

February 9, 2023
121 Evergreen Rd
New Egypt, NJ 08533

The Plumsted Township Committee Special Meeting of February 9, 2023 was called to order by Mayor Bowen.

STATEMENT: "This meeting is being held in compliance with the Open Public Meetings Act." It was presented for publication to the Asbury Park Press and posted on the Bulletin Board.

MEETING RECORDING: The recorder was not working. The Zoom session was recorded; the clerk took detailed notes of the meeting.

THOSE OFFICIALS PRESENT:

COMMITTEEMAN CUOZZO COMMITTEEMAN GRILLETTO DEPUTY MAYOR MARINARI
MAYOR BOWEN ATTORNEY CIPRIANI CLERK WITHAM

Committeeman Cuozzo advised the mayor he would be arriving late.

Mayor Bowen asked everyone to rise for the flag salute followed by a moment of silence. Bowen stated that the ribbon cutting for Twisted Steaks grand opening was Saturday. The Fire District Election on the referendum will be February 18th. The municipal building will be closed on February 20th and there will be special budget workshop on February 23rd. The purpose of this meeting is to fill the vacancy of Thomas Calabrese until the certifying of the election in November this year.

Bowen read the letter from Chairman of the Plumsted Township Republican Club with the selection of three candidates to fill the vacancy, Michael Hammerstone, Karen Lamphere and Anthony Mannino.

Bowen stated that there would be a public comment session prior to the interviews for the purpose of commenting on the agenda item only. Bowen opened up public comment.

Kate Tallon, 53 Oak Lane, came forward.

"This statement is in regard to the interview I just participated in with the Republican County Committee of Plumsted Township. My decision to apply to be Mr Cuozzo's running mate was an olive branch. An attempt to create a more unified town with a varied set of Representatives.

As you likely know, most of the candidates to replace Mr. Calabrese stuck around to wait for the vote to be finalized. What you probably don't know is that I asked 7 of the 9 candidates that came out of their interviews if they had been questioned on abortion.

None of them had. Not even Ms. Kubiel or Ms. Crowley-Lamphere, being the only other two women that had stayed to hear the vote results.

I asked if anyone else had their social media posts ready and waiting for use as ammunition against them. No one else had that experience.

Pastor Burlaga had in his hand, a cell phone in which he pulled up my Facebook posts from last year.

The first part of my social media he read out loud was a post against religious indoctrination and abuses of the government, from right after Pastor Cuzzo and his wife had chosen to press criminal charges against me for using my voice at the April 2021 Township Committee meeting. My statement was against the Christian Indoctrination of our Government. I stand by the separation of Church and State.

The second time he held up the phone was the Facebook post about my medically required D&C to save my life. Do you know that anywhere from 26-50% of all pregnancies end in a miscarriage? Do you know that without that procedure, there is a high probability that I would not have the two beautiful sons that I have today? That was a life-saving procedure that caused no death and required no intervention from the government. But these two pastors used it to assault me so I would be unable to respond to further questions. Bringing up trauma of my loss and having to watch both Pastor Cuzzo and his wife snickering at me as I fumbled for the words to say.

My statement stands. My olive branch has been returned to me and I now see that I am not a good fit for your version of the Republican Party, however, I do not believe that you hold the values of the party and I posit that your positions stem from Christian Nationalism and Stochastic Terrorism.

That you seek revenge on my statements calling out your cruelty towards the municipal employees, the police, and the minority communities.

Thomas Paine wrote in the Rights of Man, 1791 “They learn it from the governments they live under...” “Lay then the axe to the root, and teach the governments humanity. That the effect of their cruel spectacles exhibited to the populace, is to destroy tenderness or excite revenge; and by the base and false idea of governing men by terror, instead of reason, they become precedents.”

My miscarriage was but should not have been a part of this interview. I hold you accountable for your actions and I am disgusted with the farce that you spout as Christianity.”

Attorney Cipriani stated that the purpose of this public comment was regarding this agenda item only, which is selecting a candidate to fill Calabrese’s vacancy. There will be a general public comment portion after the nomination and appointment of the new committeeperson.

Dr. Norma Bowe came forward to speak about the county committee selection process. Cipriani confirmed that may be done at the general public comment portion. Bowen asked for any other comment regarding the selection process tonight.

Cuzzo asked to respond to the prior public comment. Cipriani said that there should not be any calling out and privilege of the chair to allow a response. Bowen said yes, he will allow the comments by the committee. Deputy Mayor Marinari thanked all of the individuals that presented names. Any volunteer service takes time away from families.

