

**Towamencin Township
Board of Supervisors
Special Meeting – Acceptance of Resignation
February 4, 2025
6:00 PM**

Present:

H. Charles Wilson III, Chairman
Kofi Osei, Asst. Treasurer/Asst. Secretary
Joyce F. Snyder, Secretary
Kristin Warner, Treasurer

Staff:

David G. Kraynik, Township Manager
Tim Troxel, Chief of Police
Niral Modi, IT Specialist
Clayton Reed, IT Director

Absent:

Laura Smith, Vice Chair

Chairman Wilson called the meeting to order at 6:00 pm and led the assemblage in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Opening Comments

Chairman Wilson stated in accordance with the Pennsylvania Second Class Township Code, the purpose of the meeting was for the Board of Supervisors to accept the resignation of Laura Smith as Supervisor. He continued, on behalf of the Board, the Board unequivocally finds Ms. Smith's video and comments to be totally unacceptable. We, collectively and individually, condemn antisemitism, hatred and division. There is no place for that in Towamencin. This Township is a place where unity and diversity are celebrated.

Chairman Wilson announced in April 2023, the Board adopted a Public Comment Policy in accordance with the Sunshine Act, and that policy is enforced for all public meetings. He noted that the Board understands this is an emotional issue, and called attention to section 8 of the policy, and asked all residents and taxpayers to be respectful.

Chairman Wilson addressed misrepresentation of information in social media posts. He explained the formal process the Board must adhere to when a resignation is tendered. The remaining Supervisors are unable to formally accept the resignation until a public meeting is held. He confirmed the Board followed all requirements, including public advertisement. He read Laura Smith's resignation statement. He expressed anguish and discord for spreading this incident to media, beyond our community, creating unfortunate strife for the Township.

Supervisor Osei commented, to his knowledge, he did not receive an email regarding the Board's statement following Laura's resignation, and claims he was unsure how that was approved. He added it is the public's constitutional right to complain about elected officials which includes going to the media.

Summarized Emailed Comments

Resident Lori Morrissey commented the Supervisors should accept the resignation of Laura Smith. She found her post a horrible antisemitic display, that belittled residents and was outrageous behavior. She continued, Ms. Smith never admitted wrongdoing, nor apologized and should never hold a Township position again. She thanked Supervisors Snyder and Osei for their immediate and thorough public statements disavowing these actions, and condemned Supervisors Wilson and Warner for doing nothing and refusing to disavow these acts. She called for Supervisors Wilson and Warner to resign feeling they are more interested in partisan unity than the Township being a respectable place to live.

Resident Augustus Fox stated his family is a descendant of an Auschwitz survivor. He feels the deliberate misinterpretation of someone exercising their First Amendment right through a gesture is not only incorrect, but harmful to the Jewish community. He felt the gesture and expression was not antisemitic action. He condemned Supervisors Osei and Snyder, and a resident for their participation in fueling the public outrage. He offered examples of what he considered as real antisemitism actions, adding personal feelings and political vendettas do not constitute antisemitism, rather they diminish the real and dangerous hatred that Jewish people face every day. He added fragile feelings and performative outrage over a protected First Amendment expression have driven away a public servant and has torn at the fabric of our community. He called for the resignations of Supervisor Snyder and Osei.

Resident Bryan Gaynor commented he found Ms. Smith's behavior reprehensible and unacceptable. He does not accept that behavior from anyone. He felt she should be ashamed and shunned from public service. He urged the Board to accept her resignation, adding, the silence from Supervisors Wilson and Warner speaks volumes about their lack of character, courage, and conviction and urged them to resign. Lastly, he found the entire situation embarrassing and a sad debacle for Towamencin; it's abhorrent and should not be tolerated.

Resident Lisa Patriarca suggested Supervisors Wilson and Warner both resign, having not denounced the vile and hateful actions of Laura Smith. She feels their silence proves they concur with the appalling behavior. She added Ms. Smith still hasn't apologized and does not recognize the hurt she has caused others. Furthermore, this conduct would never be tolerated in the workforce and would be met with immediate termination. The public shouldn't have to tolerate this behavior from elected officials, whether through their actions or by complicity.

