for telling co-workers that Police Chief Jeffrey Chen had said monkeys could do their jobs. Skinner also said 'Asians don't make good managers because people don't like them,' according to findings of the city's three-member volunteer Civil Service Commission, which upheld the termination.

Skinner appealed his dismissal, and the case went all the way to the Washington State Supreme Court, which ruled the officer could pursue his claim. The case was finally sent back to the Civil Service Commission for a new hearing.

In 2012, the commission found there was just cause for discipline, but not for termination. It imposed a 60-day suspension without pay, retroactively demoted Skinner to patrol officer and ordered back pay and benefits from the time he would have returned to work.

The city challenged the commission's authority to award back pay, but a Washington Court of Appeals ruled the city must honor its employment agreement and calculate the

back pay at the lower rank and pay grade. A trial date was set for 2016 to determine the amount owed Skinner. Rather than go to trial, the city's attorneys negotiated the settlement.

Skinner's attorney, William Murphy, said he offered several times over the past decade to resolve the case, but got no response from the city.

"They could have settled years ago at a far cheaper price, and should have," he said. He said Skinner was a 14-year veteran of the Medina police force who held a bachelor's degree in criminal justice. After the firing, he said, his client couldn't get a job in law enforcement and ended up working security for a private firm.

City Councilmember Patrick Boyd called the settlement, "really, really painful." He said the termination decision and subsequent court appeals happened before most of the present council was elected. He also said the city had won most of the court decisions and believed it was on good legal standing to deny Skinner's claims.

Once a trial date was set for March to determine how much the city owed Skinner, he said, "This council had little to do but finish the claim."

Former Chief Chen [was himself fired](#) for misconduct in 2011. He sued, alleging racial discrimination, and a jury awarded him \$2 million. But a judge [threw out the verdict](#) and Chen [lost his case in a retrial](#).

The city said Chen was fired because he had forged memos, dismissed traffic tickets, lied about looking through city email archives and bought personal items with city money.

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