Grilletto is pleased they had so many people that came forward. He said that if anyone wasn’t selected, to continue and persist for a future opening. Cuzzo thanked Grilletto for putting

together the screening committee; it was professional and very fair. They attempted to ask all candidates the same questions. Two candidates asked Cuozzo not to question them and he honored their request. He said that neither he nor his wife spoke. He stated that folks here are in an emotional state and angry. He said that it did not happen.

Salcfas spoke out against Cuozzo. Cuozzo asked to conclude since people were rude and interrupted. Cipriani said that in order to move forward, this meeting is about the selection. We need to take care of township business. Cipriani said it is the privilege of the chair. Cuozzo asked to conclude. Cipriani asked him to hold off.

Bowen wanted to start the process of interviewing. Grilletto went to get Michael Hammerstone.

Hammerstone stated he has been a resident since 1986. He has lived here for a long time, has seen a lot of people come and go. He wants to keep good people here. He has a local business experience, can bring a lot to the table and wants to make the place he lives better.

Further questions were asked of Hammerstone. He has no municipal government experience but has been involved in youth sports for many years, coached baseball from t-ball to 12 year olds, is a sponsor for many teams to keep sports going. He has been involved in activities such as the 4th of July party years ago. He has donated time and money, helped out Boy Scouts, provided electrical services to vets, anything to help out.

His vision for the next five years is to see improvement on Main Street with business; there are many vacancies downtown. There is a lot of turnover. He will work with everyone to make Main Street better, similar to Allentown. This town has fantastic potential. If everyone works together, we can enjoy the town and the lake. There were no other questions. Cuozzo thanked him for standing to serve.

Bowen introduced the next candidate, Anthony Mannino. He has spent most of his life around municipal government. His grandfather was on the Old Bridge council and grandmother the Manalapan council. He helped his grandparents stuff envelopes when he was young. He works for Holman Frenia and Alison, primarily government work. He is in the advisory department. He has done municipal audits, fire districts, authorities and school board audits. He primarily does CFO duties for municipalities since 2019. He is the CFO in Bridgewater, Berkeley Heights, Bradley Beach, Florence, Hazlet and Millstone.

He is a certified municipal finance officer, county finance officer, school business administrator, he is currently getting his tax collector certification and is a teacher at Rutgers. He has seen a lot of things, what works and what doesn't. He has had a lot of exposure. He has a good grasp on finances with solutions on how to handle any issues. His range across various municipalities helps out.

A couple of areas he is concerned about is the infrastructure, recreation programs are important to him. Bowen asked why he wanted to be part of local government. He said that infrastructure is important. It is a million dollars to repair a road. It's important to have planning in place. If the infrastructure is improved, then it should be kept up so it is safe for residents.

Growing up, he didn't have the opportunity to play; he lived on a busy road and relied on rec sports programs. He appreciated that growing up. He made many friendships at that time.

At the municipal government level, he gave his credentials which give him the experience, especially financial duties with budgeting. His strength is capital planning and budgeting. He keeps up on Local Finance Notices; the most recent with the appropriation cap waiver. He doesn't think about the current year but plans for future years, knowing that what you do this year will have ramifications for future years.

His vision for Plumsted for the next five years has to do with Main Street. When he first moved here, he liked the sprawling area, neighborhoods and downtown. There were local shops and businesses on Main Street. He has seen what it is but what it could be. He would like to see the downtown area revitalized. It could be improved in ways such as Business Improvement Districts.

Cuozzo thanked him for answering questions tonight and Monday. There were no other questions from the committee.

The final candidate was introduced, Karen Lamphere. She is originally from North Jersey, North Brunswick area. Was in the Air Force in 1980 and had 9 or 10 assignments and decided to come back. She was hired as a civil servant at Maguire through December 31, 2021.

Bowen asked a few questions. She is used to serving and needs to serve again. Served in the Air Force which took her away from serving her own community. It's time to give back to the municipality.

She has no municipal government experience. But has experience in a group where she was at the division level, had 16 chapters under her. Has done many community interactions and events. With all of the disasters and COVID at JBMDL, she was working. She had an opportunity to work with Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Emergency Management, NJ State Police and ambulance services at numerous municipalities.

Her vision is to revitalize the downtown, attract the Maguire community. It's not a drive for them. They go to the Mexican restaurant and love it. She has kind of a disability and some of the sidewalks need repair. She has a concern for the East Millstream Road and Tower Road area and the Russo dump. She knows a lot won't be done but the noise level and stench, she would like to see some mitigation.