Resident Lynn Sweet-Reimel expressed concern about the recent discourse surrounding Laura Smith. She believes the calculated media campaign by Kofi Osei and others are undermining the unity and democratic principles of our community; feeling they deliberately escalated the issue through multiple media platforms and found it to be a calculated political maneuver to threaten the collaborative governance of the Township. She is troubled by the mischaracterization, selective interpretation and political weaponization of Laura Smith's communications. She felt it is detrimental to the principles of representative democracy and local government and requested the resignation of Supervisors Osei and Snyder for their participation, political discourse and

continued support of related political attacks on social media. She asked for a commitment to restoring respectful, bipartisan communication, because residents deserve leadership that prioritizes community unity over political grandstanding.

Resident Joe Rumsey was appalled by Laura Smith's actions and baffled as to why Supervisor Wilson did not call her out as soon as the backlash started. He feels this response shows a lack of leadership and questioned why Supervisor Wilson remains on the Board if he can't handle it. In his opinion, Chuck Wilson, along with Laura, have made Towamencin look like a joke over the last 2 weeks. He ended his comment, noting that most can't wait for the November election.

Summarized Public Comments

Resident Julie Canum noted antisemitism is still a problem broadly, and this incident, hate and the threat of violence are not partisan issues. With zero context, she shared Laura's video with her son, who was offended by the video. She took issue with Laura's apology and finds it disturbing. She found Laura's actions to be harmful and took issue with the Republican Party and what she describes as poor behavior. She continued if you don't want to be recognized as a Nazi supporter or sympathizer, stop participating in the behavior. She wants to raise her children in a community of inclusiveness and not hateful actions.

Resident Judy Phipps recited the quote "silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented." She is unhappy with the silence from Supervisors Wilson and Warner, and the Township Manager, feeling it expresses a tolerance of such behavior. She applauded Supervisor Snyder and Osei's immediate response. She asked the audience to stand with her in her request for the resignation of Supervisors Wilson and Warner.

Resident Andrew Phipps expressed for the most part he has enjoyed living in Towamencin. He took issue with Laura's actions, finding it disgusting and is scared as this person was elected to represent the community and can change the outcome of the Township. He thanked Supervisors Snyder and Osei for their support and denounced the silence of the other two Supervisors and the Township Manager. He suggested those three dig deep and find their humanity and apologize for their silence and resign.

Resident Daniel Bell noted he previously served as Supervisor during COVID. During that difficult time, he was impressed by the community he served and how people found a way to come together and move forward. He feels that unity has been lost, and the Township is now known for hatred. He said the community cannot and will not stand for antisemitism. He implores the community step out of partisanship and lean into what has made this town an incredible place to live; a community focused on discourse, listening and discerning what brings us together as a supportive community, not one that endorses hateful gestures and accepts hate.

Resident Tina Gallagher shared a story of her cousin, displaced by the Nazi regime, and endured a harrowing experience during the American invasion of Germany. She added Nazis are never something to joke about. She was upset not receiving an apology from the Township or Laura. She feels the Township fell flat responding to the incident and hopes everyone can do better.

Resident Jenn Foster stated Laura's offensive video was condemned by various organizations and several local elected officials, contrasting with Supervisors Wilson and Warner's lack of public denouncement, feeling their silence signals complicity. She said the previous Township statement failed to communicate that antisemitism has no place here and tonight's statement was

too late. She shared why she feels Supervisor Wilson and Warner's lack of response created a disturbing impression that they condone such actions and their refusal to act in a timely manner put Township staff at risk and betrayed the community. She commended Supervisors Snyder and Osei for swiftly condemning Laura's actions and called for the immediate resignation of Supervisors Wilson and Warner.

Resident Paul Andrews shared a personal connection and story with a Jewish congregation. He found Laura's gesture to be sarcastic, deliberately hurtful in tone and the message was no joke. As an elected official, she should not have touched this subject matter, for jokes. He is thankful Supervisor Snyder and Osei immediately condemned these actions as did many other officials. He questioned why Supervisors Wilson and Warner remained silent, emphasizing how condemning such actions is easy. He demanded their condemnation or immediate resignation.

Resident Bruce Bailey read an excerpt from an Albert Martin book that stressed the effects of inflation, post WWI, and how it sowed the seeds of Nazism, tying a connection to modern times.

