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BODY:

City officials Thursday remained tight-lipped about the details surrounding the investigation of an assistant police commander and City-County Council member.

But some insights emerged into the subject of the probe, Lincoln Plowman, a loyal Republican known for an aggressive and frank nature that can be polarizing on the council but who is described by friends as a caring family man.

Plowman, who represents the city's Southeastside, worked his way up through the ranks in the Marion County Sheriff's Department during the 1990s. In October, he became the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department's assistant commander of administration. He was placed on administrative leave Wednesday pending an internal investigation.

Frank Straub, the city's public safety director, would not discuss the nature of the investigation or whether outside agencies are involved.

"My policy has always been that when there's an internal matter, I don't think it's appropriate to discuss it," Straub said. "I have an obligation to be respectful to him, regardless of what's going on or not going on."

Attempts to reach Plowman on Thursday were unsuccessful. He has indicated through colleagues that he does not intend to resign his seat on the council.

Some council Democrats think he should resign, but the Democratic leader on the council said she wants to wait and see how the investigation plays out.

Council President Ryan Vaughn said Thursday he has not been made aware of the nature of the investigation. He said it is Plowman's responsibility to recuse himself if a matter were to come before the council that is related to the investigation.

Friends say Plowman was active in grass-roots GOP politics for several years before his election to the council in 2003. There, he became leader of the Republican caucus and chairman of the Metropolitan Development Committee.

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As a councilman, he is known for a tenacity that sometimes has caused divisions within his own caucus.

For example, Plowman led Republican opposition to a stronger smoking ban. On the night the council voted on the ban, he convened a meeting for Republicans who opposed the ban to strategize.

"It led to a lot of distrust among the caucus," said Barbara Malone, a Republican councilwoman and supporter of the ban who said she later voiced her concerns with Plowman.

But he also used his strong-willed political nature to be an advocate for council members when a particular issue affected their districts. During a debate over the location of a traffic and probation court, he rallied behind Councilwoman Janice McHenry, whose area of the city would have been affected, and helped defeat the proposal.

"He tends to support the district councilor to a fault," said Ben Hunter, another council Republican. "It's a double-edged sword. You can gain much respect because you're loyal, but you have to be careful and make sure you're not compromising a good public policy."

During his tenure on the council, Plowman has gained support from wealthy Republican financial backers such as longtime council President Beurt SerVaas, businessman P.E. MacAllister and Timothy Durham, a financier whose business practices came under federal investigation last year.

Some of his friends and colleagues said they were shocked to learn that he was under investigation. They described him as a diligent worker who was focused on his young son and wife, who is pregnant.

"He has always been professional (as far as) I've seen," said Tim Motsinger, a supervisor in IMPD's Crime Stoppers program. "He's taken his job very seriously."

Marion County Democratic Chairman Ed Treacy called for Plowman's resignation.

"Everybody ought to have their fair day in court, but any time a Democrat gets in trouble, my good friend Mr. John asks for their resignation," Treacy said, referring to Marion County Republican Chairman Tom John. "So I must ask for Mr. Plowman's resignation."

Joanne Sanders, the council's Democratic minority leader, said the incident has had a negative impact on the entire council.

"Unfortunately," she said, "it confirms the public's worst expectations."

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