

NAACP prez supports Schwebel's plight

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Middletown Committeeman Sean Byrnes announced plans to draft a resolution expediting mediation between the township and Carolyn Schwebel, the former Middletown Human Rights Commission (HRC) chairwoman.

Byrnes made the announcement at the March 17 session of the governing body.

After 17 years of service on the HRC, officials declined to reappoint the Leonardo native to her position on the voluntary board after her term expired in January. Officials said her involvement in litigation against the township mandated that she not be reappointed.

Schwebel has since filed a lawsuit against the township for alleged infringement upon her First Amendment rights.

Other than a brief mention during Byrnes' closing remarks, the governing body remained silent about the status of



Carolyn Schwebel

Schwebel's appointment. Township Attorney Bernard Reilly said ongoing litigation prevented committee members from engaging in public discussion.

The lack of a response has not deterred Schwebel, who appeared before the committee to voice her discontent.

According to Schwebel, the initial lawsuit began during 2004 and was a separate issue involving the township's compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

"Six months after filing the lawsuit on [Jan. 2005], I was reappointed to the HRC. It was only after the

lawsuit was settled in 2007 that I was taken off the commission," Schwebel said. She called the dismissal a clear act of retaliation and vowed to resume her role as HRC chair.

The actions of the Township Committee galvanized several community leaders, many of who are personal acquaintances of Schwebel.

Among those leaders is Lorenzo Dangler, president Greater Long Branch Chapter of the NAACP.

Schwebel and Dangler worked together on the Monmouth County Human Relations Committee. According to the NAACP leader, members on the county board must request a seat on the committee.

After "loyally" working on the committee for 17 years, Dangler said the circumstances regarding the alleged unresolved litigation were extremely suspicious.

"Mrs. Schwebel is truly one of the nicest people I have ever met. If she had to resort to litigation, there had to be a legitimate reason. She must have exhausted every other



Lorenzo Dangler

opportunity," Dangler said.

Dangler characterized the attack on one of the HRC's founding members as wrongful. "Schwebel should not be the one getting the ax because she stepped on a couple of toes," he said.

"If [the Township Committee] really respected Schwebel, they would have never even cited pending litigation. To put her off is a fallacy, because working on the HRC is not a special commission or honor. It is a duty," Dangler asserted.

Dangler said an effective HRC requires a diverse membership. "Without an

African American, without a Latino, without Carolyn Schwebel, there are no reasons for the HRC to exist," he said.

Avoiding tough questions provides township officials with a layer of protection, according to Dangler.

"Township officials should set an example of how local government should be run, not an example of the blatant abuse of political power," he said.

Dangler said a committee dominated by one party lacks proper checks and balances. If the proper oversight existed, Schwebel and the HRC would not be in danger of folding, he added.

Dangler said Schwebel took part in the HRC only to help residents of Middletown who could not help themselves.

"The township of Middletown would rather waste tax dollars on attorneys going back and forth to court, when they could just do the right thing and reappoint her," he concluded. "It is simply shameful."