Furthermore, she is seeing Rt 537 and the new sports complex as a concern. It is a matter of time before it starts making its way to New Egypt. She would like to see smart development. Warehouses in the area – mitigate the potential in this community for starter homes, townhomes and plan for it because it is going to happen. She would like to get ahead of it. If we do that, there are a lot of people at JBMDL that could use affordable housing, not larger homes.

Grilletto thanked her for participating in the program. Cuozzo thanked her for answering the questions here so very well and Monday's interview. Marinari had no comment.

Grilletto said if you are not selected, persist and participate in government. Eventually it will come to fruition. Keep pushing forward. Bowen thanked everyone for participating in this process. There were 11 people that put in their names for consideration; there were excellent candidates.

Bowen asked for nominations. Marinari nominated Michael Hammerstone, seconded by

Committeeman Grilletto. There were no other nominations; roll call vote: all ayes.

ON MOTION OF COMMITTEEMAN GRILLETTO, SECONDED BY DEPUTY MAYOR MARINARI, RESOLUTION 2023-141, APPOINTING A COMMITTEEMEMBER TO FILL A VACANCY CREATED BY THE RESIGNATION OF COMMITTEEMAN THOMAS CALABRESE PURSUANT TO THE "MUNICIPAL VACANCY LAW" AS SET FORTH IN NJSA 40A:16-11. ROLL CALL VOTE: ALL AYES.

Clerk Witham administered the Oath of Office to Committeeman Hammerstone.

Mayor Bowen asked for public comment. Cuozzo asked to finish his comments before public comment starts; Bowen asked to continue after public comment.

Dr. Norma Bowe of Highland Park came forward. She is very concerned about what is happening. I'm sure all of you have sisters, moms, daughters, grandmothers that you care a great deal about. What you have done in the process of selecting people for this position may be illegal in that comment made during the interview. This is going to the state level; they have consulted an attorney about what is happening in this town. Someone's medical information is private. This is not a Christian value. She is a Christian. This is not kind. None of you would want your mother, sister, daughter to be subjected to this humiliation and harassment.

Cuozzo would like to weigh in. He asked the mayor to weigh in. Bowen will do so after public comment. Cuozzo said that the comment is based on a misunderstanding. Bowen asked for any other public comment. Cuozzo continued; please correct the record mayor. I don't want to sit here and listen to people talking about him that didn't happen. He would like him to correct the record. Bowen will not; after public comment. Lenny, will you correct the record? This is unreasonable. And he is very disappointed in both the mayor and Committeeman Grilletto. Bowen said that he will comment after public comment.

Linda Salcfas of Circle Drive spoke. She made a statement that the interview process should be null and void. It is unacceptable what happened to Kate Tallon. It all needs to stop and what has happened to Jennifer Witham as well. She wants to go on record that things need to change. It is illegal what is happening. It is uncalled for, unacceptable.

Chris Neuert of Evergreen Road congratulated Michael Hammerstone. He stated that there were 900 votes in the prior election; he deserves the seat he's sitting in.

Ellen Taylor of 29 Story Street said that she has been coming to these meetings for two years now on and off, she works at the school. She has lived here since 1985 and loves the town and knows a lot of people. She really does not do public comments. She knows Lenny and Pastor Cuozzo very well; it has been a witch hunt for two years. There is a lot of hate in this town. There have been so many lies have been spread or let's call them misunderstandings. She doesn't go on Facebook often but it is awful. She believes in the holy word of God. People can worship who they want. But stop tearing people apart. She'd stand for Pastor Cuozzo anywhere. He is not a liar, not taking taxpayer money. Let's all get along, let's communicate. Let's talk tonight. I'm an open book, God Bless you.

Karen Lamphere of 6 Hyacinth Court came forward. She believes in service before self, integrity and excellence in all you do. Not her nature to bring in arguments and bickering. While she was waiting with her fellow nominees, she heard for two hours, unrelenting criticism and hatred

about Pastor Cuozzo by Kate Tallon that the whole purpose for her was that Cuozzo is evil and hateful. Give Pastor Cuozzo an opportunity to address this in open forum for the truth.

Barbara Diblin of 12 Terrace Ave said that she believes there is no separation of church and state. The idea is that you don't want government in church but church in government. There is nothing wrong with that. The republican platform does support pro-life and that is what they were replacing, a republican seat. Pro-life views are important.

