

Diamond Staton-Williams

Media Report

Draft

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Part I Introduction

This report reviews electronically available news stories on Diamond Staton-Williams, candidate for NC House (District 73)

The Table of Contents in **Part II** of the report is a useful guide to the entire report and can be used as a stand-alone summary. In one section, it surveys the bulk of the news file, through the headlines we have assigned to each item.

Part III, the **Greatest Hits** section, identifies key points taken from available media articles.

Parts IV, **The News File**, contain edited copies of the most relevant electronically available stories.

We hope you find this useful.

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Part III Staton-Williams: Greatest Hits / Media

Background

Nurse

In January 2021, there was an extensive profile of her in the Stanly News and Press about her education and career as a nurse.

- In late 2006, the life of Diamond Staton-Williams had become so full that she now describes it as “wild.” In addition to parenting two young daughters - Caela, now 23, and Colby, 19 - she worked as a staff nurse in a Charlotte-area cardiac unit for Carolinas HealthCare System, now Atrium Health. She wanted to rise through the corporate ranks and concluded that earning a Master of Health Administration from Pfeiffer University would be the best way to do that. She enrolled in Pfeiffer’s Charlotte-based MHA program in January 2007 - just a few months after giving birth to a son, Chico. (Remarkably, he was with her when Staton-Williams took Pfeiffer’s MHA entrance test and “slept the whole way through it” in a baby carrier.)
- After graduation from Pfeiffer in 2010, Staton-Williams was promoted several times at Atrium Health, serving as a nurse manager from 2010 to 2011 and then assuming leadership roles in clinical care for six years. Beginning in 2016, she became the director of Atrium’s Ambulatory Care Management department.
- Her role in ambulatory care has her managing a staff of 28 people who coordinate care for patients after they leave the hospital. She builds upon what she learned during her master’s studies: “I’m able to look administratively at budgets and building different teams,” she said. “My degree’s concentration is in organizational leadership - which helps me build teams and move organizations along as far as change management goes.”
- Staton-Williams praised Pfeiffer’s MHA program for employing professors with lots of experience in healthcare leadership. She said that she’s responding to changes in healthcare that they anticipated and helped prepare her for, such as the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid expansion.
- Asked whether she’d encourage working mothers in similar circumstances to enter an MHA program, Staton-Williams said, “I’d encourage anyone to pursue their passion. But, you have to have good support, as I did, from your family, your university and your employer.”
- Staton-Williams felt supported by Pfeiffer during her master’s studies. In 2007, the MHA program was designed in such a way that she attended in-person classes two days a week and completed the rest of her coursework in an online format. This hybrid approach made it easier for her to integrate her MHA course work into an already busy schedule of family commitments and nursing shifts.

- "I'm very grateful and thankful that the school thought outside the box when it came to helping adults obtain further education," she said. "Many schools weren't doing that back then. You either had to go in person, or you were on your own."
- At Pfeiffer, Staton-Williams studied challenging subjects. One of them was business finance. "When you move into administration, that's something that you always have to consider and that you always have to pay attention to," she said. If, as was sometimes the case, Staton-Williams had difficulty mastering the material, she could always call or email questions to a professor - and expect a prompt reply.
- These days, Staton-Williams still leads a full life. She's a member of Pfeiffer's Alumni Board, a position that, among other things, enables her to advocate for graduates of Pfeiffer's master's programs in Charlotte and to learn more about Pfeiffer's Misenheimer campus, which, of course, she didn't know as a student.
- She also sees her involvement on the Alumni Board as a way to "elevate the voices" of students and professors of color so that, for example, more of them consider attending or working at Pfeiffer. She'd also like to see more graduates of color on the Alumni Board. (Stanly News and Press, 1/15/21)

Harrisburg Town Council

In 2017, she ran for the Harrisburg Town Council and was elected. She won re-election in 2021.

- When Staton-Williams isn't serving on the Alumni Board (or volunteering in numerous other capacities), she's quite active in local politics. A self-described "nosy" resident of Harrisburg, she began closely following developments of its Town Council several years ago. At first, she attended meetings or read meeting minutes "just to be aware."
- In 2017, a "shift" happened in her thinking: Instead of just keeping up with government, she thought, why not have a say in it as well? She ran for a seat on Harrisburg's Town Council. She won, becoming the first African-American woman to serve on the council. She is running again this year and, if re-elected, would begin a second term in November.
- Harrisburg, like many suburbs of Charlotte, has seen explosive growth in its population and commercial enterprises. Traffic is often heavy, making it difficult for motorists to get around. So, Staton-Williams is pushing for such improvements in infrastructure as wider roads and improved bridges. She's advocating for "smart growth" (i.e., the kind that doesn't diminish quality of life). She's also looking for ways to get more young people engaged in the political process.
- Staton-Williams' involvement in health administration, politics and volunteering has raised her profile to the point where the press has begun paying attention. This past December, in an article about African-Americans in North Carolina being "on the fence" about whether they'll vaccinate themselves against the Coronavirus, The Charlotte Observer quoted her as saying, "It's not any fault of our own. This country needs to rebuild its trust with the African-American community."

- In an interview for this article, Staton-Williams also said that African-Americans need to find ways to move past their skepticism. One way would be to forgive the acknowledged wrongs of the past.
- "We can't be on the sidelines when people say, 'We need someone for this advisory board in the community,' " she said. "We can't be too busy to sit on that board or to run for office. Our perspective and our representation matter." (Stanly News and Press, 1/15/21)

Racial Issues

Staton-Williams, as a Harrisburg Council member has been active in pushing concern for racial justice issues.

George Floyd Aftermath

After the George Floyd tragedy, Staton-Williams led a prayer vigil protest.

- The Black Political Caucus of Cabarrus County is sponsoring a prayer vigil and peaceful protest Sunday, June 7, in front of the Cabarrus County Courthouse. The protest, an email from the caucus stated, is being held to recognize and bring awareness to the system of oppression and racial inequities still present in the system of government.
- The caucus was started to address the ability of people in the community to elect individuals that will advocate for them in every way, said Diamond Staton-Williams, chair and co-founder of the caucus and a Harrisburg councilwoman.
- "With the recent passing of George Floyd, we wanted to make sure we not only coordinated with our law enforcement agencies but also with the individuals in our community so we could build good relationships." (Independent Tribune, 6/5/20)

At the vigil she said:

- As Staton-Williams opened the vigil, she called for action, not just from citizens, but from people in office. "It is not enough to want equity. We have to dismantle the systems that have impeded progress," she said. (Independent Tribune, 6/8/20)

Participates at Pro-BLM March

Two weeks later, she was at a "Juneteenth" protest organized by a Harrisburg Youth group that was pro-BLM and critical of the concept of "All Lives Matter" (Though there is no indication that defunding the police was specifically called for). It was also pushing for Critical Race Theory concepts in the classroom.

- A Juneteenth youth protest was held in front of the Harrisburg Town Hall last Friday, June 19, along with a march that took place through the town center. The event was held by the current Chair of the Harrisburg Youth Council Jaleah Taylor and Youth Council Secretary Sidney Curtis who both attend Hickory Ridge High School. They decided to host the protest after viewing the June Harrisburg Town Council meeting. Cabarrus County Sheriff Van Shaw, Harrisburg Mayor Steve Sciascia and Councilwoman Diamond Staton-Williams were present at the protest and participated in the march.
- "We realized that there is a lot of lack of education on these topics, and we felt like that is what we wanted to base this around. Which is why we have these posters around to educate people further," Curtis said.
- Taped to the columns in front of the town hall, there were signs posted that discussed the definitions and meanings of racial slurs, microaggressions, police brutality and the Black Lives matter movement. There were also artist-drawn images of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor.
- Curtis and Taylor also asked the audience to scan the QR codes that were taped to the pillars under the posters of information. The codes linked to the donation and information pages of the Black Lives Matter Movement and the Equal Justice Initiative.
- When asked what they hoped people took from attending the protest today, Curtis and Taylor said they hoped people learned something new. They both said that in their schools, they were not taught a lot about the history of racism in the United States.
- "We really see a lack of education. We touch on slavery but we don't really go into it. A lot of African-Americans have been killed and are still being killed, as we see in the news, and those things aren't being taught in school," said Taylor.
- Both stated that they want school curriculum to go teach how racism has affected culture through the years. "We learned about slavery and things like that, but we didn't really learn about how this trickled down into the way that we are treated and oppressed today," Curtis said.
- Another key point of the protest was to address the differences between the All Lives Matter and the Black Lives Matter movement, they said. "We are addressing the All Lives Matter movement and why that deflects away from the Black Lives Matter movement and how the Black Lives Matter movement focuses on black people because they are being killed by police officers," said Taylor. "The all lives matter movement doesn't really focus on that and deflects attention away from it." (Independent Tribune, 6/8/20)

Clash With Councilman Smith

When a member of the Council, Ian Patrick, objected to comments in the formal statement about Floyd's death that implied endorsement of "systemic racism", Staton-Williams' responses to Patrick prompted Councilman Ron Smith to file a complaint charging Staton-Williams with violating the Council Code of Conduct.

- A Harrisburg councilman brought a formal complaint against a councilwoman last Friday, June 5, after council members exchanged emails June 3 about the statement the Town of Harrisburg released about George Floyd's death. Councilman Ron Smith brought the formal complaint against Councilwoman Diamond Staton-Williams last Friday after speaking with Mayor Steve Sciascia, Smith stated in an email to the mayor.
- "As per our discussion being that I did not hear back from you I am now making my complaint a formal complaint with regards to the exchange provided by Council member Diamond Stanton Williams," Smith stated in the email.
- The town council was presented with a draft statement June 3 and Councilman Ian Patrick informed Town Manager Haynes Brigman that he had an issue with a particular phrase, according to an email Patrick sent to Brigman.
- "I take issue with the phrase 'shocking and tragic reminder of the social and racial injustices that exist in our country,'" Patrick stated in the email. He asked that the phrase be removed from the statement. He continued in the email and explained why he took issue with it.
- "It seems to imply that we are making a statement regarding 'systemic racism'. While I agree there is much to be done, if you look at some of the work done by Coleman Hughes, Larry Elder, Richard Herrnstein, Charles Murray and many other important thinkers (many of them black) – it can actually do more harm to the black community to continue using terms like 'systematic racism'," he stated in an email. "I actually know a lot about this subject, which is why on my marriage certificate under race, my wife and I listed 'human'."
- The councilwoman then sent an email in response to Patrick's request to remove the phrase. "Please use the sentence. My statement is from a person of color perspective. Thank you. Please do not email or call me to try and explain," she wrote in an email.
- She then sent another email later. "To remove the phrase and not acknowledge social injustice and systematic racism is to further put yet another bandaid on the very issue. It's like taking pain medicine over and over until you are addicted but not addressing the source of the pain. As leaders we have an ethical and moral obligation to recognize the very issues that impact our constituents. We were voted into this position for that very reason. Despite your efforts to put 'human' on your marriage certificate does not translate to what the black and brown experience is nor does it validate our experiences. If you are truly for the people and recognize, sympathize and want to be part of a meaningful solution to combat general, systematic racism, then you will include the statement. If you want to continue to ignore the issue at hand and not recognize why

people are protesting, just don't release a statement. The silence will be enough said," she wrote in the email.

- On Friday, Smith sent an email to the mayor stating that he was making a formal complaint, stating that he believed Staton-Williams' behavior was not in line with the council's code of conducted.
- The mayor called Staton-Williams Friday afternoon and told her that a formal complaint had been filed against her, she said.
- "The mayor gave me a call and advised me that a formal complaint had been filed against me, and that from a council person's perspective, I had violated the code of conduct related to an email surrounding our statement that we put out regarding the death of George Floyd."
- When asked about the complaint she stated that she felt the need to voice her opinion. "Being that I am the only African-American and that I'm the only woman, I made sure that I gave them my perspective about that and advised that it was my perspective that we give this statement," she said "I am not up for a white person to try to really explain this to me. He did not like that."(Independent Tribune, 6/8/20)

The complaint was discussed at the next meeting but then stalled for the next five months before Smith finally withdrew it in November just before a majority of the Council was about to vote to dismiss it.