Resident Vanessa Gaynor stated Supervisor Smith's actions were disgusting, divisive and dangerous, and there is no place for hate in the Township, especially from an elected official. She encourages all Supervisors to accept her resignation. She felt the lack of response from Supervisors Wilson and Warner was appalling and any response now is too late. She stated Laura's actions and Supervisor Wilson and Warner's inaction has thrust the Township into the international spotlight. She added the Township's delayed public statement caused the Township, its staff and residents to be dragged through the mud. She also took issue with the Board's failure to fill the vacancy board. She stated the current majority lacks courage, character and competence, and the Township deserves better, and they need to go.

Resident Laurena Fields feels the Laura Smith incident was upsetting for a few reasons: you don't make fun of genocide, especially if you hold political office; there is nothing funny about the Holocaust; and the explanation Laura provided. When Laura took her oath, she is supposed to represent everyone in the Township, what is best for all, and loses the right to be an internet troll, which is what she was doing. Supervisor Wilson and Warner's lack of response signals either they agree or don't care, and don't uphold their oath and take the citizens seriously.

Resident Marco Muto shared he stood before the crowd with an overwhelming sense of embarrassment, frustration and disappointment that he continually needs to discuss with his children that hateful speech, symbolism and gestures coming from elected and non-elected officials has no place in the world. He condemned Ms. Smith's response as mischaracterized and noted this would be her legacy. He stated politics are out of control and reminded everyone that community begins at the local level, and that we should take care of and look out for one another instead of figuring out what side one is on. Regardless of your political beliefs, if you care more about what divides us rather than what unites us, individuals should ask themselves why. He suggested the Board work together to bring the community back from this ugly blemish; you all have been duly elected to lead the community and leadership is what is needed.

Resident Jennifer Childress commented the video is disgusting, but is not a believer in cancel culture, learning it oversimplifies complex issues and does not allow for change or growth. Everyone is human and makes mistakes and in Laura's case, a gigantic one. She believes in holding people accountable and that's why she accepts Laura's resignation and hopes Laura can begin to reflect on her reckless and senseless actions. She continued every person has used the language of bigotry without thought or awareness, noting it's not always about intent but the

impact it has. She directed the following to the Board, you are all elected officials and have a responsibility to represent everyone in the community, not just members of your party. The role of a public servant is to work for the common good, listening to all voices, cross lines and collaborate and compromise. Anyone sitting on the wrong side of this video should resign.

Resident Carston Peterson stated there are political issues and right and wrong principles everyone should agree on. He claimed he was watching from home but felt compelled to come in person after hearing Supervisor Wilson's beginning statements: "some members of the community felt the need to go to the media." He cautioned that comment will come back to haunt him if he does not correct that immediately.

Resident Christian Fusco shared an anecdote of his grandfather, who fought as a bomber pilot in WWII, describing how in the post-war period and decades afterward, there was a moral clarity, noting that making jokes or light of the Holocaust or Nazis was a clear line in the sand of what is wrong, with no gray areas. He contrasted to current events that would be considered unfathomable not that long ago, with lines continuing to be crossed/blurred. He told Supervisor Wilson this incident was made public, then it was elevated, and now you see the response. He encourages people to push back on normalizing this type of behavior.

Resident Shannon Main commented on the persistent and dangerous behavior by certain elected officials who called for Supervisor Smith's resignation and their relentless bullying tactics. She noted one of the loudest bullying participants is a school board director, who voted for an anti-bullying policy for the district yet participates in social media bullying by encouraging non-township residents to instill violence and attend public meetings to escalate tension, contradicting his stance on bullying. She stated elected officials should give respect and promote unity, yet some continue to instill division and hostile environments. She asked if Supervisor Smith's actions are unacceptable than what about the actions of the individuals who continuously engage in harassing behavior and fuel rage in the community.

Resident James Collins emphasized the role of elected officials and the power of the microphone and the consequences that result from the words they speak. He said when you speak and offend people, then your apology should be just as loud as the offense. He stated jokes have effects. He suggested that the community needs to stand together.

Resident Nancy Becker shared she has lived in the community for quite a while and has never seen any form of antisemitism. She acknowledged what Laura did was poor judgment. However, the response has caused Laura and her mother to be terrorized, which is pure evil. She feels that is unacceptable and whoever publicized this does not care about the Township.

Resident Stephanie Baer commented the incident is disgusting. She stated she emailed the Supervisors for a response and did not receive one. She finds the lack of response from Supervisors Wilson and Warner indicates they are Nazi sympathizers. This behavior has no place in the community. She said Supervisors Wilson and Warner are awful and would like them to resign, then thanked Supervisors Snyder and Osei.

