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HOA lodges ethics complaint against Milton official

By CHAMIAN CRUZ

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MILTON, Ga. — The White Columns Homeowners Association has filed an ethics complaint against Milton City Councilman Paul Moore for casting a recent vote on a matter that could be a conflict of interest.

Moore denies the allegations and calls the charge an attempt at intimidation by the HOA that he, himself, belongs to.

At its May 2 business meeting, the City Council voted to defer deciding whether to sign an agreement with White Columns so the HOA could recoup half of its purchase and installation costs for traffic calming devices in the neighborhood.

HOA President Tony Palazzo said at the meeting White Columns has had an ongoing “speeding problem” and is actively taking steps to make the streets safer for children and residents.

The 440-plus residence community is home to the White Columns Country Club, which has approximately 1,000 members and has reported problems with speeders. The road leading to the golf club, White Columns Drive, is a public street.



Last year, with city staff approval, the HOA purchased and installed the four radar feedback signs for a total cost of \$13,706. HOA officials later learned the city has a Traffic Calming program that, in certain cases, pays for half the cost of measures taken by neighborhoods to mitigate speeding on public streets. The cost-sharing program would have had the city reimburse White Columns \$6,853 to install the signs.

Appen Media obtained a copy of the 63-page ethics complaint, filed by Palazzo May 6, through an open records request. The complaint accuses Moore of committing seven ethics violations.

Palazzo states that because Moore lives on White Columns Drive, where three of the four signs are located, he stands to be financially affected by the installation and maintenance costs.

Additionally, Palazzo alleges Moore is an active participant in a homeowners group that dissents from the HOA on several issues and acts as a dual representative of that group's views by "misusing" his role as a public official. The claim stems from a letter from that group about a separate matter where Moore's name was added along with others in the community.

In his complaint, Palazzo says Moore should have disclosed his alleged conflict and abstained from participating and voting on matters about White Columns.

"[Moore], who has a personal, pecuniary conflict of interest and personal bias against the proponents, did not abstain and instead influenced the council to advocate against the proposal," the complaint states.

May 2 City Council meeting

Several residents spoke against the measure during an hours-long discussion at the May 2 City Council meeting, where elected officials ultimately voted 5-2 to defer a decision.



During the meeting, Palazzo alleges Moore suggested the city consider reversing its previous approval to install the radar feedback signs. But, in his 28-page response filed on June 8, Moore states no action was taken and clarified that he requested the signs be turned off so the city could conduct a proper speed study.

Public Works Director Sara Leaders said White Columns Drive and Treyburn Manor View inside the neighborhood meet the threshold for a cost-sharing agreement because at least 50 percent of vehicles exceed the posted 25 mph speed limit.

In the last 10 years, the city has reached similar agreements with six other neighborhoods. Additionally, because White Columns has a mandatory HOA, it is not required to get 2/3 approval from residents to make changes.

The City Council agreed to revisit the matter in August.

Meanwhile, city staff was asked to conduct the speed study in the golf section of White Columns, install additional stop signs at two intersections, collect information on speed-related warnings and citations issued by Milton police and encourage the HOA to survey neighbors' support of the radar feedback signs. It is the sixth speed study conducted in the neighborhood in 22 years.



Traffic calming devices in White Columns draws pushback
By CHAMIAN CRUZ

Alleged speeding problem

The speed study confirmed what the HOA already knew, it states in a May 26 letter to the City Council.

“The speeds in White Columns are excessive,” it states. “Motorists are traveling at reckless, dangerous speeds, creating unacceptable risks to the families who live in our community. Even more importantly, the latest speed study makes clear that additional traffic control measures are warranted, necessary and must be used to improve the safety of White Columns.”





The letter states that in a survey conducted among golf section residents during the first quarter of this year, half of the respondents said addressing speeding and road safety was “extremely or very important.” Another 26 percent said the issue was “somewhat important.”

According to the speed study, which covered a 48-hour period, 83 percent out of more than 2,000 vehicles that traveled through White Columns Drive toward Freemanville exceeded the speed limit, with an average speed of 29 mph. Heading away from Freemanville, 87 percent exceeded the speed limit, with an average speed of 32 mph.

On Treyburn Manor View, heading away from White Columns Drive, 78 percent out of nearly 800 vehicles exceeded the speed limit, with an average speed of 30 mph.

The study also showed White Columns Drive has the second most traffic on a residential street in Milton after Kennewick Road, and that 15 percent of the traffic on Treyburn Manor View travels faster than 35 mph, with multiple readings of more than 60 mph and 75 mph.

In a Dec. 17, 2021, meeting between Leaders, the HOA and local law enforcement, Police Chief Rich Austin said speeding issues in the White Columns area have increased “considerably” in the last couple of years, according to the meeting minutes.

Austin stated while all Milton police officers are responsible for traffic control, only two officers are dedicated to speed control in the neighboring areas. The other problem, he stated, is that radar needs 500 feet to capture speed, and White Columns Drive does not have many straight sections, making it harder to read and estimate drivers’ speed.





White Columns, Austin stated, is in a “perfect storm” of traffic problems based on the area and technical difficulties, adding that he would add three more officers to the traffic enforcement team in 2022.

Moore responds

In his response, Moore’s attorney, E. Logan Butler with Patterson Moore Butler, states Moore disclosed his residency early on at the May 2 City Council meeting and that Palazzo’s complaint is based on “speculation, innuendo” and “personal animosity” against Moore.

“Every count of this complaint is frivolous, baseless and simply intended to harass, intimidate and silence [Moore],” it states.

The response includes a signed affidavit from City Manager Steven Krokoff, who states that prior to the meeting he told Moore he did not believe there was a conflict. Mayor Peyton Jamison and five City Council members, except for Juliette Johnson, signed affidavits stating they knew Moore was a resident at White Columns.





Milton City Council member Paul Moore and former council member Laura Bentley at a Hopewell Road ceremony in November.

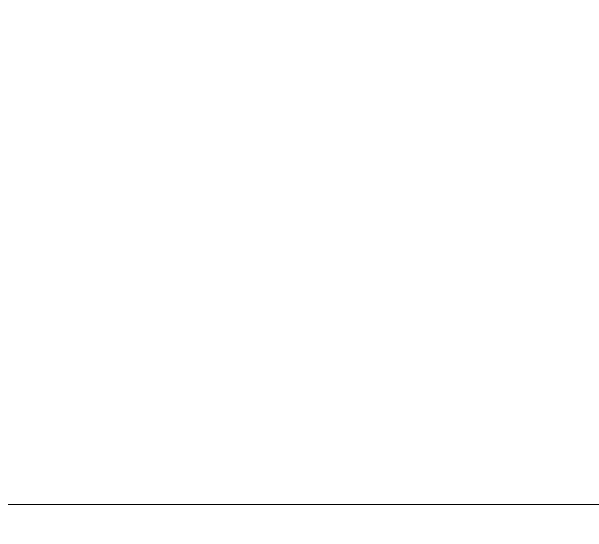
TIFFANY MORGAN/APPEN MEDIA

Additionally, it points out the HOA requested to meet with Moore, along with other city officials, last year to discuss the matter, calling it paradoxical.

“It seems the complainant has no problem involving [Moore] in this matter when complainant thinks it will support his end game,” it states. “... When you review all of the statements made by [Moore] at the meeting, you see that he was not pushing a personal agenda but was responding to opposition raised during public comment ... and he was following the requirements of the traffic calming ordinance in asking his questions.”

A proposed initial ethics panel meeting is scheduled for Thursday, June 30, at 10 a.m., according to Milton City Clerk Tammy Lowit.





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