- Five months after filing a Code of Conduct complaint, Harrisburg Town Councilmember Ron Smith withdrew his complaint against Councilmember Diamond Staton-Williams during Monday's town council meeting. His withdrawal came moments before the council's vote to dismiss the complaint. In the complaint filed in June, Smith mentioned instances where Staton-Williams and Councilmember Ian Patrick communicated via email about a statement the town had drafted on George Floyd's death. Patrick had taken issue with a phrase that referenced systemic racism. Staton-Williams had asked to keep it in.
- Smith said that he had originally filed the complaint due to concerns over the council's ability to communicate — not to choose sides between council members. Councilmember Rodney Dellinger commented that he agreed with Smith's concern over Staton-Williams' responses to Patrick in the emails. "I am in agreement here that we need to have an open dialogue, if we can, and I would hope going forward that none of us ever say again, 'Don't call me. Don't email me' — or whatever the words were," Dellinger said.
- In response, Staton-Williams explained why she asked Patrick not to call or email her to explain why he disagreed with the systemic racism phrase. "I think that the dehumanization of Black people, the devaluation of Black culture and communities and the vilification of blackness itself has led us to where we are today," she said. "When I spoke about this in June, I said as a council we need diversity and equity training. Those items have been provided, and I haven't seen another councilmember step forward to attend."

- Staton-Williams had also brought the possibility of diversity and equity training to council at a January budget meeting, but it was not heavily supported. "As far as a better understanding for what I said, really, I set up a boundary for myself," she said. A boundary that sometimes, if you are not a Black woman or a Black person, it is hard to understand.
- "It is a boundary. And in all actually, I probably saved the conversation from going any further down that rabbit hole. The people that were quoted in the email to me, these were men who cited — who really believe in racist, misogynistic theories. How do you think that makes me feel? Did anyone ever consider that? The only thing that was considered was everyone's ego and how it made them feel."
- Smith said the complaint went without a resolution for so long because he was waiting on the mayor to take action. Smith stated several times during the meeting that he wasn't clear what the formal complaint process entailed.....
- Councilmember Troy Selberg put forward a motion to dismiss the complaint. Councilmember John Booth seconded the motion. Before it went to a vote, Smith asked Selberg for his rationale behind why Selberg believed Staton-Williams did not violate the Code of Conduct. Selberg said that while he believed the council was in need of learning to communicate better, he did not see Staton-Williams' actions in violation of the Code of Conduct.
- "I believe this council needs to come together. I believe it needs to come together in a face-to-face summit where we can discuss our differences," Selberg said. "I don't think this is something that needs to be displayed in public as we are doing currently."
- "And I do not see any Code of Conduct violation, therefore I am motioning that we dismiss this, and if you would like to continue this discussion, I would encourage all of us to get together and work better as a council."
- Before the council could vote on Selberg's motion to dismiss the complaint, Smith withdrew his complaint. "This complaint was independent of itself. It was not tied to the statement that Councilmember Patrick made. It was more about the ability for our council to have open dialogue and to be able to be collaborative," Smith said. (Independent Tribune, 11/10/20)

Stallings Road Rezoning Controversy

Related to this is how a controversial December 2018 4-3 rezoning vote would two years later lead to Staton-Williams making charges of racial insensitivity against Smith. It began in with a 4-3 vote to have a high density housing development project built on Stallings Road over the objections of residents in the area.

- After passionate arguments from neighbors, yelling and an audience member being escorted out of the meeting by a deputy, Harrisburg Town Council voted 4-3 to move forward with a proposed development project on Stallings Road. Community members wearing red and stickers that had the words "High density" crossed out packed the auditorium of Hickory Ridge High School on Monday, Oct. 8 to express their concerns over the development and await council's decision. The meeting was moved to the high school because of the anticipated number of attendees.
- Residents of Stallings Farm and Flowers Farm have been fighting the proposal that would put 191 single-family homes with 2.33 of those homes per acre next to their neighborhoods. Since they became aware of the proposal, the citizens have expressed concerns saying it is "high density housing" and will add more traffic, put stress on already overcrowded schools and diminish property values.....
- During the public hearing portion of the meeting neighbors made their case against the development. Many said they don't believe the subdivision meets the town's Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) requirements. Many accused council of already having their minds made up before the meeting, and questioned if they were correctly following the town's laws and procedures.
- After listening to the public comments— which one man tried to continue by walking up the podium and talking over council after the public hearing was complete before being escorted out by deputies— council voted 4-3 to rezone the land and move forward with the project. Members Diamond Staton-Williams, Troy Selberg, Benita Conrad and John Booth voted in favor of the project with Ron Smith, Rick Russo and Christopher Barfield voting against it. (Independent Tribune, 12/11/18)

Two years later, this resulted in Staton-Williams accusing Smith and two new Council members (one of whom, Rodney Dellinger had been a citizen activist against the rezoning project) of being “racially insensitive” because they supported the appointment of a new member of the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) Committee, Michael Painter who had derisively referred to the project as “Ebony Acres.” Staton-Williams also suggested that the resident protesters who had worn red at the time were acting in the tradition of a 19th century racist group the Wilmington Red Shirts.

- A Harrisburg Town Council member is speaking out against what she sees as insensitive statements being made by fellow council members. Council member Diamond Staton-Williams said council members Ron Smith, Rodney Dellinger and Ian Patrick knowingly supported the appointment of a Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) committee member who used code words such as "ebony" during discussions about housing developments planned for the town. She also said they are part of a group in town known for wearing red shirts, voicing opinions on development and attending council meetings. Smith, Dellinger and Patrick all deny being part of any "red shirt" group.

- The group, which started in Harrisburg in 2018, has been named the "Red Shirts". This is a similar name to the Wilmington Red Shirts who intimidated, beat and killed African-Americans to stop them from registering to vote in the late nineteenth century. This later came to a head in the 1898 Wilmington insurrection.
- The Harrisburg group had its start in 2018 when the Stallings Road Project rezoning and annexation, which later became the Harmony Acres development, went before the town council. "At that time in 2018, we were voting on a development off Stallings Road. This development would be in between Stallings Farm and Flowers farm," Staton-Williams said. "The land was owned by Mrs. Stallings and her husband – her husband, who is an African-American. And of course, it's their right to sell the lands and they wanted to get the best price for it."
- Neighbors to the property had been made aware of the potential development by a councilmember before the information had been made public. Smith, who lived near the future development, took a preliminary project plan from a closed meeting with the developer and sent it to his neighborhood HOA in July 2017. When Smith was later censured by the town council, one of the reasons listed for the censure was distributing the plan. The censure resolution stated Smith's intent was to generate opposition to the project.
- Neighbors started having email conversations with council members and staff discussing community concerns.
- One email sent Tuesday, February 20, 2018 by current Harrisburg UDO Committee Member Michael Painter asked the planning and zoning director for information. His email read: "I was just wanting to know more information about Ebony Acres and when the neighborhood meeting would occur with more information. I live in stallings farm and very concerned about the decision to allow high density homes in my area."
- At the time of the email the developer had not picked nor released a name for the development. Staton-Williams said Ebony Acres was a racial term in reference to Stallings being married to an African-American man.
- "From my understanding, that's when it was named Ebony Acres, by the email that was sent to the town by one of the residents in those communities. But what I have heard from others is that it was actually called Nigger Acres," Staton-Williams said. "I have personally heard it from personal connections and then I saw it had been changed to Ebony Acres once we got the email to the planning and zoning director at that time."
- Painter was not on the UDO committee until 2020 when the council voted to approve his appointment. At the time of the email, he was just a resident. When he was appointed to the committee, Town Attorney Rich Koch questioned Painter about the email. Painter said, he thought it was the name of the development and stated it was not an intended racial slur.....
- When the project was set to go before the town, Dellinger, who was not on council at the time, and Jennifer Teague were both residents of a neighborhood near the Stallings property and asked

people to wear red to meetings. Dellinger sent out an email and Teague posted to her Facebook group.

- "We decided as a show of solidarity for anyone that shows up to these meetings to wear red," Teague said. "In fact, I think our post in this group was if you don't have red, wear black. It was really a show of solidarity for a group." When asked if she was aware of the Wilmington Red Shirts connection, she said no. "That was never an intention. We never used that word. It was wear red. Come support your neighbors," she said.
- When the council voted October 2018 to approve the rezoning and annexation of the Stallings property, there were at least 50 people in the crowd wearing red, Staton-Williams said. Dellinger was one of them. The rezoning passed 4-3 and the annexation passed 5-2. Smith voted against the rezoning and annexation.....
- Before the Stalling Property vote, Staton-Williams said she and Dellinger had met to discuss his concerns. When he ran for council in 2019, she started to have some concerns. "I guess last year, during the campaign, some of the talking points from some of the candidates running gave me pause, typically around housing and ensuring a specific demographic was taken care of," she said.
- She stated that once Dellinger was on council, she was concerned over the way he referenced people. "While on council, especially during our budget meetings this year especially — being an African American you pick up on when certain terms are used — so he kept saying we don't want those people. Those people. Who are those people? So I sent him a text message in the beginning of May and asked him," she said. She said he made the reference in a budget meeting where council discussed canceling the Fourth of July fireworks show.
- He did not respond to the text message but did send a voicemail. He said "all those people" was in reference to the town's border to Mecklenburg County. He said social distancing would be hard if people came across the county line and stated she must have misheard him.

With this new flap occurring before final resolution of Smith's June complaint against Staton-Williams, she offered these thoughts regarding Smith, Dellinger and Patrick.

- Staton-Williams said that after what happened, specifically in June, it has been hard to trust Smith, Dellinger and Patrick. "Everything the three of them do, I'm always going to be suspicious of. I'm always going to be cautious," she said. "And for a council and for a municipality to work well, those are things that shouldn't occur, especially when you have people talking about 'those people'," she said. "And usually when you have people talking about those people, it is about race, and I am a person of that race."

- She said that while she did point out the connection between the group in Harrisburg wearing red shirts and the Wilmington Red Shirts, she does not believe everyone who wore a red shirt is racist. "To people who truly did not know about Wilmington, did not know about the insurrection and how white citizens killed black people for power and land, you should absolutely step away from that as a supporter of that. You should step away," she said. "It is fine to have differing opinions about lot sizes. It is fine to have differing opinions about materials used on homes. There is a way to express your feelings and not be caught into something that is, at the root of it, racial or racist and rooted in supremacy ideology."
- She said she feels a responsibility to let residents know, considering what has happened in the country this year. "Seeing what is happening elsewhere, I have known about this Ebony Acres email since 2018 and that's my cross to bear. I should have made it an issue then," she said. "After the budget meeting and that 'those people' comment and constantly hearing little snippets of disdain for other races, I need to raise my hand. I need to wave my flag. I need to bring everybody's attention and make sure that people understand this is not right." (Independent Tribune, 10/12/20)

In the end, the Council voted 6-1 to ask Painter, the UDO member who had used the term "Ebony Acres" to step down. (Independent Tribune, 10/13/20)

Miscellaneous

From a question and answer during her re-election for City Council in 2021.

- Question 1: Why do you want to run for this local position?
 - Staton-Williams: I believe I am the right person to run for this elected leader position because there needs to be a different perspective at the decision-making table. I believe in helping others and caring for others through acts of service. Being in an elected leader position is an act of service to our community.
- Question 2: What makes you qualified to fill this seat?
 - Staton-Williams: I am a nurse, a mom, a wife, a small-business owner who serves the community in multiple ways. As a nurse, I understand our connection to the health and well-being of all residents within our community. As a mom and wife, I understand the importance of education and family-centered activities to support our community. As a small-business owner, I understand the importance of connecting economic development opportunities to other small-business owners who are also our neighbors. I also support our community through volunteerism with the Cabarrus County Adult Care Home Committee, serving with Communities in Schools, and other community-oriented organizations. Having a greater understanding of our connectedness makes me qualified for any elected leader position.

- Question 3: What do you consider to be the most pressing issues for this community?
 - Staton-Williams: I believe the most pressing issues for Harrisburg are economic development, sustainable infrastructure growth, and youth development and services. I believe the most pressing issues for Cabarrus County are obtainable (supply), attainable (within different income ranges) housing options, transportation, and sustainable infrastructure. (Independent Tribune, 10/27/21)

Staton-Williams is now running for the State House in District 73. There have been no articles profiling her decision to run.

Part IV Staton-Williams: The News File, 2017-22

2017

NOV 2017 Elected to Harrisburg Town Council

Steve Sciascia will spend another four years as mayor of Harrisburg. In the municipal election on Tuesday, Sciascia was re-elected by getting 57.55 percent of the votes. His competitor and current town council member, Christopher Barfield, received 41.61 percent.

A 20-year Harrisburg resident, Sciascia said he is very excited to serve the town for another four years and is appreciative of all who supported him during election season.

"I'm looking forward to just making sure that I can provide the citizens what they need to be successful," Sciascia said.

Prior to serving as mayor, Sciascia also spent eight years a member of Harrisburg Town Council, six years on the Cabarrus Parks and Recreation Commission and has coached over 35 youth sport teams for Harrisburg Youth Association.

In the town council race, incumbent John Booth came in with the most votes with 1,287 or 17.92 percent.

Booth said after serving for the last four years, he became invested in a lot of projects that were ongoing. So he decided to run again to see those projects to completion.