Reverend Phyllis Zoon of the Plumsted Presbyterian Church; she is no longer a resident. A lot of words are being said. It is black history month. When she was in seminary, Dr William Farley Smith said that they used to bring slaves into the church. They sang Lord I want to be a Christian and want to be one in my heart. She hopes that we can all be Christians in our heart and be in the spirit of love and pray for the serenity and hope we have the courage to change the things that need to be changed. She hopes we will make the change.

Ryan Kertis of Evergreen Road, came forward and read the following email he had sent to the Clerk and three members of the governing body.

“Dear Township Committee Members, I am writing to express my extreme disappointment and displeasure with the actions of one of your colleagues and your lack of response to the malicious attack on my family through Committeeman Dominick Cuozzo.

As you may know, the issue has now become statewide news and it is unacceptable that this individual has personally come after my family with repulsive lies and yet, the Township Committee remains silent on the matter. In fact, some of you have been silent since October as many of you have been aware of what has been occurring. Your silence is not only a disappointment but also sends a message of disregard for the safety and well-being of your constituents.

I find it interesting that I have not only been a dedicated public servant here in Plumsted for years but have greatly assisted on nearly all your political campaigns, free of cost. To date, none of you have reached out to me or my family sending sympathy, condolences or providing updates and/or resources (like much of the community has) to cope with what my family has been going through due to your colleague's actions and your lack of action. It is disheartening that my family and I were good enough for the Township when volunteering, putting together programs for small businesses, paying for one of your wives' groceries when she couldn't find her debit card at IGA or allowing Main Street tenants shower at our residence due to their uninhabitable living conditions but not now.

It is incredibly unfortunate that Plumsted Township has taken such a mute approach to a family that has been associated with the town for nearly 20 years. I expect the Township Committee to take swift and decisive action to address this situation and make it clear that such behavior is unacceptable and will not be tolerated within the township that you all are supposed to govern.

I look forward to your prompt response and action on this matter.

Respectfully,

Ryan D. Kertis”

Attorney Cipriani advised she has the letter and will be replying. Kertis asked about the censure emails that were sent to the clerk. Cipriani will handle it as normal correspondence, it will be addressed at the next meeting.

There was no further public comment.

Deputy Mayor Marinari said that he has been in this community since 1980. It is a sad situation. When he moved here, he was told he had 6 months left due to cancer. The community took his two young boys and treated them like they lived here forever. He has never seen this town this way. The past it past. There is a lot of anger and venom in the community. He doesn't know what can be done. Let's start anew. If there are any issues, let's stop it then. He knows everyone pretty much and you are all good people. He doesn't know what we are going to do. He has sat here in this seat for a lot of things. One of the things is for this lady by my side for two years, all that she did for me. She has my resignation and has for some time. He doesn't know if there's an answer. Let tomorrow be a different day. It's disheartening. If there are issues, let's bring them forward. He doesn't want people crying in here. This is not the community that all of us knew. The election is in November, the primary in June. Reach out to the committee. This has to change. He doesn't know the answer. Look at those pictures from Turkey, 21,000 people were killed. Can't we work together? Life is way too short. He wasn't going to say this but his wife Janet has been diagnosed with cancer. He's sitting here for the community. He could have walked away. Let's try, in the name of Christ.

Hammerstone said that he cannot comment on what has been going on but thank you for your years of service and being a good friend. Cuozzo said Herb, I love you and appreciate you. We've prayed a lot together and it's not going to stop. He's thankful for every moment and will pray many more years. Your influence is felt. Thank you. Grilletto will pray for him and his family.

Cuozzo said that if there was a monster of a person in this town that exists, he would stand with you, light the torches and grab the pitchforks and run them out. He promises that you have the wrong idea. He has many flaws and is not perfect, but he didn't say a word to Kate Tallon at the time of the interview except to welcome her to the room. She asked he didn't speak and he didn't. He asked Mayor Bowen and Committeeman Grilletto to please let the record reflect that. He has a lot more to say but is asking. Mayor Bowen said yes, he was informed the day after the meeting that the question of pro-life and pro-choice was asked of a few candidates. He contacted the person that asked those questions. He wasn't aware that Kate had shared those experiences to others and folks knew of it. He heard that and was obviously deeply concerned that the question was targeted to her on purpose which he agrees is totally inappropriate. I asked the person that asked the question if he was aware that Tallon had shared that personal experience that was medically necessary and a difficult situation. He said that he was not aware. Tallon said that he had it on his phone at the time. She said that Pastor Burlaga had her Facebook post on his phone about her experience.

