

# SOMERSET & HUNTERDON

Page 27 Tuesday, August 15, 2006

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The Star-Ledger

## Councilwoman keeping post despite taking D.C. job

Franklin Twp. official sold condo, has a local address, and will run for mayor in 2007

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Although she has sold her Franklin Township condo and taken a job in Washington, D.C., Councilwoman Wandra Ashley-Williams said she has no plans to resign and will seek an even higher municipal post.

"Not only am I staying in Franklin Township, I will be running for mayor in the 2007 election," Ashley-Williams stated in an e-mail yesterday.

The former head of the New Brunswick area NAACP, Ashley-Williams, 56, was elected in 2003 to a four-year council seat.

The recent sale of her home and new out-of-state job have caused some residents to question her ability to finish that term.

But after taking a job in Washington's corrections department and selling her home, "she gave the township clerk a new address where she said she will be staying locally," said Kenneth Daly, the township manager.

Ashley-Williams said her decisions to sell her house and take a new job were "personal." She said she remains dedicated to the township and her council duties.

Since she provided a local address on

Girard Avenue, there's no problem, said township attorney Louis Rainone. Many people work out of town or make lengthy business trips, and some have multiple homes, but they remain registered to vote in Franklin Township, he said.

The controversy comes in the midst of a split among township Democrats. Ashley-Williams is a stalwart of the "regular" Democrats.

But after the June primary, a group of self-described "reform" Democrats took control of the party committee. Trying to distance the local party from former state Sen. John Lynch and developer Jack Mor-

ris, they ousted then-Chairman Bill Grippo.

With a majority on the party committee, the reform faction could nominate replacements if Ashley-Williams left the council. Democratic committeeman Phillip Kramer said the reform faction has been trying to raise the question of Ashley-Williams' residency, "but we're having trouble getting anywhere with it."

Yesterday, Ashley-Williams took aim at another of the reformers, Councilman Brian Regan, saying his "announcement that I had sold my house and therefore was leaving was politically motivated."

"Ms. Ashley-Williams is misinformed," Regan said. "All I did was congratulate her on her new job. I didn't know about her house until later."

Regan said he has had "no serious discussions" about seeking the Democratic mayoral nomination to run against Republican incumbent Brian Levine next year, and has not made up his mind whether to run again at all.

Republican Chairman Bob LaCorte said candidates must swear they are residents of the municipality when filing to run

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ASHLEY  
-WILLIAMS

# COUNCIL

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for local office.

"If elected, residence in the municipality should continue for the duration of the term in office," La-Corte said, suggesting a concerned citizen could ask the local ethics board to investigate the facts.

"It's a question of where you consider your permanent residence to be . . . where you're registered to

vote, pay utilities," said Rainone, the township attorney. He said New Jersey case law has declared that residency "should be broadly construed so as not to deprive somebody of a public office."

Records at the Somerset County Clerk's Office show Ashley-Williams sold her Sapphire Lane condo on July 12 for \$320,000.

"If you have someone who maintains they still live here, the council really doesn't have any authority to declare otherwise," Rainone said.

New Democratic Chairwoman Rozalyn Sherman said a council member who misses eight consecutive meetings can be removed, but added she hopes it does not come to that.

Sherman said she has reached Ashley-Williams only by e-mail, but said, "She's a woman able to do a lot of things at one time. . . . I'm willing to work with her to give her the opportunity" to fulfill her council duties.