"I think my message and what I stood for really resonated with all of the residents. I think I had a good message that the people could get behind," Booth said. "At the end of the day, I'm coming back and I can bring proven leadership and experience to the board. I look forward to working with two new members. I think they will bring some fresh perspective and new ideas. It's time to roll up our sleeves and get to work for the next four years; get to work for the town of Harrisburg."

Diamond Staton-Williams was also elected with 1,281 votes or 17.84 percent and Troy Selberg gained a seat on council with 957 votes, 13.33 percent.

Staton-Williams, who sources say is the first African American woman voted to the council, said she is ecstatic and appreciate everyone coming out to vote and making sure their voices were heard.

"I am so excited. It's going to be a great opportunity to serve the community and advocate for the people of Harrisburg," she said. "I'm looking forward to listening to the people of Harrisburg and trying to figure out exactly what changes they would like to see to improve the quality of life."

Selberg and Williams will take the seats of Jeff Phillips and Chad Baucom, both who did not seek re-election.

"I'm extremely shocked. I had the support of a lot of great people in this town. I've been here some 26 years and couldn't have done it without great family, some friends and the fire department, the police department and town council," Selberg said. "I've always been behind the scenes helping in this community. The people currently on council, we've always worked hand in hand. I'm looking forward to making Harrisburg a team; a group of people working towards a common goal."

The results are still unofficial, according to the Cabarrus County Board of Elections. (Independent Tribune, 11/7/17)

DEC 2017 Sworn In To Town Council

Re-elected Mayor Steve Sciascia and council members were sworn-in during Harrisburg's Town Council meeting on Monday, Dec. 11.

Along with Sciascia, incumbent councilman John Booth was also sworn-in again.

The two newcomers who took the oath were council members Diamond Staton-Williams and Troy Selberg.

Williams is a nurse, wife and mother who decided to run for town council because of her deep sense of responsibility to see the community's small businesses grow. She said she wanted to work with fellow members to strengthen the local economy by revitalizing Harrisburg's Town Center by creating spaces for allow for easy access and recreation, and supporting youth through focused and fulfilling activities.

Selberg, who moved to Harrisburg 25 years ago to start a family, said he ran for a seat because he enjoys helping people and furthering the success of the community.

He said this is an opportunity for him to serve the people in a capacity where they have a voice of reason with a focus on keeping our town financially strong while still providing for the established town priorities such as public safety, a positive community appearance, activities and recreational opportunities for youth, adults, and seniors, and retaining the town history and character. (Independent Tribune, 12/19/17)

2018

OCT 2018 Controversial Rezoning Request Approved 4-3

After passionate arguments from neighbors, yelling and an audience member being escorted out of the meeting by a deputy, Harrisburg Town Council voted 4-3 to move forward with a proposed development project on Stallings Road.

Community members wearing red and stickers that had the words "High density" crossed out packed the auditorium of Hickory Ridge High School on Monday, Oct. 8 to express their concerns over the development and await council's decision. The meeting was moved to the high school because of the anticipated number of attendees.

Residents of Stallings Farm and Flowers Farm have been fighting the proposal that would put 191 single-family homes with 2.33 of those homes per acre next to their neighborhoods.

Since they became aware of the proposal, the citizens have expressed concerns saying it is "high density housing" and will add more traffic, put stress on already overcrowded schools and diminish property values.

Overview of the project

A public hearing on the proposal was originally scheduled for the council's September meeting, but was moved to the October meeting because council was waiting on two pieces of missing information; summary notes from neighborhood meetings and an updated Traffic Impact Analysis (TIA).

During the Monday meeting, Town Manager Haynes Brigman gave an overview of the project to council and the audience.

The request from the developer was to rezone 82.05 acres located at 3550 Stallings Road and to permit the development of the 191 single-family dwellings with 97 lots to be age-restricted for 55 and older.

The area was originally zoned RL (Residential Low Density), RE (Rural Estate) and Cabarrus County LDR (Low-Density Residential).

The developer requested the town rezone the property to CZ-RM-1 (Residential Medium Density), CZ-RV (Residential Village) and CZ-RC (Residential Compact).

Zoning within 500 feet of the property is zoned RL, Cabarrus County LDR, RE, RM-1 and OI (Office and Institutional).

Brigman said the Future Land Use Plan lists the area in question as Medium Density Residential with a density range of three to four dwelling units per acre. The plan recommends the area be zoned RV and RM-1.

After discussions with staff and the town's Planning and Zoning Board, Brigman said the developer agreed to change the RC (Residential Compact) area of the proposed development to RM-1 (Residential Medium Density) to meet the Future Land Use standards.

He also said that through various studies, the town determined that it has adequate police, fire and sanitation services available for the additional neighbors and that the Cabarrus County Schools district has new schools planned over the next five years that will help with the overcrowding.

Comments from the public

During the public hearing portion of the meeting neighbors made their case against the development. Many said they don't believe the subdivision meets the town's Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) requirements.

Many accused council of already having their minds made up before the meeting, and questioned if they were correctly following the town's laws and procedures.

Two speakers asked council members to vote by raising their hands, so the audience could see who was for and who was against.

"It comes down to are we trying to put the wrong product at the wrong spot? I think that's what everybody's frustration is. Why are we forcing the issue?" speaker Patrick Rhyne said. "This is a everybody issue. This effects everybody in here. We simply ask you to take the information and input of people who have come here to say, 'Listen to our voices.' Please do the right thing."

Speaker Robert Dellinger also told council that the right thing for them to do was to vote down the project. He then asked them if they could lay their heads down each night knowing they have followed the governing laws of the town.

"Please don't get me wrong. The residents of Harrisburg are still very concerned about the number of homes that are placed on an acre lot and will continue to do so," Dellinger said. "However, we are just as concerned that the protocols and procedures have been met."

Dellinger then turned toward the audience and talked to his "neighbors in red." He told them that whatever the outcome of the vote, they should not get mad.

"Our case has been presented. It is strong," he said. "We have done our research. You have supported with your attendance, emails and finances in saving Harrisburg, and I have no doubt you will continue to do this in the future."

He then told the citizens of Harrisburg what they could do to continue to stand against future developments like this one. He encouraged them to attend council meetings, Planning and Zoning Board meetings and neighborhood meetings.

Then he went a little further.

"Will you stay or will you go? Just think if 500 people put their homes on sale in Harrisburg. What impact would that have on this town? What would it say to people trying to come to this town? What would it say to builders and the homes that they're trying to build now?" Dellinger said. "Then finally those of us that continue to stay can spend our dollars in Charlotte or Concord. So in closing, what will Harrisburg be? You can help make that decision."

Council's vote

After listening to the public comments— which one man tried to continue by walking up the podium and talking over council after the public hearing was complete before being escorted out by deputies— council voted 4-3 to rezone the land and move forward with the project.

Members Diamond Staton-Williams, Troy Selberg, Benita Conrad and John Booth voted in favor of the project with Ron Smith, Rick Russo and Christopher Barfield voting against it.

After the decision was made, each council member took a moment to share some thoughts on the development and the public hearing process.

As audience members yelled back at her in response and some walked out, council member Benita Conrad told the audience this was not an easy decision. She said before the vote Monday she reread all of the emails she received concerning the project and while some were thoughtful and considerate, others were offensive and disrespectful.

She said some of the emails suggested the council was committing illegal acts.

"I know this is the direction that the national media and the rest of the nation is taking on national politics, but this is not Harrisburg. I'd like to say if this is, then we've already lost that small town feel," Conrad said. "And to imply or even come right out and say that to live in a good neighborhood with good neighbors you must live in an all brick house on a half-acre lot; that's extremely prejudice and many of the folks making those suggestions don't live on a half-acre lot in an all brick house. So I don't really understand where they are coming from."

Conrad said her family moved here 40 years ago and even at that time Harrisburg was growing. She added that many people in the audience also moved there to be close to Charlotte but to reap the benefits of the smaller town with great schools.

She said they were all able to move to Harrisburg because of farmers selling their land to be developed and it is unrealistic to think that the town will stay small.

"This small town was growing when we moved here 40 years ago and it was growing when all of you moved. The fact was it was growing and that was the reason you were able to move here in the first place," she said. "We didn't become ranked one of the best small towns in America by rubber-stamping development and we have thoroughly examined this development. We did disagree on this development, but we did approve it." (Independent Tribune, 12/11/18)

2020

MAY 2020 Organizes Student Achievement Parade

Town Councilwoman Diamond Staton-Williams organized an achievement parade and celebration for Harrisburg students to help celebrate their accomplishments even while social distancing.

The parade will take place Saturday, May 16, at 1 p.m. in the Canterfield subdivision. The parade will run along Moss Creek Drive.

Staton-Williams got the idea a few weeks ago while planning a drive-by celebration for her eldest daughter's college graduation. She posted on her neighborhood's Facebook page and proposed the idea of a parade. Several neighbors agreed and everyone jumped into a whirlwind of planning.

"I came up with the idea of having an achievement parade since my family is not the only family wanting to celebrate the achievements of our children during this time," she stated.

The parade, she said, is to celebrate kindergarten graduation, fifth grade promotion, eight grade promotion, high school graduation and college graduation. The event will also celebrate teachers who live in the neighborhood.

Parents are encouraged to decorate a lawn chair in honor of their child's accomplishment. They can sit on the main street of the neighborhood with their family or friends as the parade passes.

The parade will consist of participants from the Harrisburg Fire Department, Mayor Steve Sciascia, a school board member and a surprise guest. (Independent Tribune, 5/14/20)

JUN 2020 Organizes Prayer Vigil For George Floyd

The Black Political Caucus of Cabarrus County is sponsoring a prayer vigil and peaceful protest Sunday, June 7, in front of the Cabarrus County Courthouse.

The protest, an email from the caucus stated, is being held to recognize and bring awareness to the system of oppression and racial inequities still present in the system of government.

The caucus was started to address the ability of people in the community to elect individuals that will advocate for them in every way, said Diamond Staton-Williams, chair and co-founder of the caucus and a Harrisburg councilwoman.

"With the recent passing of George Floyd, we wanted to make sure we not only coordinated with our law enforcement agencies but also with the individuals in our community so we could build good relationships."

There will be a candlelight vigil held at 4 p.m. which will be followed by songs, prayer and a moment of silence. Several guest speakers will also be present.

Once the vigil is completed, there will be a peaceful protest. Participants will walk from the Courthouse from Corban Avenue to Church Street and then turn left on Cabarrus Avenue before taking a left on Union Street to return to the courthouse.

Anyone in the community is welcome, Staton-Williams said, from every municipality in Cabarrus County. She stated in an email that participants are welcome to bring signs in support of the protest.

"We are stronger together. We have to build strong relationships to build a strong community," she said. "If anything is going to change we have to include other municipalities."

The caucus is also looking for volunteers to help set up before the event. Anyone who wants to volunteer can check in at 2 p.m. to be assigned a role. Signs will be posted to direct people to the check-in.

More information on volunteers can be found below:

All volunteers will need to arrive early (2pm) and meet Kayla Seigler on the corner of Barbaric Avenue SW and Union Street S (near Not Just Franks) to receive instructions on where to be located and gather your designated materials (water, snacks, candles, lighters, masks, trash bags).

Volunteers to direct people on where to gather using arrow signs (these will be provided) while adjoined with another volunteer to hand out candles to everyone.

Volunteers to walk through the crowd to hand out bottled water and squirt hand sanitizer into people's hands who request it.

Volunteers to walk through the crowd to light all of the candles quickly.

We ask all volunteers to grab a trash bag or two to keep in their pocket

All volunteers will open one of their trash bags at the end of the vigil (before the walk/march) to collect any trash from anyone. Volunteers should take the second trash bag out of their pocket to collect trash from anyone once we arrive back at the courthouse after the march for a second round of trash collection. (Independent Tribune, 6/5/20)



Above the crowd of people that filled the street in front of the Cabarrus County Courthouse Sunday, June 7, the band completed its sound checks as the Black Political Caucus of Cabarrus County gathered together at the top of the steps.

One of the founders of the caucus, Diamond Staton-Williams – who also serves as a Harrisburg town councilwoman – opened the prayer vigil.

"Today's events are important for all of us. The tragic and senseless death of George Floyd has sparked a movement in our nation that we can no longer ignore," she said.

In particular, Floyd's death and the movement it created spoke to some of the reasons she, Aimy Steele and Maya Jones founded the caucus. The caucus, said Steele, was founded to bring more black voices into county government to champion issues specific to African-Americans.

The women began planning the caucus in 2019 before it began in January 2020, reaching out to the Black Political Caucus of Mecklenburg County for guidance and inspiration.

Staton-Williams said that she began thinking about ways to get more black voices in government after her 2017 election.