Resident Bruce Bailey stated what Laura Smith did was person-to-person and contrasted with previous comments made regarding a School Board Director's comments about Laura and their participation in a recent anti-bullying policy is a school district matter. He feels the matters are unrelated and for different forums.

Resident Tina Gallagher commented that she feels an apology is still necessary for everyone to heal and would like all the Supervisors to work on a plan to bring everyone together.

Resident Carsten Pedersen stated it is clear there is a political divide, but that should have nothing to do with identifying right from wrong in this matter. He empathized for Laura because she made a mistake, and now Towamencin has a black eye. He repeated the Chairman needs to offer a follow-up response to his statement about individuals going to the media.

Chairman Wilson responded he was addressing certain individuals, he was not saying people shouldn't report things to the media, but by acting as political operatives they went out of their way to spread this near and far, to create disunity in our community. He stated he was upset with what Laura did and it was wrong.

Supervisor Osei responded we have a policy not to attack people in the audience and he feels Chairman Wilson was doing that and that is poor leadership. Chairman Wilson responded that he did not refer to anyone by name, and those contributors know who they are and shame on them for making a bad situation worse.

Resident Judith Phipps commented Laura's behavior was evident within the Jewish community before it the news spread broadly. She asked Supervisors Wilson and Warner to stand up and apologize in front of everyone this evening, she feels it is owed to all.

Resident Jenn Foster commented the only person in the room that made this political was Chairman Wilson, adding this is not a political issue; what Laura did was wrong. She felt it was wrong and disgusting to point fingers at the community and accuse them of making it worse. She said if bullying Nazis is wrong, she doesn't want to be right.

Resident Andrew Phipps demands an apology to everyone.

Resident Jennifer Childress said she is dumbfounded by Chairman Wilson, outraged by his comments, and told him to resign. She told the audience she was one of the people who called the media outlets.

Resident Shannon Main commented directly to Supervisor Osei, saying he should be trying to unite the community, as people listen to him. She then referenced his social media post calling for people from the wider Bux/Mont area to attend the February 12 meeting. She feels both Supervisor Osei and Snyder were able to unite people for the sewer sale and they should be doing that for this.

Resident Paul Andrews directed his comment to Chairman Wilson stating he was going to go viral. He personally shared this news item because he wanted people to know what was going on. He understands Supervisor Warner was out of the country, but shamed Chairman Wilson for his lack of response, declaring he made the matter worse. He noted there are two Supervisor seats open in November and he'll see everyone there.

Resident James Collins offered a personal comment regarding him and Laura. He continued this is a lesson to be careful what you put online because once it's out there you no longer have control. The point to all of this is it happened, and an immediate apology may have helped, the lack of response made this situation worse. If you say nothing it appears you are supporting the bad action. This is a good Township, and we need to stick together.

Resident Christian Fusco commented what Chairman Wilson is demonstrating is he doesn't understand the matter at all and continues to miss the point. This demonstrates poor leadership. There's a time for unity and to stand up for what's right, and he will always do what's right.

Resident Nancy Becker shared she would like to see everyone come together, because we all love this Township. Residents are commenting there is no place for hate here, but she heard the most hateful things tonight and asked everyone to put it aside. She stated Laura made a mistake and we need to move on.

Resident Vanessa Gaynor commented that what she is witnessing is not the example she wants to set for her children. She can't believe that Laura Smith's actions are being blamed on private citizens. She asked Chairman Wilson to reconsider where he stands on the issue.

Resident Bruce Bailey stated he is not hearing anything new, and the Supervisors are here to do their job. He asked everyone to let them get to business.

Acceptance of Resignation of Laura Smith

On a motion by Supervisor Snyder, seconded by Supervisor Osei, the Board accepted the resignation of Laura Smith.

