

Town of Colchester, Connecticut

127 Norwich Avenue, Colchester, Connecticut 06415

Mary Bylone, First Selectman

Board of Selectman Minutes

Special Meeting

Tuesday, May 18, 2021 @ 7:00 PM

Meeting Held via Zoom

Members Present: First Selectman Mary Bylone, Selectmen Rosemary Coyle, Denise Turner, Denise Mizla and Taras Rudko

1. CALL TO ORDER: First Selectman Mary Bylone called the meeting to order at 7 p.m.
2. Executive Session to Discuss the Performance of a Police Officer: D. Turner motioned to enter Executive Session at 7:03 p.m., seconded by D. Mizla. MOTION CARRIED 4 to 1 with T. Rudko opposing. Invited into Executive Session were: Human Resources Director Shannon Ramsby, Sgt. Mike Rondinone, Sgt. Tim Edwards, Officer Craig Scheel, Officer Bryan Kowalsky, Police Commissioner Carol Vaillancourt and Police Commissioner James Stavola. Carol Vaillancourt refused to participate in the Executive Session. The Board exited Executive Session at 7:53 p.m. No Action was Taken.
3. Discuss the Performance of the Police Commissioner James Stavola: No Action was Taken.
4. Discuss the Performance of Police Commissioner Carol Vaillancourt: No Action was Taken.
5. Discuss Taras Rudko's Complaint to the Board of Selectmen dated May 17, 2021: No Action was Taken.
6. Discuss Police Statistic Discrepancy in the FY 2021-2022 Budget Book: No Action was Taken.
7. ADJOURN: R. Coyle motioned to adjourn at 9:48 p.m., seconded by D. Turner. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

RECEIVED
COLCHESTER, CT
2021 MAY 19 AM 10:31
Gayle Furman
GAYLE FURMAN
TOWN CLERK

To the Board of Selectmen:

I am submitting this correspondence as a formal complaint with the following two points:

1. I have had the opportunity to review the interview packet submitted by Mr. Stavola and in fact the term "removed" was used; however, the nature of his removal was not disclosed. I find it disheartening that certain members of the Board of Selectmen were aware of the nature of his removal and failed to disclose it during the public meeting. I do understand that I had the opportunity to pose the question during that interview; however, I know the truth now and I would be remiss if I did not act on behalf of my constituents.
2. With regard to the complaint filed by Vice Chairman Vaillancourt dated May 3, 2021, there are three concerns that I gravitate toward immediately:
 - A. That Vice Chairman Vaillancourt is being denied access to information and is being put into a position to support data and/or conclusions that are being presented to the public without taxpayer oversight.
 - B. That Chairman Stavola additionally is behaving as a bully and creating a toxic working environment, subjecting commission members to ridicule and what amounts to public votes of forced allegiance.
 - C. That both Chairman Stavola and First Selectman Bylone are fostering an environment of unprofessionalism counterproductive to the mandate of the commission.

The First Amendment right is afforded to everyone as evidenced by the Police Union's stance on Officer [REDACTED] right in commenting, albeit they were demeaning. I would argue that an officer acting in his/her official capacity should be held to a higher bar of professionalism. It would appear not everyone present held that belief, as witnessed by the fact that Stavola and Bylone did nothing in their leadership capacity to address this inappropriate behavior which could be construed as insubordinate, disrespectful and should therefore be actionable.

The fact that there seems to be a disconnect by all parties regarding the role of the Police Commission leaves me troubled. The Police Commission's role is to act as taxpayer-based oversight entity to provide transparency and accountability to the public in conjunction with management as to the operations of our local police force.

In conversations with Vice Chairman Vaillancourt, she has stated that she did in fact ask for supporting data both on the political removal of the SRO and the police crime and call statistics that were being used to present to the public. This request for data was not provided to Vice Chairman Vaillancourt. As a result, Sargent Edwards presented inaccurate data to the public to justify the addition of two additional police officers on the basis of increased call volume and overall crime.

Both Chairman Stavola and First Selectman Bylone unilaterally worked on the data that ended up in the police presentation to the public. When the inaccuracies between the two budget books were brought to light during a public Board of Finance presentation by Mr. Bisbikos well over a month ago, the public was promised by the First Selectman Bylone that this would be examined and rectified. To date, the data has not been corrected in this year's budget book. As a result, the public will be asked to decide at the town's referendum based on inaccurate data. There needs to be an explanation as to why that data

was inaccurate and why it still remains that way. The truth of the matter is that both call volume and crime has been declining. A noteworthy point to mention is that Chairman Stavola also attended other boards and passed the inaccurate data to them to create a false narrative to justify the additional officers.