"I saw that out of all of Cabarrus County at that time in 2017 I was elected, I was one of four black elected officials. And that just sparked an interest in me. I know that there is a larger African-American community here," she said. "I wanted to make sure that we tried to do something to help put people in positions that really represent the African-American community."

That goal to amplify voices translated into the message of the prayer vigil, Steele said.

"We needed to amplify the voices of those who have been traditionally disenfranchised and silenced for some many years. And we needed to do that right now," Steele said.

As Staton-Williams opened the vigil, she called for action, not just from citizens, but from people in office.

"It is not enough to want equity. We have to dismantle the systems that have impeded progress," she said.

Among the crowd of people with lit candles in hand, was Concord Mayor Bill C. Dusch, Harrisburg Mayor Steve Sciascia, Concord Police Chief Gary Gacek and Cabarrus County Sheriff Van Shaw.

Kannapolis Mayor Darrell Hinnant and Kannapolis Interim Police Chief Terry Spry were also in attendance.

As Staton-Williams finished, Steele stepped up to the podium and recounted how she spent memorial day. She said the day started with exchanged texts and phone calls from her family thanking her brother, brother-in-law, and father for their military service for the country. Then the media reported Floyd's death.

His death, she said, was another instance of racial injustice that was felt all across the nation, even in Concord.

"As a black person in Concord and in North Carolina I have been advised since moving here in 1993 to not go to certain areas of town due to how I would be treated or how I was looked at," she said.

She explained that she even felt safer in black communities.

"I am a mother, I am a wife. I love to ride horse. I love to take pictures. I love public speaking. I love my five children. I am allergic to shell fish and I am a vegetarian," she said. "But none of that matters when my skin color is weaponized as a threat before I can share the above with anyone."

And violence was a common occurrence for the black community, Jones said. During her speech, she recounted a conversation she had with her father as she and the caucus were planning the vigil.

"I said, 'Dad we are having a prayer vigil. Do we need to have another prayer vigil? Black people always have prayer vigils. We always get together and pray. Are things changing?'" she said.

She explained that she felt the need for practical change. But he said yes, they did.

"He told me that you need a time to be introspective and to connect with other humans. And I knew immediately that he was right because I had seen like you did on the media where people opened their doors during a pandemic, stepped outside with black faces, brown faces, tan faces, beige faces, and white faces and said black lives matter – said my black life matters."

Jones then led the crowd in lighting their candles as the band sang "Raise a Hallelujah".

After the group of reverends and pastors prayed over the crowd, Steele led everyone in a moment of silence. That moment lasted for 8 minutes and 46 seconds – the amount of time Floyd was on the ground with a Minneapolis police officer's knee on his neck.

As the minutes stretched on in silence, some members in the crowd sat on the pavement and cried. When Steele called the halfway mark – 4 minutes and 23 seconds – voices in the crowd whispered.

After the moment of silence, Concord Councilwoman Ella Mae Small went to the podium and recounted the number of times Concord had experienced riots that stemmed from racial issues.

She said Concord had experienced riots four times. Its first occurred when schools were desegregated. Logan High School was closed in 1968 and the students were sent to white schools, she said. This sparked the first riots in the city. But the last riots that took place in Concord was in 1993 when Angelo Robinson, a black man, suffocated to death while in the custody of Concord police.

Small said she hoped the 1993 riots were the last that the city would ever see.

A way to accomplish that, she said, is to put black voices in government.

"There are two council members that are presently serving in Cabarrus County, one in Harrisburg and one in Concord and both of us are women. The county commission has no Afro-Americans. The school board has no Afro-Americans, along with various other positions," she said. "We are looking forward to having more of our people serving in high positions in our government and also being elected to state and national offices."

As the prayer vigil portion of the event ended, people gathered in the streets as police officers moved barricades to open up the road

Leading the march, Staton-Williams, Steele and Jones walked in front, raising their fists as the Concord chief of police and Cabarrus County sheriff walked beside the protesters, heading up the streets of downtown. (Independent Tribune, 6/8/20)

JUN 2020 Councilman Makes Complaint Against Williams Over Floyd Remarks

A Harrisburg councilman brought a formal complaint against a councilwoman last Friday, June 5, after council members exchanged emails June 3 about the statement the Town of Harrisburg released about George Floyd's death.

Councilman Ron Smith brought the formal complaint against Councilwoman Diamond Staton-Williams last Friday after speaking with Mayor Steve Sciascia, Smith stated in an email to the mayor.

"As per our discussion being that I did not hear back from you I am now making my complaint a formal complaint with regards to the exchange provided by Council member Diamond Stanton Williams," Smith stated in the email.

The town council was presented with a draft statement June 3 and Councilman Ian Patrick informed Town Manager Haynes Brigman that he had an issue with a particular phrase, according to an email Patrick sent to Brigman.

"I take issue with the phrase 'shocking and tragic reminder of the social and racial injustices that exist in our country,'" Patrick stated in the email.

He asked that the phrase be removed from the statement. He continued in the email and explained why he took issue with it.

"It seems to imply that we are making a statement regarding 'systemic racism'. While I agree there is much to be done, if you look at some of the work done by Coleman Hughes, Larry Elder, Richard Herrnstein, Charles Murray and many other important thinkers (many of them black) – it can actually do more harm to the black community to continue using terms like 'systematic racism'," he stated in an email. "I actually know a lot about this subject, which is why on my marriage certificate under race, my wife and I listed 'human'."

The councilwoman then sent an email in response to Patrick's request to remove the phrase.

"Please use the sentence. My statement is from a person of color perspective. Thank you. Please do not email or call me to try and explain," she wrote in an email.

She then sent another email later.

"To remove the phrase and not acknowledge social injustice and systematic racism is to further put yet another bandaid on the very issue. It's like taking pain medicine over and over until you are addicted but not addressing the source of the pain. As leaders we have an ethical and moral obligation to recognize the very issues that impact our constituents. We were voted into this position for that very reason. Despite your efforts to put 'human' on your marriage certificate does not translate to what the black and brown experience is nor does it validate our experiences. If you are truly for the people and recognize, sympathize and want to be part of a meaningful solution to combat general, systematic racism, then you will include the statement. If you want to continue to ignore the issue at hand and not recognize why people are protesting, just don't release a statement. The silence will be enough said," she wrote in the email.

On Friday, Smith sent an email to the mayor stating that he was making a formal complaint, stating that he believed Staton-Williams' behavior was not in line with the council's code of conducted.

The mayor called Staton-Williams Friday afternoon and told her that a formal complaint had been filed against her, she said.

"The mayor gave me a call and advised me that a formal complaint had been filed against me, and that from a council person's perspective, I had violated the code of conduct related to an email surrounding our statement that we put out regarding the death of George Floyd."

When asked about the complaint she stated that she felt the need to voice her opinion.

"Being that I am the only African-American and that I'm the only woman, I made sure that I gave them my perspective about that and advised that it was my perspective that we give this statement," she said "I am not up for a white person to try to really explain this to me. He did not like that."

The complaint will be discussed during the virtual town council meeting tonight beginning at 6 p.m.

Both Smith and Patrick declined to comment on the complaint, when asked. The mayor stated that he had no comment since the complaint is now being handled by the town attorney. (Independent Tribune, 6/8/20)

JUN 2020 Council Meeting Leads to Committee; Discusses Complaint

Mayor Steve Sciascia announced during the virtual town council meeting last night, June 8, announced a new committee would be formed to connect the council with organizations that support the African-American community.

The mayor said that he had invited Chuck Collier of Racial Equity Cabarrus to speak at next month's meeting to discuss programs and workshops that they offer.

"I think it is going to help us move in a direction that we all want to go," he said.

Later in the meeting he announced that a new committee would be formed during the council meeting Wednesday, Jun 10, to enact steps forward that Councilwoman Diamond Staton-Williams put forward. Council members will volunteer to be a part of that committee, he said.

"I look forward to some folks stepping up to be on that committee that we will create," he said.

The complaint that was filed by Councilman Ron Smith against Councilwoman Diamond Staton-Williams was addressed during the public hearing and council comment portions of the meeting.

Smith filed a complaint after an email conversation where the council discussed the statement released recognizing George Floyd's death.

Staton-Williams held a moment of silence during the meeting that lasted 8 minute and 46 seconds. She asked that everyone on the call and at home reflect on George Floyd's last words – when he said he couldn't breathe and called out for his mother – during the silence.

Afterward, she put forward three steps to moving forward:

She called for diversity and equity training and requested that the R.E.C. be a part of the training.

She asked to build community relationships in a positive way by partnering with Cabarrus NAACP and Clergy of Color and other organizations.

She also asked that individual on the council reflect on personal unconscious biases

She also stated that until systemic racism was acknowledged, there would be no solution.

Councilman Troy Selberg stated in the meeting that he supported all of three of her steps forward.

Smith also spoke during the meeting about why he filed the complaint.

"My complaint was not about anything other than our inability to have dialogue," he said. "When council member provided her initial statement she said please do not email or call me to try and explain."

This was in reference to Staton-Williams first email which was in reply to comments made by Councilman Ian Patrick. Smith stated that those words inhibited dialogue from taking place.

"Here we are at a stalemate and we can't have a dialogue if we are told not to call or email to discuss it."

Staton-Williams initially responded to an email sent by Patrick where he requested that a portion of the drafted statement be taken out. She asked that the portion be kept in and asked Patrick not to call or email her to explain.

"I take issue with the phrase 'shocking and tragic reminder of the social and racial injustices that exist in our country,'" Patrick stated in his email.

Smith also pointed to Staton-Williams second email where she invited the council to a prayer vigil that she and the Black Political Caucus of Cabarrus County put on last Sunday.

"It just felt like with the vigil on Sunday was to be seen and not heard and I didn't really understand how we were supposed to take that."

Earlier in the meeting, Staton-Williams stated that she had not said for the council to be seen and not heard and that Smith had misquoted her.

"Now is the time to listen for understanding and not to respond, as I stated in my email, which was inaccurately stated in the complaint. There is a difference," she said.

Councilman Patrick also spoke during the meeting about what has happened since the complaint became public.

"I simply had an opinion and the response to my opinion was don't talk or email me, so if you would like to look at who was really silenced on this one, it was me," he said.

He said that there are people attacking him on social media and that he has been called a racist.

The council will meet this Wednesday, June 10, to further discuss the town budget and to discuss the committee that the mayor wants to put together. (Independent Tribune, 6/9/20)

JUN 2020 Task Force Formed

The Harrisburg Town Council formed a task force during last night's meeting to aid in community relations with people of color.

The task force was first mentioned by Mayor Steve Sciascia during Monday's town council meeting. His decision to form is came after Councilwoman Diamond Staton-Williams put forward three solutions to aid in relations between council members and people of color in the community.

The task force was in response to Staton-Williams second solutions which asked the town council to partner with organizations that support the needs of people of color.

"We need to build our community relationships in a positive way with organizations that support the African-American community, Latino community, and Southeast Asian community," she said. "This

includes partnering with the Cabarrus county NAACP, clergy of color, and other organizations who support people of color."

This was not the first time that diversity training was brought up to the council. In December 2019, the council discussed getting new and existing members together for training – diversity would have been a part of that training. The council also sought out local resources to help with it, the mayor said.

The training was set to take place once new council members were acclimated, the mayor said. But since the pandemic hit quickly after, they haven't been able to meet for training yet.

When asked about his main goal for the task force, the mayor stated that he hopes it will do more than just talk about solutions and making change. He expects to see real action.

"Too many times we find ourselves talking about doing something and then fail to take action. The creation of this committee is taking action that will allow us to partner with each organization," he said. "I am hopeful that we can bring our great community closer together and get past the recent events," he stated.

The councilwoman said that she would coordinate the contacts between the task force and the organizations she mentioned. Councilman Troy Selberg, Councilman Rick Russo and Councilman Rodney Dellinger asked to be on the task force.

Before asking to be on the task force, Dellinger made a few remarks:

"Mr. Mayor, in today's world which is presented to us in the way of drama and television, people seem to think that it is normal to stir up drama, but to the contrary, drama is not to be the normal in this world. There is a song titled 'Let There be Peace on Earth'. It says, 'Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me. Let there be peace on earth, the peace that was meant to be. With God as our father, brothers all are we. Let me walk with my brother in perfect harmony.

"In Mathew 22:37-40, 'Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.'

"I am willing to be a part of this committee because my expectation is that it will be a committee with dialogue. If I am to be told how I should feel or what I am to believe and how I should think, this will not work. If calmness and peace shall reign, much will be accomplished."

Councilman Ron Smith asked to be an alternate due to concerns for elderly family members and worried he wouldn't be able to make every meeting. The mayor made him an official alternate but also stated that all other councilmembers could be asked to serve as alternates should the need arise.