Voting Yes: H. Charles Wilson, III, Joyce F. Snyder, Kristin Warner, Kofi Osei

Voting No: N/A

Abstaining: N/A

Absent: Laura Smith

Supervisor Osei stated the following. He has no personal contact or information for Laura Smith. He does not understand the concept of him forcing Laura's actions, stating the platform used (Tik-Tok) is for those with intentions of fame, as content has the potential to go viral. He does not control the community or have great power. He gladly accepts Laura Smith's resignation but does not accept her statement. He feels Laura defended the video because she wanted to poke fun at people. If you are doing a gesture to poke fun at people that would be offended by a Nazi salute, the gesture your doing is indistinguishable. Laura did a blatant antisemitic act and did not have the courtesy to apologize. He thanked the community for quickly and decisively condemning her video. He thinks most Republicans are good people and he governs for the entire Township. He hates partisan politics because he does not feel it should be in local politics. He said the grace he gives Republican voters is not extended to Republican leaders. He took issue with no statements offered from local Republican leadership, including the County party and to him, that represents complicity and is unacceptable. He took issue with Chairman Wilson and his position regarding Laura's actions and her resignation. He added there was an attempt to revise the meeting agenda to fill the vacancy board and took issue with the vacancy seat not being filled to date and described its role. He criticized Chairman Wilson's leadership and selfish behavior, emphasizing he should resign. He offered the following steps the Board can take to move forward: release a strong statement condemning Laura's actions, apologize on behalf of the Township and approve a resolution condemning antisemitism and hatred in general; they should not appoint someone to the vacancy board now; but rather take applications for the Supervisor vacancy and the Board should unanimously approve the appointment with someone who can work with the entire Board and is well respected in the community. He nominated Dan Bell for the vacant Supervisor seat.

Supervisor Snyder unequivocally agreed with Supervisor Osei's statements. She feels Ms. Smith's actions deeply affected the community and it did not provide the apology many were hoping for. The impact of her words has caused pain, frustration and disappointment among our neighbors;

She acknowledged this pain and expressed her deepest sorrow. She said our community is built on respect, inclusion and accountability. She found Ms. Smith's actions unacceptable and troubling. She asked how we can move forward as individuals and a united community. She said healing does not occur overnight, nor without effort. She asked everyone to share their ideas with her because she is committed to ensuring we not only move past this but learn from it. Lastly, she understands the frustration for lack of leadership in response to this crisis and she was disappointed at the failure to respond by Supervisors Wilson and Warner, offering a timeline for context. She described their inaction during this period was dereliction of duty and their silence sent a message that this community's pain is not a priority. She encouraged residents to remain engaged and demand accountability from those in positions of leadership.

Supervisor Warner shared a timeline, noting she was out of the country when this incident occurred and unfolded. She explained that an immediate response was not possible because she was difficult to reach due to traveling. She stated she was bullied using her Township email and more personally her private Facebook page being referred to as a Nazi and Nazi-sympathizer. She was extremely concerned for her 22-year-old daughter's safety because she was staying alone at her home, coming and going to work. She did not wish to share with the public that she was not home. She stated she does not condone antisemitism, sharing her grandfather fought in WWII and it affected her family greatly. She called the actions of those who bullied and threatened her during this period abhorrent. She noted hatred goes both ways; you can't condemn Laura's actions, then turn around and harass and bully others. She said no matter what the supervisors do or say, people twist their words. She does not feel she has ever treated anyone poorly, but rather with professionalism and humanity. She responded that she put the "# Together Against Antisemitism" sticker on her Facebook profile picture after the terrorist attack against a synagogue in Pittsburgh in 2018 and that she never removed it because it represents her position. She said that to imply that it was placed there to make her look better as many implied in email messages directed to her was contrary to fact. She stands against any prejudice perpetrated by one group against another and always has.

Chairman Wilson stated these actions cannot be tolerated. He stated Laura was wrong and he knew when he heard this, she had to resign. He apologized for getting a slow start in responding, noting he is not on social media often and described a serious medical issue concerning a household member over the weekend in question. He said everyone needs to unite and move forward. He said the Board needs to decide amongst themselves to fill the Supervisor vacancy. He apologized for his earlier comments and retracted his earlier statement; he in no way was saying people should not go to the media. He did not feel the piling on helped the community. He does not condone racism or antisemitic behavior in any fashion. He apologized for any miscommunication caused by the late delivery and was sorry for what the community went through due to his colleague.

Supervisor Osei empathized with Supervisor Warner over the referenced threats, but stated what the community wants is for her to publicly condemn Laura Smith's video.

Supervisor Warner responded to Supervisor Osei that she already did that; she continued she is an elected official of the community who has done nothing wrong. She stated she is not going to resign. She said Laura was foolish, but she is not Laura. She believes everyone is responsible for their own behavior, and it is not her job to condemn Laura Smith or anyone else.

There being no additional business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:04 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Colleen Ehrle". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Colleen" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Ehrle".

Colleen Ehrle
Director of Administration