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Police Commissioners' Complaints Come Full Circle

by Karla Santos

A full circle of complaints have been made amongst police commissioners after a discussion that took place during the commission's April 26 meeting.

According to Carol Vaillancourt, a member of the police commission, she felt offended by comments made by an officer during the public meeting, and the response to her complaint was another complaint by the Police Commission against herself.

One of the ways in which Police Commission Chairman, Jim Stavola, attempted to resolve the complaint was through an executive session that took place Monday. However, Vaillancourt did not attend the session because she wants to be able to discuss her complaint publicly.

"Commissioner Stavola is abusing his power

and bullying me by calling this executive meeting on Monday," Vaillancourt told the *Rivereast*. "I purposely sent my complaint to the officer supervisors and the Ad Hoc Committee for Diversity & Inclusion because Chairman Stavola and Selectman Bylone were in attendance and chose silence when the offending comment was made."

Denise Turner, chairman of the town's ad-hoc Diversity and Inclusion Committee clarified that the town does not have an official Diversity and Inclusion Commission at this time.

"The ad-Hoc Committee for Diversity and Inclusion is in the process of creating the official commission, which we hope will come to fruition very soon," she said. "The ad-hoc committee has no power to take any action on any

matters that may present."

Vaillancourt's original complaint was a letter to Sgt. Michael Rondinone, Resident Trooper Sergeant, where she expressed her concern regarding a statement that was made by a police officer during the Police Commission meeting April 26th.

Rondinone said he is still investigating Vaillancourt's complaint and that he was not the person who released it to the police commission.

She said that Officer Bryan Kowalsky made a reference about "the past commissioners that sometimes the running joke in his office was that they were going to make decisions for the water department when they didn't know anything about water."

Vaillancourt said that Kowalsky also mentioned that Stavola was the only chairman with prior police knowledge.

She said she found the comment to be "alarming and offensive," as she interpreted it as if it implies that civilians have no business being on the commission.

"All commissioners I have worked with have spent countless hours attending meetings, doing research, participating at special functions all for the better of our community," Vaillancourt said. "These actions are to be commended not ridiculed or to make fun of."

She said that in the past, the commission was not very successful and noted that its goals have remained the same. Vaillancourt said a lack of support from the management yielded a lack of results.

In addition, she said she feels the Colchester Police Department only responds to topics brought up by current commissioners with past police experience.

"Although I find value in having ex-police

officers at the table I also see the value of civilians," she said.

She said she personally felt attacked by the comments from Kowalsky.

"He made me feel, as a woman civilian having no police experience on the commission, that it discredits all the long hours of hard work that I have done for the police department and town for the past four years," Vaillancourt said.

Vaillancourt noted the Police Commission is made up of five members; two are former police officers and three are civilians, two of them, civilian women.

Vaillancourt was the chair of the Police Commission for about two years. Although she doesn't clearly remember the specific dates she said she believes she served in that capacity from about November 2018 to about September 2020.

After Monday's executive session, Stavola announced how they would proceed with the complaint. He said the Police Commission, by majority vote, has found that Vaillancourt has violated numerous Police Commission by-laws and state statutes stemming from her complaint against Kowalsky.

The violations were sent to the Board of Selectmen for further review and possible action.

Because of those results, Vaillancourt filed another complaint against Stavola and expected it to be addressed in yesterday's Board of Selectmen meeting, after-press time.

Stavola, meanwhile, told the *Rivereast* he can't disclose the specific violations made by Vaillancourt because they were discussed during an executive session. He said he can't comment on the issue because it is still being investigated and that the reason he handled Vaillancourt's complaint with an executive session is that policies require an executive session.

Norton Park Gifts

All are invited to become part of North Westchester history and the new Norton Park at 348 Westchester Rd. in Colchester on the site of the former C.H. Norton Paper Mill along the Jeremy River.

People can purchase an engraved brick (two sizes) for the commemorative walk or an engraved granite capstone to be placed on the low walls of the former mill for additional seating. The installation of these items will be in Phase 2 of the project, likely in 2022.

The purchase of these park commemorative items is tax-deductible. In addition to the donation acknowledgement letter, a certificate for the gift purchase may be requested with the order.

To download the Norton Park Gift fundraising flyer and form, go to www.colchesterct.gov/norton-park-committee. The flyer link is in left green margin. Information about the park, its design and a public forum presentation may be found on the same site.

Tag Sale May 15

Westchester Congregational Church will hold a Tag Sale Saturday, May 15, from 8 a.m.-noon, at the parsonage, located at 98 Cemetery Rd. Wear your mask and plan to be physically distant from others.

Donations of good-quality usable items can be dropped off on the parsonage porch before

Mother's Day Flower Sale

Boy Scout Troop 72 will hold its 20th annual Mother's Day flower sale Friday and Saturday, May 7 and 8, adjacent to the Colchester Hayward Fire Department headquarters on Old Hartford Road. Hours are Friday from 5-8 p.m. and Saturday from 9 a.m.-5 p.m. or whenever sold out.