The committee is expected to meet monthly, but all other details will be worked out in the coming weeks. (Independent Tribune, 6/11/20)

JUN 2020 Raising Awareness on Racial Equity

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and the deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor and George Floyd the conversation of racial equity and systemic racism has crossed news headlines nationwide.

For Cabarrus County, there are people like Concord Councilwoman Ella Mae Small, Harrisburg Councilwoman Diamond Staton-Williams and Racial Equity Cabarrus Founder Chuck Collier that have been raising awareness for these issues, before the increase in media coverage.

Collier said that he is hopeful that the current media visibility of these issues will bring a new awareness to people, especially people like him – white Americans.

He said that he started Racial Equity Cabarrus after Keith Lamont Scott was killed by a black police officer in Charlotte. He said the first and main goal of the organization is to bring awareness and education not only to residents but to elected officials and police departments.

"We are trying to have racial equity training and to heighten the understanding that racism is a problem in this country and has been since its founding. But we white folks don't really understand that because we live in it to our advantage," Collier said. "So this white supremacy that we live in that shapes every corner of our lives is steeped in our culture and it manifests itself across systems."

He said that with the pandemic, disparities in healthcare for black Americans have been made evident. According to the NC Department of Health and Human Services, Black North Carolinians make up 26% of positive cases even though they represent about 21% of the population. Nationally, he said, the disparity is far greater.

He said that when he saw Mecklenburg's proclamation that there was a health crisis for black Americans, he agreed. He said the pandemic made the disparity in healthcare access for black Americans more visible.

"It has pointed it out. It has made it more visible. It has always existed," he said. "Why is that? There is a reason. There are underlying causes and there are many like a lack of access to healthcare. It can be even transportation issues where people cannot get to healthcare. It can also be implicit bias where black people and brown people are not getting the same care or interest as white people get."

He said that there is an intersectionality across systems that can cause these types of disparities. But in order to address these issues, he said, people must first admit that there is an issue.

"Until we admit and we understand that we have a problem with racism in this country, we are not going to find a solution," he said. "Racism exists in our country because we make sure that it is invisible and invisibility is where racism thrives."

In order to talk about racism and racial equity, he said that the terms must be defined. Collier said that racism is the result of prejudice plus power and racial equity is proportionate access to opportunity and resources within all systems regardless of race or ethnicity.

Changing those systems to ensure accessibility, is the key element to ending systemic racism, Staton-Williams said.

"For local officials – or whether it is local, state, or national – we have to look at policies and procedures and determine how that impacts all people, not just the people who write checks," she said. "What can you do to break those barriers so people can see that there is equity and equality in the decision that you are making."

She said that officials should look at policies that are currently in place such as policing policies for people in poverty.

"This conversation goes beyond me. It is a community conversation now where we really have to look and see what polices have been put in place. We know that people in poverty are policed differently than those who live in places like here in Harrisburg that are more affluent," she said.

She said that the likelihood of a person in poverty being arrested is high. And since people in poverty usually make less than minimum wage and do not typically have savings, going through the justice system and accumulating court costs adds to the financial burden. She said it is a cycle, where people in poverty, who may have been sent to court over something like a minor traffic infraction, cannot afford their court costs and are then put in jail because they cannot pay.

"Am I really helping this person?" she asked. "Am I really helping my community on something as minor as a traffic infringement? I am not really helping that person. I am tacking on to the burden of being a citizen of this county I am tacking on to the financial burden. I am tacking on to the burden of them being able to feed their family."

She said that she has seen changes in Cabarrus County over the last 13 years that she and her family have lived here. She is one of two current female black elected officials in the county. Living in both Kannapolis and Harrisburg, she said that for the most part people have been welcoming to her and the ideas of change, until recently.

"I have been a little fortunate because I have been surrounded by people in Cabarrus County who have been very open to me, my family and changes. I have not first-hand experienced until recently anything different. And that has been hard for me," she said. "It makes you question a lot about what you think about people, what you know about people, what you considered to be true about people that you know. It makes you really apprehensive at times about having those conversations."

Concord Councilwoman Ella Mae Small has lived in Concord since 1968 when she and her husband moved to the county. She worked in the Cabarrus County School system for about three years before schools were desegregated in the state. The Logan High School was then closed and several teachers were moved to different positions in the system or dismissed, she said.

During her time as a resident and as an elected official, she said that there have been some changes in racial equity and the government, but more could be done.

"I have seen some changes, and we have made a little progress. But I don't think we have made that much. We are pretty much where we were 50 years ago," Small said.

She discussed the current racial diversity in the county government. Currently, there are no black Americans on the county's board of commissioners. However, previously there has been one. For elected council members in the county's municipalities, there are two black council members, both Small and Staton-Williams.

There has been one black Concord chief of police, she said, former Chief Betty Stocks.

Small said that the county is trying to improve but more is needed. She cited the need for minority teachers to be present in schools. The Concord Fire Department, she said, is another main area where diversity is need. She said that while black and other people of color were in management at the department, those people have since retired.

But one of the main issues for black Americans in the county, she said, is employment.

"We talk about making improvements, but generally, it is hard to do in Cabarrus County. You will find that for Afro-Americans, a lot of us are jobless," she said.

While there are black people employed by the Concord City Government, many of them are in lower paying jobs, she said. There are currently three black people in city managerial positions she said, but there could be more.

Right now, Cabarrus County, said Staton-Williams, is at a crossroad for where it is headed.

"Are we really going to push through this and find solutions with each other to continue with progress? And it is up to each individual," she said. "We have to combat our own internal conscious and unconscious biases that can impact the decisions we make as elected official or as residents."
(Independent Tribune, 6/19/20)

JUN 2020 Participates in Pro-BLM Protest

A Juneteenth youth protest was held in front of the Harrisburg Town Hall last Friday, June 19, along with a march that took place through the town center.

The event was held by the current Chair of the Harrisburg Youth Council Jaleah Taylor and Youth Council Secretary Sidney Curtis who both attend Hickory Ridge High School. They decided to host the protest after viewing the June Harrisburg Town Council meeting. Cabarrus County Sheriff Van Shaw, Harrisburg Mayor Steve Sciascia and Councilwoman Diamond Staton-Williams were present at the protest and participated in the march.

"We realized that there is a lot of lack of education on these topics, and we felt like that is what we wanted to base this around. Which is why we have these posters around to educate people further," Curtis said.

Taped to the columns in front of the town hall, there were signs posted that discussed the definitions and meanings of racial slurs, microaggressions, police brutality and the Black Lives matter movement. There were also artist-drawn images of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor.

Curtis and Taylor also asked the audience to scan the QR codes that were taped to the pillars under the posters of information. The codes linked to the donation and information pages of the Black Lives Matter Movement and the Equal Justice Initiative.

When asked what they hoped people took from attending the protest today, Curtis and Taylor said they hoped people learned something new. They both said that in their schools, they were not taught a lot about the history of racism in the United States.

"We really see a lack of education. We touch on slavery but we don't really go into it. A lot of African-Americans have been killed and are still being killed, as we see in the news, and those things aren't being taught in school," said Taylor.

Both stated that they want school curriculum to go teach how racism has affected culture through the years.

"We learned about slavery and things like that, but we didn't really learn about how this trickled down into the way that we are treated and oppressed today," Curtis said.

Another key point of the protest was to address the differences between the All Lives Matter and the Black Lives Matter movement, they said.

"We are addressing the All Lives Matter movement and why that deflects away from the Black Lives Matter movement and how the Black Lives Matter movement focuses on black people because they are being killed by police officers," said Taylor. "The all lives matter movement doesn't really focus on that and deflects attention away from it."

During the protest Phillip Brown, a recent graduate of Hickory Ridge High School and the former student body president, addressed these differences.

"Change starts with us. Change starts now with what we are doing. Of course we stand for all lives," Brown said. "All lives matter. But right now people of color, black lives, are being oppressed and murdered. So right now, all lives don't matter until black lives matter."

The majority of the speakers at the protest were current or former high school students. For Taylor, she said that it is important for the voices of young people to be heard right now.

"I feel that is important that our youth are being heard during this time because we are the leaders of the future," she said. "We are going to be the law makers. We are going to be the legislators in the future, and it is really important that we are getting a step ahead. And even though we are youth and we can't actually go out and vote yet – some of us – we still need to be focusing on these issues because they are important."

Curtis said that she hopes her generation will be a group that goes out and educates themselves on topics and seeks out information instead of adopting the beliefs of those around them.

"A lot of times we inherit our parents' ideals and then we tend to just accept that as the truth and then we don't try to educate ourselves and learn more and change that," she said.

After the speakers had finished, the group lined up in the road and walked through the town center, escorted by the Cabarrus County Police Department. As the group passed homes in the area, people waved from their doors and some joined in.

After the march was completed, they gathered behind town hall as Curtis thanked everyone for coming and asked people to line up to sign a banner for the event, if they wished. (Independent Tribune, 6/22/20)

JUL 2020 Town Mask Mandate Imposed

The Harrisburg Town Council approved a mandate during its meeting last night to require residents to wear facial coverings at town facilities and buildings.

"When we get the opportunity to open our town hall and our other public facing facilities. We will need guidance from the town council on whether or not we want to require masks for individuals who use those facilities and those places," Town Manager Haynes Brigman said.

Council Ron Smith put forward the motion for the facial coverings and Councilwoman Diamond Staton-Williams seconded the motions and it was approved unanimously.

This mandate will require residents to wear facial coverings at all town facilities, this will include places like parks, Brigman said.

The town manager brought the mandate to council during the meeting stating that town staff would need the council's guidance on whether to require facial coverings at town facilities, since Governor Roy Cooper's order exempted local governments from the state facial covering requirement.

"This is separate from the North Carolina Governor's orders for wearing masks out in public," Brigman said. "The Governor wanted to give each individual state government and local government the opportunity to make their own rules when it comes to face covering requirement."

Town staff, he said, are currently required to wear a facial covering if employees cannot maintain 6 feet of social distance or if employees are in a room together. The town has also implemented other safety precautions. In order to require residents to wear facial coverings while at town facilities, the council needed to approve a mandate.

When Councilman Rodney Dellinger asked how enforcement of the mandate would be carried out, Brigman said it would be similar to how the town is enforcing the state facial covering mandate. As of

now, staff enforce the mandate by educating residents on why it is important to wear a facial covering as opposed to a criminal offense or civil fine.

When Dellinger asked if the town would ask people to leave if they do not wear facial coverings, Brigman said yes, but it would depend.

"It depends on the situation, but potentially, yes. For instance, at a park facility, it would be unlikely that we would ask someone to remove themselves from an outdoor facility," he said. "But indoors, if we found ourselves or our staff in a position where we were compromised by an individual not following that mandate, then, yes, we could ask them to be removed from the facility."

Currently, the town has the ability to ask people to leave a facility if they are putting the health and safety of employees at risk, Brigman said. This wouldn't be any different.

The town is not planning to open government buildings back up to the public for several weeks, or at least until the August town council meeting, Brigman said. But adopting the facial covering mandate now will prepare residents for the requirement once the buildings are open.

The town's facial covering mandate will be lifted once the state facial covering mandate is lifted, Brigman said. (Independent Tribune, 7/14/20)

SEP 2020 Legal Question Over Racial Equity Task Force

A Harrisburg council member has expressed concerns that the Racial Equity Task Force is in violation of North Carolina's Open Meetings Law.

Council member Rodney Dellinger's concerns about the task force potentially violating the state's Open Meetings Law sparked a lengthy discussion and disagreement among council members and Town Attorney Rich Koch.

Concerns brought to town council

During the Harrisburg Town Council's monthly meeting Sept. 14, Dellinger asked Koch if the task force was subject to North Carolina's Open Meetings Law.

Dellinger had also sent an email to Koch before the council meeting to discuss his concerns without the knowledge of other council members.

The North Carolina Open Meetings Law states that all official meetings of public bodies must be open to the public. An official meeting is defined by the state's Open Meetings Law as:

"'Official meeting' means a meeting, assembly or gathering together at any time or place or the simultaneous communication by conference telephone or other electronic means of a majority of the members of a public body for the purpose of conducting hearings, participating in deliberations, or voting upon or otherwise transacting the public business within the jurisdiction, real or apparent, of the

public body. However, a social meeting or other informal assembly or gathering together of the members of a public body does not constitute an official meeting unless called or held to evade the spirit and purposes of this Article."

To make an official meeting open to the public, minutes of the meeting need to be taken, a notice must be made to the public in advance of the meeting, the public needs to have access to attend the meeting and the public needs to have access to its minutes.

Council member Troy Selberg stated that he was also concerned about whether the task force was subject to the Open Meetings Law. In an interview with the Independent Tribune, he said his concerns stemmed from the number of council members attending the meetings.

