



Township of South Orange Village

Office of the Village President

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To Members of the South Orange Community:

Yesterday various news outlets broke a story involving a local school board member during a routine traffic stop that occurred on April 27, 2018. Video footage was also obtained and has been made available to the public.

First, I applaud the professionalism of Patrol Officer Shaun Horst, a sentiment I conveyed to him in person shortly after I was made aware of the incident. His actions, as captured on the dashboard camera, are to be expected by each and every officer that proudly serves our community as a member of our South Orange Police Department. Under the leadership of Police Chief Kyle Kroll, ongoing and proactive professional development efforts have been underway, including an emphasis on de-escalation training which occurred last year.

Next, the question has been raised about whether or not the school board member had used her status as an elected official or references to contacting me as a means to seek privilege. A call to me never occurred and I assure you that I have not nor will I use my position of influence to alter the outcome of any police operation.

Lastly, a derogatory and hurtful comment was made about our Police Chief at the conclusion of the traffic stop. A meeting had been requested by the board member prior to this incident becoming public and has since occurred. An apology has been made both privately and publicly and accepted by our Police Chief. While he has opted not to make any public comments to date, he has conveyed to me his personal desire to move forward together and focus his efforts on serving the South Orange community to the best of his ability — which he has proudly done for 30 years.

On a personal note, I ask members of our community to look within themselves and be a part of the healing process and identify constructive ways to move forward together. With every challenge that comes before us, we have a choice of whether to incite division or seek out opportunities to better understand each other and grow stronger. As we set examples for our youth, I hope it is the latter. Our standards must remain high, and accountability can take various forms, whether it be punitive or restorative — the question is which better serves our purposes. The South Orange community, along with our sister town of Maplewood, is known for having hard but much needed conversations about race, intentional integration, implicit bias, community policing, social justice, privilege — and the list continues. These conversations are not easy — and sometimes uncomfortable — but are absolutely necessary. The Village has not been without fault, and while this unfortunate incident has made its way into the court of public opinion, both public and private meetings occur regularly with members of our community who have the courage to share their experiences and work with us to improve public safety operations. These agendas and concerns are often guided by a desire to bring about constructive change for the betterment of all our residents and guests. For that, I am grateful.

I, along with my colleagues on the Board of Trustees, remain committed to partnering and working collaboratively with the community as we move forward.

Sincerely,

Sheena Collum
Village President