

D.C. move won't force resignation

Home News Tribune Online 07/15/06

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FRANKLIN — Deputy Mayor Wandra Ashley-Williams recently sold her Franklin home to pursue a job in Washington, D.C., but will maintain a residence within the township to continue her term and commute between the two locations.

"Others have done this without a problem," Ashley-Williams said. "It's not an issue."

Ashley-Williams, 56, sold her condominium at 23 Sapphire Lane in Franklin Park and for the past couple of weeks has been making the roughly 180-mile drive to Washington, D.C., where she also has a residence.

She said that she will be wherever her schedule dictates and does not see the commute as a hindrance to serving the township.

"I've had other jobs that called for me to make long commutes or be in other parts of the country and it did not affect me," Ashley-Williams said. "This is absolutely not going to stop me from my duties and being deputy mayor."

Roz Sherman, who chairs the local Democratic Party, said she is fine with the move as long as Ashley-Williams maintains a legal residence within the township and is still able to handle the duties of her office.

"My only fear is that she will lose touch with the town," Sherman said. "It's a grueling thing to be two places at once, but if she is able to handle it and it does not affect her job, then I see no problem with it."

Mayor Brian Levine said that, while attending to the town's business is important, there is something to be gained from being a full-time resident.

"I'll be at Dunkin' Donuts and someone will come up to me with a problem or I'll be driving around and see something I think should be fixed," Levine said. "It's one thing to be at the meetings, but to be fair that is only part of the job."

Ashley-Williams has lived in Franklin for 29 years after growing up in Louisiana. She has been active in the community by serving on various boards and committees, including as president of the city's chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People from 1990 to 1996 and again from 1998 to 2000.

Ashley-Williams was elected to the Township Council in 2003 along with Brian Regan and Bernard Schrum and was sworn in on New Year's Day 2004. She was elected by the council as deputy mayor last year and sworn in on New Year's Day. Her council term expires on New Year's Eve of next year, and she made no indication how long she plans to stay in office.

"It may be two months or it may be two years," Ashley-Williams said. "We're just going to see what happens."

If Ashley-Williams chooses to resign before Sept. 1, the democratic committee will select three people to fill the seat and then hold a special election. If she resigns after Sept 1, the committee will appoint someone to the position who will serve out the rest of Ashley-Williams' term.