He said that at one meeting, four members were present, which would have the majority of the town council members present, making the task force meeting subject to Open Meetings Law. He said he wanted clarity if the task force was subject to the law so that the task force could continue its work without issue.

With COVID-19, meetings are held virtually, and it is easy for council members to log onto a meeting and potentially not realize three members are already present. He said that, as council members, they need to make sure they follow state law.

"My concern is just making sure that as a government body, we are following the statutes of the state of North Carolina," he said to the Independent Tribune.

During the council meeting, Selberg said that several town boards and committees had started in a similar fashion to the task force, where council members were present with residential volunteers. The Sustainability Committee, which recently was approved as a town board, had a similar start.

During the council meeting, Dellinger also asked if the task force would be conducting legislation. Mayor Steve Sciascia said that the task force is currently gathering information and data before setting out to accomplish its goals. But in accomplishing those goals, he saw the task force as an influence of change that would report to the council, not as a body that would pass legislation.

Dellinger also asked if the task force would be made into an official town board.

"I appreciate the inclusiveness of this task force, and as a reminder, a task force is a temporary grouping under one leader for the purpose of accomplishing a definite agenda." He continued: "I know, mayor, you said at the very first meeting that you had eventually hoped this would become an advisory board or some type of board with its own bylaws."

In the meeting, Sciascia said the task force needed to remain a task force, for now.

"From my perspective, right now this needs to be a task force. I don't know that we have enough information to be an actual board," he said. "Our goal was to understand the systems — the systems being the schools, medical, judicial system, our police system — to understand what the numbers are

from a Harrisburg perspective and a Cabarrus County perspective to determine if we have a problem. And if we have a problem, we influence changes around those problems."

It was not clear, based on Dellinger's statements at the council meeting, what the reason for his concern was. The Independent Tribune reached out to Dellinger about his concerns regarding the task force, but he declined to comment.

A disagreement among the council

There was some disagreement among council members and the town attorney as to whether the task force qualifies as an official meeting subject to Open Meetings Law.

Koch said that any public body of the town that is conducting town business needs to abide by the public meeting law.

"It sounded to me like the task force was sort of like — not a permanent public body connected to the town — but a temporary one, and as such, it would be subject to the Open Meetings Law of North Carolina," he said. "Anybody looking at that from the outside would think it's a town board." He later said: "If it looked to an outside citizen like this is part of the town, then you treat it like part of the town."

When the task force was formed June 10, only three council members volunteered to be a part of it: Dellinger, Selberg and Councilman Rick Russo. Council member Ron Smith agreed to be an alternate. Diamond Staton-Williams was to act as a consultant for the task force, but would not be required to attend meetings.

Since then, Russo has not attended all meetings. Staton-Williams has attended meetings with Selberg and Dellinger when Russo could not attend.

Only three council members need to be in attendance at each meeting, the mayor said during the council meeting.

"Three of you volunteered and one as an alternate, so those are really the only three that should be attending, and the alternate needs to find out if one of the other three are not," he said. "We should not be violating open meeting laws with that."

The mayor agreed during the council meeting to have minutes taken for the task force meetings and also agreed to post a notice of their meetings to the town's website.

Residents already had some access to the task force meetings. Since the task force held its first meeting, the mayor has offered, during monthly council meetings, to send the task force Zoom link to any interested resident.

Similar concerns stated in an email

Dellinger had also sent an email to the mayor and the task force in August asking similar questions to those he posed in the council's monthly meeting. His first set of questions, Dellinger wrote, were from a resident.

His email said:

"Based on the resident's questions:

1. Can anyone attend the Zoom virtual meetings? Once we return to in-person meetings, will the public be able to attend in person?
2. Will those not part of the Task Force be able to ask questions at some point during the meetings?
3. Will the meetings going forward be able to be recorded and/or where can the community find agenda/minutes of the meetings?
4. Is there a plan to add any information to the town's web page about the Task Force?"

These questions reference actions similar to requirements of the Open Meetings Law. The mayor responded to the questions and opened it to the task force to also chime in.

He said that the public can attend the meetings. Outside of the three council members and the mayor, the task force is made up of about 20 residential volunteers. The mayor also said attendees can ask questions or make comments.

As for the question of keeping minutes, the mayor has kept general minutes of the meetings and has sent them to all council members and task force members. In an email, the mayor agreed to have someone take minutes. In a responding email, Councilwoman Staton-Williams asked if Dellinger would take minutes for the task force. He declined.

The history behind it

The town's Racial Equity Task Force was originally created as a product of the deaths of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery and others this year. It was also formed after Smith filed a complaint against Staton-Williams, stating that her email exchange with Council member Ian Patrick discussing the town's statement on Floyd's death violated the council's code of conduct.

That complaint has never been dropped.

During the email chain discussing the statement, Dellinger, Patrick and Smith did not support the town's statement on Floyd's death.

Dellinger volunteered to be a part of the task force in the council's meeting June 10 when the mayor formed it. Before he volunteered, he made a few remarks. In those, he stated:

"I am willing to be a part of this committee because my expectation is that it will be a committee with dialogue. If I am to be told how I should feel or what I am to believe and how I should think, this will not work. If calmness and peace shall reign, much will be accomplished."

In an email to the mayor and the task force, he reiterated that statement.

"When I agreed to be on this task force, I said it would work if it was a dialogue, and I was not going to be told what to do or how I should think. If given that respect, I will in turn provide respect."

The task force has been collecting data from the Cabarrus County Sheriff's Office and from Cabarrus County School Systems. It has also held discussions with Sheriff Van Shaw and Lt. Chris Measimer.

The mayor told the Independent Tribune in an interview that, as far as he has been told, members of the task force have no complaints about the dialogue so far and have appreciated the candid discussions with county officials. (Independent Tribune, 9/22/20)

OCT 2020 Accuses Council Members of Making Insensitive Statements

NOTE: There is a word in this story that many readers will find offensive, but it is included because it is critical to the story.

HARRISBURG — A Harrisburg Town Council member is speaking out against what she sees as insensitive statements being made by fellow council members.

Council member Diamond Staton-Williams said council members Ron Smith, Rodney Dellinger and Ian Patrick knowingly supported the appointment of a Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) committee member who used code words such as "ebony" during discussions about housing developments planned for the town. She also said they are part of a group in town known for wearing red shirts, voicing opinions on development and attending council meetings.

Smith, Dellinger and Patrick all deny being part of any "red shirt" group.

The group, which started in Harrisburg in 2018, has been named the "Red Shirts". This is a similar name to the Wilmington Red Shirts who intimidated, beat and killed African-Americans to stop them from registering to vote in the late nineteenth century. This later came to a head in the 1898 Wilmington insurrection.

The Stallings Property

The Harrisburg group had its start in 2018 when the Stallings Road Project rezoning and annexation, which later became the Harmony Acres development, went before the town council.

"At that time in 2018, we were voting on a development off Stallings Road. This development would be in between Stallings Farm and Flowers farm," Staton-Williams said. "The land was owned by Mrs.

Stallings and her husband – her husband, who is an African-American. And of course, it's their right to sell the lands and they wanted to get the best price for it."

Neighbors to the property had been made aware of the potential development by a councilmember before the information had been made public.

Smith, who lived near the future development, took a preliminary project plan from a closed meeting with the developer and sent it to his neighborhood HOA in July 2017. When Smith was later censured by the town council, one of the reasons listed for the censure was distributing the plan. The censure resolution stated Smith's intent was to generate opposition to the project.

The racial slur

Neighbors started having email conversations with council members and staff discussing community concerns.

One email sent Tuesday, February 20, 2018 by current Harrisburg UDO Committee Member Michael Painter asked the planning and zoning director for information.

His email read: "I was just wanting to know more information about Ebony Acres and when the neighborhood meeting would occur with more information. I live in Stallings farm and very concerned about the decision to allow high density homes in my area."

At the time of the email the developer had not picked nor released a name for the development. Staton-Williams said Ebony Acres was a racial term in reference to Stallings being married to an African-American man.

Painter did not respond to the Independent Tribune's requests for comment.

"From my understanding, that's when it was named Ebony Acres, by the email that was sent to the town by one of the residents in those communities. But what I have heard from others is that it was actually called Nigger Acres," Staton-Williams said. "I have personally heard it from personal connections and then I saw it had been changed to Ebony Acres once we got the email to the planning and zoning director at that time."

Painter was not on the UDO committee until 2020 when the council voted to approve his appointment. At the time of the email, he was just a resident. When he was appointed to the committee, Town Attorney Rich Koch questioned Painter about the email. Painter said, he thought it was the name of the development and stated it was not an intended racial slur.

Cabarrus Democratic Party Vice Chair Rebecca Herrick said she saw a lot of discussions on social media and in the neighborhoods about the Stallings Road project at the time. She also saw and heard people refer to it as Ebony Acres.

"It turned into a racial thing where because she is married to a black man, they were all calling it Ebony Acres, and people were saying it was going to be Section 8 housing, which was never true," she said. "So I tried to put information out saying it wasn't true."

The shirts

When the project was set to go before the town, Dellinger, who was not on council at the time, and Jennifer Teague were both residents of a neighborhood near the Stallings property and asked people to wear red to meetings.

Dellinger sent out an email and Teague posted to her Facebook group.

"We decided as a show of solidarity for anyone that shows up to these meetings to wear red," Teague said. "In fact, I think our post in this group was if you don't have red, wear black. It was really a show of solidarity for a group."

When asked if she was aware of the Wilmington Red Shirts connection, she said no.

"That was never an intention. We never used that word. It was wear red. Come support your neighbors," she said.

When the council voted October 2018 to approve the rezoning and annexation of the Stallings property, there were at least 50 people in the crowd wearing red, Staton-Williams said. Dellinger was one of them. The rezoning passed 4-3 and the annexation passed 5-2. Smith voted against the rezoning and annexation.

But after the vote, the red shirt idea wasn't dropped, Herrick said. In December of 2019, she received an anonymous package containing a red shirt and a note.

Herrick — who helped Staton-Williams campaign three years ago — said she and Smith openly disagreed about a parks and recreation referendum for the November 2019 ballot. She had also been vocal against Smith's re-election and Dellinger's 2019 campaign for council.

The note read: "Please accept this as your personal invitation to the Harrisburg Town Council Meeting on December 9, 2019, for the induction of the new members of the town council, or the 'clown show' as some are calling it. Your red shirt has been included for you to wear. Hope to see you there... The Red Shirts"

Herrick had called the town council a "clown show" in a social media post.

Those people

Before the Stalling Property vote, Staton-Williams said she and Dellinger had met to discuss his concerns.

When he ran for council in 2019, she started to have some concerns.

"I guess last year, during the campaign, some of the talking points from some of the candidates running gave me pause, typically around housing and ensuring a specific demographic was taken care of," she said.

She stated that once Dellinger was on council, she was concerned over the way he referenced people.

"While on council, especially during our budget meetings this year especially — being an African American you pick up on when certain terms are used — so he kept saying we don't want those people. Those people. Who are those people? So I sent him a text message in the beginning of May and asked him," she said.

She said he made the reference in a budget meeting where council discussed canceling the Fourth of July fireworks show.

He did not respond to the text message but did send a voicemail.

He said "all those people" was in reference to the town's border to Mecklenburg County. He said social distancing would be hard if people came across the county line and stated she must have misheard him.

The June emails

In June, a complaint was filed against Staton-Williams by Smith stating she was in violation of the council's Code of Conduct due to her responses to emails where council members discussed a town statement on George Floyd's death.

That complaint has not been resolved.

In an email, Patrick stated he took issue with the phrase "social and racial injustices that exist in our country". He said terms like systemic racism could do harm to the Black community and cited Coleman Hughes, Larry Elder, Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray for his response.

Herrnstein and Murray were authors of "The Bell Curve." The Southern Poverty Law Center accused Murray of stating Black and other minorities are disadvantaged because they are genetically inferior — things "The Bell Curve" has also been accused of. Hughes, a black columnist, has openly taken issue with the Black Lives Matter movement.

Smith stated he did not agree with the statement citing concerns over how Floyd was represented, stating that, at the time of death, Floyd had fentanyl and methamphetamine in his system.

Dellinger stated he did not approve or disprove the statement.

Smith and Patrick also declined to approve Cabarrus County's statement on Floyd's death. Dellinger never made a statement of approval or disapproval.

None of the council members responded to the Independent Tribune's questions about those emails.

The point

Staton-Williams said that after what happened, specifically in June, it has been hard to trust Smith, Dellinger and Patrick.

"Everything the three of them do, I'm always going to be suspicious of. I'm always going to be cautious," she said. "And for a council and for a municipality to work well, those are things that shouldn't occur, especially when you have people talking about 'those people'," she said. "And usually when you have people talking about those people, it is about race, and I am a person of that race."