Cipriani stated that in order to move forward, she asks the public not comment at this time, just as the committee did not interrupt when they were speaking. Bowen said the questions that were asked, were a list of 'republican' questions supplied to him.

Cuozzo asked Grilletto could you also confirm to people here since they don't believe it didn't happen. Grilletto stated that Cuozzo did not ask any questions to two people, including Tallon.

Cuozzo has another comment. One of the statements made was that applying for this position was an olive branch. However, one question asked of all candidates was if you were elected, would you run with Committeeman Grilletto and Committeeman Cuozzo the following November. All of the candidates said yes except two of them, Tallon and Fox. There was no olive branch offered. All were asked the same question. Seven questions were written out. It has been attested to by Grilletto and Bowen that is exactly what he said and it was the truth. Anyone that would hold past decisions over their head in a grotesque way deserves her anger. To some extent, he is thankful people are here to protest. He promises he didn't do it and that isn't what happened. She was lied to.

There was further comments from the audience. Cuozzo addressed the second comment. Mr. Kertis, he had nothing bad to say about Ryan. He read his comments in public forum, read them aloud and folks decided the behavior was unbecoming for an officer of the club. Votes were taken and agreed that they were unbecoming. He has a grudge now. Cuozzo stated he knows nothing about his personal life, he is secretive about it. He doesn't know if he has children, if he is married, he has no clue about Ryan Kertis' life. Nor does he desire to know. Accusations are not true. So he doesn't know what Mr. Kertis' letter contained. He said he sent it to three committeeman and the clerk. He said that he called him and threatened Cuozzo. For about the last two years, running and in this position, everyone knows it was an emergency situation, please run. He ran and the last two years, he has had more disrespect than he has ever seen from a human being. Further inaudible comments from the public. Cuozzo just wanted to talk about it because he has been the target, there is a lot of hatred, he has a wife, daughter, his mother is in heaven. He would never treat someone the way you are saying someone treated her. He is tired of being the focus of public comment the whole time.

Thank you Herb, he makes a motion and he seconds, he would never let folks treat my other committeeman the way you committeemen have let these folks treat me without any response. No pushback and I think it's terrible. He would never allow it. He would let them know and say something. It is terrible the way Mayor Bowen and Committeeman Grilletto have allowed it and you know better.

Bowen said for clarity sake, the process is that the Republican County Committee, part of the Ocean County Republican organization is a separate entity, not part of the township. The township has no jurisdiction, no authority over the interview process and activities of the Republican club. Regarding complaints to the township, whether it is employees, public, we have been consistent to send all of those to counsel. The process is even handed, regardless of where it comes from. No committee member redirects anything. We had a different labor counsel last year and they didn't give us advice and move on complaints in a timely fashion so we have new counsel this year for guidance and a response in a more timely fashion. We are in the process of going out for township attorney, an RFP, we have special counsel here tonight. We have been making the best effort we can within the strict limitations of government to respond to the community in a more timely fashion. We respect the rights of the community, employees and the committee. Special counsel has handled several issues for us.

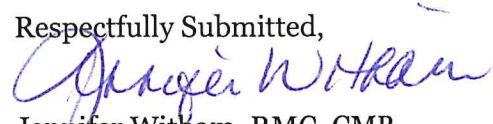
Personally, I want to thank the Deputy Mayor for all of his advice, time and he knows it is not surprising on a Sunday afternoon that I will be pulling in before Big Woods closes. I value his expertise and insight greatly. He and Janet are a blessing. He and his wife enjoy their company.

All of their comments will be taken to heart and will start working on them tomorrow morning and pledge to serve our community. And welcome our new colleague, Committeeman Hammerstone. We will fill up his plate with responsibilities very quickly. One for tomorrow will be a pending judge appointment that we need to take action.

Motion to adjourn by Cuzzo. Resident Kathleen Sucharski asked to speak. For decades, we all know what Herb Marinari has done for this community. He has dedicated his life to the community and schools, to our children. Marinari appreciates the best wishes and asks they say a prayer for Janet, thank you.

ON MOTION OF COMMITTEEMAN CUOZZO, SECONDED BY COMMITTEEMAN GRILLETTO, THE FEBRUARY 9, 2023 MEETING WAS ADJOURNED. ROLL CALL VOTE: ALL AYES.

Respectfully Submitted,



Jennifer Witham, RMC, CMR
Municipal Clerk