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Mamaroneck planning board member fights ouster over conflict of interest charge

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Facing ethics charges involving two development projects, a Village of Mamaroneck Planning Board member could be ousted as the decision will fall to Mayor Thomas Murphy.

Following last year's recommendation by the Board of Ethics that Cynthia Goldstein be removed from the Planning Board, a hearing was held May 27 concerning her conduct. Accused of violating recusal and disclosure laws, Goldstein has denied all wrongdoing and even filed a lawsuit against the village in March to clear her name.

Murphy, as village mayor, must determine if Goldstein can remain on the Planning Board she joined in December 2018, according to state law.

Murphy said he would keep an open mind before reaching a decision.

"During the hearing we tried to let every voice be heard and let Ms. Goldstein fully present any mitigating factors that I would need to make my decision," Murphy said.

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A virtual hearing was held May 27 to determine whether Village of Mamaroneck Planning Board member Cynthia Goldstein (top, center) should be removed from the board she's served on since 2018. (Photo: The Journal News staff)

The ethics board, citing "overwhelming evidence," determined Goldstein's involvement in the two projects could be perceived as conflicts of interest.

"Each member of the Ethics Board is a volunteer and each has great reluctance to recommend removing a volunteer board member," the penal wrote in its recommendation. "However the evidence, coupled with Ms. Goldstein's attitude and conduct, has overwhelmed that reluctance."

The ethics board wrote in its Nov. 29, 2019 decision that Goldstein failed to recuse herself from the Hampshire Recreation housing proposal even though her property abuts the site of the potential development. She also failed to publicly disclose her proximity to the Hampshire Country Club, the ethics board stated. The project, which would have built 105 single-family homes on part of Hampshire's golf course, was unanimously rejected by the Planning Board earlier this year.

Goldstein's decision-making was again questioned over a Planning Board application to demolish and replace a home at 203 Hommocks Road in which the new owner wanted to extend a sewer line to connect to his home.

The ethics board criticized Goldstein's early involvement in the project because her husband, Steven, had advocated for months to have that same sewer line extended so more households in the village, including one owned by the Goldsteins, could hook into it and not rely on a pricier septic system.

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On June 14, 2019, Goldstein recused herself from the Hommocks project review, but did not disclose her direct interest in the project, the ethics board wrote. Goldstein sat on the board for one meeting connected to the Hommocks project even though it was suggested she step aside before that, the ethics board wrote.

Goldstein's attitude toward the ethics board was "unrelenting hostile" during the investigation and hearing into her actions, the ethics board wrote, and offered poor transparency to the public.

Goldstein responds

Goldstein, an attorney and accountant, said during last week's hearing the effort to remove her was a "gut punch."

"My goal is to always follow the law," Goldstein said.

She filed a lawsuit against the village March 1, criticizing the ethics board's decision as arbitrary and an abuse of discretion. In the lawsuit, she said an ethics board member should've recused herself from Goldstein's case because she and Goldstein had an apparent falling out.

Goldstein said she voted on the Hampshire project because she had no direct interest in the project and was one of hundreds to live near the site. She said during the hearing she only recused herself from the Hommocks Road project to put the matter to rest.

During the six-hour hearing, most speakers supported Goldstein, including village trustees and members of other volunteer boards in Mamaroneck.

Planning Board Chairwoman Kathleen Savolt said it would be a huge loss if Goldstein was kicked off the board, calling her "high caliber." She said she didn't think Goldstein needed to step away from either project despite living nearby because of how small the village is.

"I've publicly referred to her as and told people she should be called the Mother Theresa of Mamaroneck," Savolt said.

Hampshire attorney, David Cooper, urged Murphy to remove Goldstein.

Cooper criticized the village for not disclosing the ethics board's recommendation for about six months and allowing Goldstein to vote on the project.

"Ms. Goldstein was one of the most vocal opponents of the (Hampshire) Project during the Planning Board's review process," Cooper said.

David Propper covers New Rochelle and the shore towns. Reach him at dpropper@lohud.com and follow him on Twitter: [dg_props](https://twitter.com/dg_props) (https://twitter.com/dg_props). Our local coverage is only possible with support from our readers. [Sign up for a digital subscription here.](https://cm.lohud.com/specialoffer) (<https://cm.lohud.com/specialoffer>).

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