She said that while she did point out the connection between the group in Harrisburg wearing red shirts and the Wilmington Red Shirts, she does not believe everyone who wore a red shirt is racist.

"To people who truly did not know about Wilmington, did not know about the insurrection and how white citizens killed black people for power and land, you should absolutely step away from that as a supporter of that. You should step away," she said. "It is fine to have differing opinions about lot sizes. It is fine to have differing opinions about materials used on homes. There is a way to express your feelings and not be caught into something that is, at the root of it, racial or racist and rooted in supremacy ideology."

She said she feels a responsibility to let residents know, considering what has happened in the country this year.

"Seeing what is happening elsewhere, I have known about this Ebony Acres email since 2018 and that's my cross to bear. I should have made it an issue then," she said. "After the budget meeting and that 'those people' comment and constantly hearing little snippets of disdain for other races, I need to raise my hand. I need to wave my flag. I need to bring everybody's attention and make sure that people understand this is not right." (Independent Tribune, 10/12/20)

OCT 2020 Council Asks UDO Committee Member to Step Down

The Harrisburg Town Council voted to ask a member of the Unified Development Ordinance (UDO) Committee to step down in Monday's meeting.

The council had voted unanimously in its June meeting this year to appoint Michael Painter to the Harrisburg UDO Committee as a resident representative. But in an August closed session, Council member Diamond Staton-Williams brought forward an email Painter sent to the former planning and zoning director in 2018 that contained what some council members consider to be an insensitive term.

"We have talked about this for two months. One of the things that I talked about is our reputational risk of having a member of the community who emailed us the email regarding Ebony Acres to the town," Staton-Williams said. "And what that looks like for us as a community — having that member on the board knowing that there could be potentially racial implications behind that email, and having that person — or requesting — that that person step down off of that board."

The council discussed the emails in two closed sessions before decide to bring it to the October meeting. After the August closed session, the town attorney asked Painter for an explanation for why he called the development Ebony Acres. Painter stated that he had heard from neighbors in 2013 that Ebony Acres would be a future development at the Stallings property.

Plans for a development at the Stallings property were not brought to the town until 2017 and the land was not sold until later.

The email was in the town's possession since 2018. During the meeting, several council members stated they weren't aware of the email until after Council member Troy Selberg, who motioned for Painter's appointment, asked for the discussion about the email to be on the agenda for the Oct. 12 meeting. He said that the town can't turn a blind eye.

"I was the one who motioned to approve him and as we reach back and forth across the aisle to approve or disapprove people in the community. I felt at the time, with the information that I had, that Mr. Painter was a person that could bring solutions to the table," Selberg said. "Now understanding the climate that we are in, things are changing rapidly. I was brought aware through the task force we put in place with Racial Equity that by us turning our head, by ignoring some of this racial issues that happens in our community, we are no different than Philadelphia or Seattle. We are Harrisburg, North Carolina and we are bigger than that."

Selberg also stated that keeping Painter on the board could expose the town to potential risks.

"We are talking about a discussion differently from what we had in closed session, that we bring some of the awareness here to not only some of the potential lawsuits in five years from now that we may have because he is on this particular committee. And we as a board really didn't understand the implications," Selberg said.

Other council members expressed concern for Painter's career and asked to have him speak to the public.

"Given that Mr. Painter didn't know this discussion tonight, I would at least like to give him the opportunity to address the public. If he chooses to do so. We can still move forward, but at the same time, I think there is some interest in letting him be able to speak," Ron Smith said. "The concern that I have is that we have one email that could potentially disrupt this gentleman's whole career, good, bad or indifferent."

Mayor Steve Sciascia said if the council was concerned about what the exposure would do to Painter's career, waiting another month to have him speak before council would expose him more.

"He did respond back to Rich's email and obviously made the statement about 2018," the mayor said. "Do we think that he is going to speak publicly about this? To everyone's point, that is just exposing — right, wrong or indifferent — more by bringing him here to have that conversation. I mean we are doing it now to him. Bringing him back is going to put it out another month, doing exactly what we are doing right now."

Smith asked if the council would look back at previous emails of every member that currently sit on appointed positions and said he didn't think it was fair to judge Painter.

"The gentleman sent the wrong email, but I don't think it is fair to judge his whole existence off this one email," Smith said. "Asking him to step away, I guess there is no other choice."

Staton-Williams said the council's focus should be on how their decision affected the town.

"These are actual words that he said in an email to the previous planning and zoning director this is not about him personally this is about — I just want to re direct — this is about the town," Staton-Williams said. "We are all on a governing board to do everything that we need to do to protect the town. So if you are saying to me that this is about his career and anything else, I think we are on the wrong path. I think we all need to be looking at how this could potentially impact that town."

Council member Rick Russo made the initial motion to ask him to step down. Staton-Williams seconded the motion and it passed 6-1. (Independent Tribune, 10/13/20)

NOV 2020 Smith Complaint to Move Forward

A complaint lodged five months ago against Council Member Diamond Staton-Williams is set to go before the Harrisburg Town Council on Monday, Nov. 9.

The complaint has been open since June 5, when Council Member Ron Smith first made it. Smith sent an email to Mayor Steve Sciascia noting three instances in an email chain — discussing the town's statement on George Floyd's death — where Smith believes Staton-Williams violated the Town Council's Code of Conduct.

Smith said that after a phone conversation with the mayor where he voiced his concerns about Staton-Williams, he never heard anything back from Sciascia. Smith said he felt he was supposed to make a formal complaint, so he wrote the complaint in a June 5 email.

Smith mainly referenced Staton-Williams' response to a June 3 email, where Council Member Ian Patrick took issue with a portion of the town's proposed statement referencing systemic racism.

Staton-Williams responded to Patrick, writing: "Please use the sentence. My statement is from a person of color perspective. Thank you. Please do not email or call me to try and explain."

In his email to the mayor, Smith characterized Staton-Williams' response as disrespectful and unprofessional. He also stated that it shut down dialogue.

"Mr. Mayor, the above statement from Council Member Williams goes against the role for which we serve and serve our community," Smith wrote in his email.

The complaint was never formally brought before council and never had a resolution. During the town council's Oct. 12 meeting, Smith addressed the complaint after resident comments during the meeting.

Staton-Williams suggested that the complaint be put on the Oct. 12 agenda. Ultimately town staffers placed it on the Nov. 9 agenda instead.

There are three possible resolutions for the complaint:

The formal complaint can be withdrawn by Smith.

Smith, or any other member of council, can make a motion to approve or accept the formal complaint with no action taken against or requested from Staton-Williams. This means the council agrees that she was in violation of the Code of Conduct as outlined in the complaint but wishes to take no action or require any action from her.

Smith, or any member of council, can make a motion to approve or accept the formal complaint and request actions be taken against, or requested from Staton-Williams. Those can be determined by the person filing the motion, but the only formal action the town council can take against another council member is to censure them for their actions.

If a motion fails to support Smith's assertion of Code of Conduct violations by Staton-Williams, the formal complaint will effectively die without support or action from the council.

No matter which decision the council comes to, the complaint will be resolved at the Nov. 9 meeting — after five months.

The town council is also set to declare racism a public health crisis in the Harrisburg community at the Nov. 9 meeting. Staton-Williams asked the mayor during the Oct. 12 meeting if the town could make a resolution denouncing racism. Staffers later put together a proclamation naming racism a public health crisis and committing to end racism and improve the quality of life for all residents.

The proclamation is scheduled to be signed at the Nov. 9 council meeting.

The Town Council chambers will be open to 12 members of the public during the meeting. The 12 seats will be filled on a first-come, first-served basis. Members of the public will be required to wear masks at the meeting and will have to successfully complete a COVID-19 screening questionnaire and temperature check before being admitted to the Council Chambers. (Independent Tribune, 11/3/20)

NOV 2020 Smith Withdraws Complaint

Five months after filing a Code of Conduct complaint, Harrisburg Town Councilmember Ron Smith withdrew his complaint against Councilmember Diamond Staton-Williams during Monday's town council meeting.

His withdrawal came moments before the council's vote to dismiss the complaint.

In the complaint filed in June, Smith mentioned instances where Staton-Williams and Councilmember Ian Patrick communicated via email about a statement the town had drafted on George Floyd's death.

Patrick had taken issue with a phrase that referenced systemic racism. Staton-Williams had asked to keep it in.

Smith said that he had originally filed the complaint due to concerns over the council's ability to communicate — not to choose sides between council members.

Councilmember Rodney Dellinger commented that he agreed with Smith's concern over Staton-Williams' responses to Patrick in the emails.

"I am in agreement here that we need to have an open dialogue, if we can, and I would hope going forward that none of us ever say again, 'Don't call me. Don't email me' — or whatever the words were," Dellinger said.

In response, Staton-Williams explained why she asked Patrick not to call or email her to explain why he disagreed with the systemic racism phrase.

"I think that the dehumanization of Black people, the devaluation of Black culture and communities and the vilification of blackness itself has led us to where we are today," she said. "When I spoke about this in June, I said as a council we need diversity and equity training.

"Those items have been provided, and I haven't seen another councilmember step forward to attend."

Staton-Williams had also brought the possibility of diversity and equity training to council at a January budget meeting, but it was not heavily supported.

"As far as a better understanding for what I said, really, I set up a boundary for myself," she said. A boundary that sometimes, if you are not a Black woman or a Black person, it is hard to understand.

"It is a boundary. And in all actually, I probably saved the conversation from going any further down that rabbit hole. The people that were quoted in the email to me, these were men who cited — who really believe in racist, misogynistic theories.

"How do you think that makes me feel? Did anyone ever consider that? The only thing that was considered was everyone's ego and how it made them feel."

Smith said the complaint went without a resolution for so long because he was waiting on the mayor to take action. Smith stated several times during the meeting that he wasn't clear what the formal complaint process entailed.

Town Manager Haynes Brigman addressed Smith and explained the complaint resolution process.

"The Code of Conduct is an adopted policy of the town council, and the town council polices itself," Brigman said. "So when there is a proposed or claimed violation of that policy, it is up to the board to support that or deny that violation existed.

"So it is entirely up to the board, as I mentioned in the agenda packet tonight, the various options that council has. It is completely up to the individual councilmembers to decide if a violation took place and, if one did, what sort of actions, if any, would be taken against that councilperson."

Councilmember Troy Selberg put forward a motion to dismiss the complaint. Councilmember John Booth seconded the motion.

Before it went to a vote, Smith asked Selberg for his rationale behind why Selberg believed Staton-Williams did not violate the Code of Conduct.

Selberg said that while he believed the council was in need of learning to communicate better, he did not see Staton-Williams' actions in violation of the Code of Conduct.

"I believe this council needs to come together. I believe it needs to come together in a face-to-face summit where we can discuss our differences," Selberg said. "I don't think this is something that needs to be displayed in public as we are doing currently."

"And I do not see any Code of Conduct violation, therefore I am motioning that we dismiss this, and if you would like to continue this discussion, I would encourage all of us to get together and work better as a council."

Before the council could vote on Selberg's motion to dismiss the complaint, Smith withdrew his complaint.

"This complaint was independent of itself. It was not tied to the statement that Councilmember Patrick made. It was more about the ability for our council to have open dialogue and to be able to be collaborative," Smith said.

Smith said he was not looking for any particular action to be taken.

Ultimately, Smith said, he wanted to see closure to the complaint.

"Absolutely I want to see closure to this complaint. I certainly don't want to see it go on. I feel like we have had to see this and focus on this for a while," Smith said. (Independent Tribune, 11/10/20)

DEC 2020 Lack of Trust in Government Regarding COVID Vaccine

Diamond Staton-Williams knew as a child she wanted to be a nurse. It's important, she said, for her as a Black woman to represent her community in a field where Black patients don't often see themselves in doctor's offices.

Now a healthcare industry veteran of 17 years and mother of three, she's struggled with whether to vaccinate her family against COVID-19.

”It’s not any fault of our own. This country needs to rebuild its trust with the African-American community,” Staton-Williams said in a recent interview with the Observer. She is also an elected member of the Harrisburg Town Council .

As coronavirus vaccines arrive in North Carolina and across the country, many Black Carolinians are still on the fence about whether they’re going to vaccinate themselves and their families.

Mothers in particular have to weigh a heavy decision — whether to trust a system that has let them down time and time again.

The history of American medicine is plagued by accounts of experimentation and forced sterilization of people of color. Black women die at a higher rate during pregnancy and childbirth — as do their babies.

The COVID-19 pandemic has exploited existing disparities in healthcare. Black people across the country and in North Carolina have been one of the communities struck the hardest by the virus — but they’re the most leery of a vaccine. Rightfully so, says Staton-Williams.

