

SNAC: Whistleblower resigns from town committee

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The woman who accused fellow members of the Selectmen's Nomination Advisory Committee (SNAC) of making biased and offensive comments last week resigned from the group Monday night.

Nancy Wolf tendered her resignation nearly a week after making accusations she now says she regrets. The nine-member all-volunteer committee identifies and recruits community members for possible appointment by the Board of Selectmen to town boards and commissions. Besides Ms. Wolf, the committee consists of Leslie Lee, chairman, Greg Islan, vice chairman, Laura Geffs, secretary, Stuart Adelberg, president of the Greenwich United Way, former Selectman Peter Crumbine, Mike Harris, Leora Levy and John Vecciolla.

Last Wednesday, Oct. 19, Ms. Wolf sent an e-mail to First Selectman Peter Tesei requesting that "a town Affirmative Action Advisory Committee Officer spend some time working with and/or training members of SNAC in the area of racial bias."

She said she noticed offensive behavior during meetings of the committee that included "ethnic slurs and making fun of last names" or someone's ability to serve "based on race, ethnicity and/or socio-economic standing in the community."

In an interview earlier this week, Ms. Wolf said that she believes the group brought prejudices into committee discussions, but then added that accusing them of racial bias was a regrettable choice of words.

"'Racial' is a charged word," she said. "This is not a racist story. I'm sorry about that."

Mr. Tesei responded last week by suggesting the members of the group undergo sensitivity training.

"Nobody objected to that," said Mr. Tesei. "They were entirely willing to do it."

Democratic Town Committee Chairman Frank Farricker believes that Mr. Tesei acted prematurely. He accused the first selectman of "ordering" the committee members to undergo sensitivity training based on one person's accusations, undermining the reputation of the group.

"This is the most elite committee in town," Mr. Farricker said.

According to Mr. Tesei, the sensitivity training was just a recommendation and he has been looking into the situation.

“We have to carefully investigate,” Mr. Tesei said. “Our concern is due to our sensitivity to issues of diversity.”

He said a considerable amount of time was spent trying to moderate discussions between the individuals involved. According to Mr. Tesei, the town strives to educate its employees to work by best practices. It offers training throughout the year on issues such as sexual harassment, workplace bullying and diversity training. Even though the group is a volunteer committee, he said they are welcome to make use of the services.

Mr. Tesei noted that the eight remaining members of the group feel they have been “painted badly” and he believes Ms. Wolf’s concerns boiled down to a difference of perception.

“The overall goal of the committee is to bring together a range of members of our community,” Mr. Tesei said regarding the tasks they have been charged to perform.

Selectman Drew Marzullo said he hopes this will not tarnish the image of the group, which he said is comprised of “great” and “dedicated” members.

“These men and women are leaders who have volunteered countless hours,” Mr. Marzullo said.

Ms. Lee said that the group appreciates the support of the selectmen and every member of the committee has “vehemently” denied the accusations.

“We have no idea why this happened,” she said. “We are dumbfounded.”

Ms. Lee, the committee chairman, said that Ms. Wolf’s resignation came after she was requested to provide more details and to put into writing the specific claims she made.

“She has refused to submit that report,” said Ms. Lee. “That says there is no substance to the allegations.”

Ms. Wolf said she was asked by Ms. Lee to resign.

“They wanted my resignation, they got it. I’m a volunteer,” Ms. Wolf said.

She added that she believes that she has been used as a game piece in political agendas.

“Even whistle-blowers have rights,” she added.

According to Ms. Wolf, the situation got out of control due to the initial “hastily written” e-mail she sent to Mr. Tesei being made public.

“I had no idea it would be circulated,” she said. But she also expressed her hope that what has happened will not vilify the men and women in the committee.

“I don’t think they’re racist or evil-doers,” Ms. Wolf said. “It was never my intention to injure anyone, including myself.”

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