

Councilwoman should live in Franklin

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It's been said that the road to ruin is paved with good intentions. That thought came to mind when I learned a Franklin Township Council member, Wandra Ashley-Williams, had decided to stay at her elected post even though she had sold her condominium in Franklin and established residency in Washington, D.C., after landing a job in that city. She has a new Franklin residence, but it's unclear how often she stays there or if she is an owner or tenant. Even more striking was her recent announcement that she would seek Franklin's mayoral post next year.

I commend her dedication to what she perceives as her duty to serve the township. However, I am compelled to respectfully ask that she refrain from all council activities until the Township Council or other fact-finding body determines to what extent she lives in the township.

This period of inquiry will give her ample opportunity to make clear exactly what her residency status is. If the inquiry finds she is not a full-time resident of Franklin, she should tender her resignation. Should she fail to refrain from council activities, be uncooperative, or refuse to offer her resignation if appropriate, the council should formally ask for her resignation.

What's at stake here is a very basic principle of good government: Those that have the power to make decisions for a community should share with the community the consequences of those decisions.

Councilwoman Ashley-Williams is exercising her power as an elected official; making decisions that will have far-reaching consequences for Franklin. But if she does not live in the township in any significant way she will not have to live with the consequences of those decisions in any significant way. It speaks to a situation of power without commensurate responsibility, decisions without proportional consequences.

At the very least, she has signaled that she now has less of a stake in the community by selling her township home, establishing residency out of state, and committing to a 400-mile, round-trip commute. Splitting her time between two homes points to a decrease in the depth of the daily life of the township. Elected leaders should be immersed in the life of the community they serve.

Some have tried to frame this situation around her ability or inability to attend council meetings. How many meetings she attends or misses is not the point. The point is whether she should be attending any meetings at all and wielding power.

Franklin residents have a right to expect their elected leaders to live in Franklin full-time, not part-time. Again, I applaud her good intentions, but fairness demands that she refrain from council activities until her residency is clearly established and resign if she is not a full-time resident.

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