”My friends who have told me they’re not getting the vaccine, that’s the main reason,” she said. “They don’t trust the science and don’t trust the government, and it’s because of the history we have with this country.” (Charlotte Observer, 12/28/20)



Black families in North Carolina are struggling with the decision to get vaccinated for the coronavirus, citing a history of distrust in the health care system — from forced sterilization to higher mortality rates among pregnant Black mothers, the Charlotte Observer reported.

”It’s not any fault of our own,” Diamond Staton-Williams, a nurse and elected member of the Harrisburg Town Council , told the Observer. “This country needs to rebuild its trust with the African-American community.”

Black people have historically not participated in vaccine trials. While recruiting people of color was a priority in the COVID-19 vaccination trials, the Observer reported minority participation “increased only slightly.”

Monica Fuller Johnson, a mom of two who works at the Charlotte-based Cardinal Innovations Healthcare , said she hopes to get vaccinated when it becomes available but will wait to vaccinate her sons until more research has been done.

”For me, the benefits outweigh the risks,” she said. “If there are disparities in health care and the health care that we [Black people] receive, the best way for me to prevent needing it is to prevent COVID-19.” (RNO, 12/28/20)

2021

JAN 2021 Profile

In late 2006, the life of Diamond Staton-Williams had become so full that she now describes it as “wild.”

In addition to parenting two young daughters - Caela, now 23, and Colby, 19 - she worked as a staff nurse in a Charlotte-area cardiac unit for Carolinas HealthCare System, now Atrium Health. She wanted to rise through the corporate ranks and concluded that earning a Master of Health Administration from Pfeiffer University would be the best way to do that. She enrolled in Pfeiffer’s Charlotte-based MHA program in January 2007 - just a few months after giving birth to a son, Chico. (Remarkably, he was with her when Staton-Williams took Pfeiffer’s MHA entrance test and “slept the whole way through it” in a baby carrier.)

After graduation from Pfeiffer in 2010, Staton-Williams was promoted several times at Atrium Health, serving as a nurse manager from 2010 to 2011 and then assuming leadership roles in clinical care for six years. Beginning in 2016, she became the director of Atrium’s Ambulatory Care Management department.

Her role in ambulatory care has her managing a staff of 28 people who coordinate care for patients after they leave the hospital. She builds upon what she learned during her master’s studies: “I’m able to look administratively at budgets and building different teams,” she said. “My degree’s concentration is in organizational leadership - which helps me build teams and move organizations along as far as change management goes.”

Staton-Williams praised Pfeiffer’s MHA program for employing professors with lots of experience in healthcare leadership. She said that she’s responding to changes in healthcare that they anticipated and helped prepare her for, such as the Affordable Care Act and Medicaid expansion.

Asked whether she'd encourage working mothers in similar circumstances to enter an MHA program, Staton-Williams said, "I'd encourage anyone to pursue their passion. But, you have to have good support, as I did, from your family, your university and your employer."

Staton-Williams felt supported by Pfeiffer during her master's studies. In 2007, the MHA program was designed in such a way that she attended in-person classes two days a week and completed the rest of her coursework in an online format. This hybrid approach made it easier for her to integrate her MHA course work into an already busy schedule of family commitments and nursing shifts.

"I'm very grateful and thankful that the school thought outside the box when it came to helping adults obtain further education," she said. "Many schools weren't doing that back then. You either had to go in person, or you were on your own."

At Pfeiffer, Staton-Williams studied challenging subjects. One of them was business finance.

"When you move into administration, that's something that you always have to consider and that you always have to pay attention to," she said.

If, as was sometimes the case, Staton-Williams had difficulty mastering the material, she could always call or email questions to a professor - and expect a prompt reply.

These days, Staton-Williams still leads a full life. She's a member of Pfeiffer's Alumni Board, a position that, among other things, enables her to advocate for graduates of Pfeiffer's master's programs in Charlotte and to learn more about Pfeiffer's Misenheimer campus, which, of course, she didn't know as a student.

She also sees her involvement on the Alumni Board as a way to "elevate the voices" of students and professors of color so that, for example, more of them consider attending or working at Pfeiffer. She'd also like to see more graduates of color on the Alumni Board.

When Staton-Williams isn't serving on the Alumni Board (or volunteering in numerous other capacities), she's quite active in local politics. A self-described "nosy" resident of Harrisburg, she began closely following developments of its Town Council several years ago. At first, she attended meetings or read meeting minutes "just to be aware."

In 2017, a "shift" happened in her thinking: Instead of just keeping up with government, she thought, why not have a say in it as well? She ran for a seat on Harrisburg's Town Council. She won, becoming the first African-American woman to serve on the council. She is running again this year and, if re-elected, would begin a second term in November.

Harrisburg, like many suburbs of Charlotte, has seen explosive growth in its population and commercial enterprises. Traffic is often heavy, making it difficult for motorists to get around. So, Staton-Williams is pushing for such improvements in infrastructure as wider roads and improved bridges. She's advocating for "smart growth" (i.e., the kind that doesn't diminish quality of life). She's also looking for ways to get more young people engaged in the political process.

Staton-Williams' involvement in health administration, politics and volunteering has raised her profile to the point where the press has begun paying attention. This past December, in an article about African-Americans in North Carolina being "on the fence" about whether they'll vaccinate themselves against the Coronavirus, The Charlotte Observer quoted her as saying, "It's not any fault of our own. This country needs to rebuild its trust with the African-American community."

In an interview for this article, Staton-Williams also said that African-Americans need to find ways to move past their skepticism. One way would be to forgive the acknowledged wrongs of the past.

"We can't be on the sidelines when people say, 'We need someone for this advisory board in the community,' " she said. "We can't be too busy to sit on that board or to run for office. Our perspective and our representation matter." (Stanly News and Press, 1/15/21)

MAR 2021 Code of Conduct Revised

In a last minute turn of events, the Harrisburg Town Council voted 4-3 at its Monday night meeting to strike a portion of its Code of Conduct that deals with council members' behavior outside official settings.

At last month's meeting, a complaint from a resident was read describing social media posts from Council member Ron Smith. The resident described Smith's behavior as bullying.

From that discussion last month, Council member Diamond Staton-Williams requested an update to the Code of Conduct's "In Unofficial Settings" portion to include virtual and social media platforms.

The proposed revision was: "The community is constantly observing elected officials every day that they serve in office. Their behaviors and comments serve as models for proper deportment in the town. Honesty and respect for the dignity of each individual should be reflected in every word and action taken by elected officials, 24 hours a day, seven days a week in-person, virtually, and on social media platforms. It is a serious and continuous responsibility."

The Code of Conduct has not been updated since May 2018, said Town Manger Haynes Brigman.

The council was expected to schedule a public hearing for April where the revision would be discussed. But Town Attorney Rich Koch clarified that state law did not require a public hearing for the Code of Conduct to be changed. The council could make a change without a public hearing, but the town has historically always held a public hearing when changing the Code of Conduct.

Instead of voting on the revision, Council member Ian Patrick put forward a motion to fully strike the same portion of "In Unofficial Settings" dealing with council members' behavior from the Code of Conduct.

Patrick said that he has always taken issue with that portion of the Code of Conduct and said he felt it violated his First Amendment rights. He said adding verbiage that would include council member behavior on social media was overstepping.

"Council will now be scrutinized 24 hours a day, seven days a week, including in-person, virtually and on social media, and those of you that have heard me talk about this before, I have had a problem with this section from the beginning," Patrick said.

He said that the council shouldn't be concerned with whether residents are offended by a council member's statements on social media.

"This is still a free country, last I checked, and there is a First Amendment, and it is my opinion that Section F 'In Unofficial Settings' is a clear First Amendment violation. It strictly prohibits what you can and cannot say."

Patrick also said that social media policies do not belong in a government Code of Conduct.

There are several municipalities in the United States that do have social media policies for elected officials. The city of Durham and the town of Mooresville in North Carolina are two municipalities that have extensive social media policies that cover both professional and personal accounts.

Council member Staton-Williams said that portion of the Code of Conduct was not a prior restraint on council members' speech, but it was a way to hold the council accountable for its words and actions in all settings.

"In order for us to be clear about the expectations and how to act and how to govern ourselves, it is best to protect ourselves and put that language in our Code of Conduct to help us all be better, be better as people. This is a decorum issue," she said. "You need to govern yourself appropriately, and I think that is what the Code of Conduct is asking us to do. You have a right to state whatever your opinion is and do what you must. But you do not have the right to be free from those consequences of your words. You don't."

Staton-Williams further said that the behavior shown by Council member Smith was not that of an official.

"From the original complaint from the resident, one thing I noticed in our Code of Conduct that was missing was our ability to self govern. As the resident said in an email to us earlier, this is a distraction by middle school behavior. So if you are going to go online and act like a middle schooler, we need to govern you like a middle schooler. I shouldn't have to do that, no one should have to do that," she said. "Why should we have to do that? You should know better."

Staton-Williams also requested more than once during the meeting that Smith apologize to the resident. Smith did not offer an apology during the meeting.

Council member Troy Selberg pointed out that town employees are held to conduct standards that include policies on social media behavior. He questioned why town council members should be held to different standards than town employees.

Selberg then clarified that Council member Patrick should have been aware of the Code of Conduct before he took office.

"This was in place prior to you running for office," Selberg said. "If you think you cannot uphold to it, I would ask that you step down."

Patrick did not offer to do so.

Council members Rodney Dellinger, Ron Smith, Rick Russo and Ian Patrick voted to take out the unofficial settings behavior portion of the Code of Conduct.

After the vote, Council member John Booth, one of the younger council members and a firefighter, offered a few words of wisdom to the council.

"Regardless of whether if it is in there or not, I have learned in my short life," Booth said. "My entire life has been in a fishbowl, with my professional career and even my role here — regardless of whether we have something on paper or not, to me, it has always been my job or my goal to always be the example — to be the standard and for people to want to look up to me. I think in this role, I think it is very, very important. So we do have a lot of full-time employees and members of the public, and I think it is beholden upon each one of us to try to set that example. So whether it is there or not, I just encourage everybody to just be mindful of what they say and try and conduct themselves in a professional manner." (Independent Tribune, 3/9/21)

OCT 2021 Q and A on Re-Election Campaign

Question 1: Why do you want to run for this local position?

Staton-Williams: I believe I am the right person to run for this elected leader position because there needs to be a different perspective at the decision-making table. I believe in helping others and caring for others through acts of service. Being in an elected leader position is an act of service to our community.

Question 2: What makes you qualified to fill this seat?

Staton-Williams: I am a nurse, a mom, a wife, a small-business owner who serves the community in multiple ways. As a nurse, I understand our connection to the health and well-being of all residents within our community. As a mom and wife, I understand the importance of education and family-centered activities to support our community. As a small-business owner, I understand the importance of connecting economic development opportunities to other small-business owners who are also our neighbors. I also support our community through volunteerism with the Cabarrus County Adult Care

Home Committee, serving with Communities in Schools, and other community-oriented organizations. Having a greater understanding of our connectedness makes me qualified for any elected leader position.

Question 3: What do you consider to be the most pressing issues for this community?

Staton-Williams: I believe the most pressing issues for Harrisburg are economic development, sustainable infrastructure growth, and youth development and services. I believe the most pressing issues for Cabarrus County are obtainable (supply), attainable (within different income ranges) housing options, transportation, and sustainable infrastructure. (Independent Tribune, 10/27/21)

2022

MAY 2022 Running For State House

Brian Echevarria won the Republican primary ticket for the N.C. House District 73 race.

Echevarria pulled 57.49% of the vote, coming out ahead of fellow Republicans Catherine Whiteford and Parish Moffitt, who held 22.39% and 20.11% of the vote respectively.

A financial adviser, Echevarria gained some social media attention earlier in the year after he spoke during a Cabarrus County Board of Education meeting. A lot of interest was placed on comments he made regarding critical race theory.

Echevarria garnered 3,104 votes to 1,209 for Whiteford and 1,086 for Moffitt.

Wednesday morning, Echevarria gave a statement about his primary win.

"Our community is fantastic, and their confidence in me is humbling," he said. "Our volunteers throughout the campaign made this victory possible. I am grateful to have such loving and capable people in my life."

The seat was left open after state Rep. Larry Pittman opted not to run for reelection. Pittman had previously stated he would not run for reelection following his fifth full term in office.

Since the redistricting process, District 73 has changed in its makeup. The district now encompasses part of the city of Concord to the town of Harrisburg — roughly what Pittman's former district covered.

Echevarria will run against Democratic candidate Diamond Staton-Williams in the November election. Staton-Williams is currently on the Harrisburg City Council. (Independent Tribune, 5/17/22)