The Police Commission held a special session that entered into a closed-door executive session hearing to discuss the actions of both Vice Chairman Vaillancourt and Officer [REDACTED]. Vice Chairman Vaillancourt was denied her statutory ability to call for the discussion of her actions and performance to be public. As a result of this denial the commission proceeded to engage in an illegal meeting. Two quick points here. 1. Vice Chairman Vaillancourt refused to participate in the session. 2. Had the Vice Chairman entered into this session she would be precluded from publicly disclosing any topics of discussion in order to defend herself.

The following is the statute outlining executive sessions:

“(6) “Executive sessions” means a meeting of a public agency at which the public is excluded for one or more of the following purposes: (A) Discussion concerning the appointment, employment, performance, evaluation, health or dismissal of a public officer or employee, provided that such individual may require that discussion be held at an open meeting; (B) strategy and negotiations with respect to pending claims or pending litigation to which the public agency or a member thereof, because of the member’s conduct as a member of such agency, is a party until such litigation or claim has been finally adjudicated or otherwise settled; (C) matters concerning security strategy or the deployment of security personnel, or devices affecting public security; (D) discussion of the selection of a site or the lease, sale or purchase of real estate by the state or a political subdivision of the state when publicity regarding such site, lease, sale, purchase or construction would adversely impact the price of such site, lease, sale, purchase or construction until such time as all of the property has been acquired or all proceedings or transactions concerning same have been terminated or abandoned; and (E) discussion of any matter which would result in the disclosure of public records or the information contained therein described in subsection (b) of section 1-210.”

Considering these details, one could most certainly draw the conclusion as an elected official and as a taxpayer that both Chairman Stavola and First Selectman Byline got caught in a lie. As a result of being caught they are using their political influence to silence and remove an individual that exposed this deception. I personally believe that Vice Chairman Vaillancourt has served in the best interest of the citizens of Colchester and in fact should be commended for attempting to provide the transparency that we all deserve.

I would also be remiss if I did not mention the fact that the Board of Selectmen is choosing to not address Vice Chairman Vaillancourt’s complaint against Chairman Stavola, which was issued first and entered into the public record during the May 6, 2021 Board of Selectmen meeting. There was no discussion allowed under correspondence to address the complaint. However, we are allowing for a complaint based on political retribution to be strongly considered against Vice Chairman Vaillancourt.

Monday, May 17, 2021

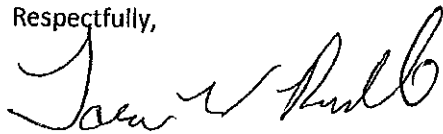
As a side note Vice Chairman Vaillancourt also submitted her complaint to the Diversity and Inclusion Committee, which is comprised of all females, of which two sit on the Board of Selectmen. I find it difficult that there has been zero engagement by the committee to communicate with a woman who is asking for help to address a toxic working environment. An example of this would be Chairman Stavola forcing a public vote of confidence in a Police Commission session after news media articles addressing his removal.

On a personal note: Chairman Stavola's wife attempted to publicly slander me by making false statements to the Rivereast newspaper in the April 23, 2021 edition. I rebuked her claims in the following week's paper, clearly restating my comments that actually were made and recorded both online and during the Board of Finance Budget Workshop via Zoom. One must ask the question, was she acting as his proxy? Furthermore, Chairman Stavola issued a false and unsubstantiated quote he attributed to Mr. Bisbikos in the May 14th edition of the Rivereast in an attempt to slander and politically assassinate his character. All this in an attempt to move the public's eye away from the complaint issued by the Vice Chairman against Chairman Stavola outlining his bullying, lack of professionalism and outright lying to the public.

In closing, it saddens me to see Our First Selectman acting unilaterally as a bully and perpetuating that behavior in eliciting the assistance of Mr. Stavola to do the same to push a political agenda. I am asking that the Board of Selectman join me in correcting this mistake by placing a motion on the table to remove Chairman Stavola.

I ask that this correspondence be added to the minutes of our next meeting and that the topic be included as an agenda item as well.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Taras W. Rudko', written in a cursive style.

Taras W. Rudko
Member, Board of Selectmen
Town of Colchester