



[WUNA-Main] A letter of concern from Councilperson Sacks

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To: wuna-main@googlegroups.com

Sat, Feb 6, 2021 at 11:23 AM

To my fellow citizens of Urbana,

During the most recent meeting of Urbana's City Council, a 'A Resolution Committing to End Structural Racism and Achieve Racial Equity' (https://urbanaininois.us/sites/default/files/attachments/Resolution_2021-02-005R.pdf) was introduced by Councilpersons Shirese Hursey and Maryalice Wu. This resolution summarizes a long and sad history of racism in Urbana, the effects of this history on current residents of Urbana, and directs the City to reject racism and white supremacy while striving for equity—it was unanimously supported by all City Councilmembers and the Mayor.

During the public comment session, however, Christopher Hansen, a candidate for City Council, spoke disparagingly of the resolution. I am sure that I was not alone in feeling outrage that Hansen, a white man, spoke disparagingly of a resolution against racism and white supremacy that was authored by Councilperson Hursey, who is African American, a woman, and has multi-generational ties to Urbana.

Hansen's comments were, however, not a surprise, given that he works with an outside organization that has been described on the internet as extreme right wing and part of the 'Patriot Movement'. I have been informed that this organization has supported Hansen's recent lawsuits against the City of Urbana. The organization, named 'Edgar County Watchdogs' purports to advocate for 'good governance' but others have documented that their real goal is to destroy local governments in IL and install their people in elected and non-elected offices. If you read in the link below about the strategy and tactics that this group has used on other local governments in IL, I believe that you will recognize a similar approach being used here in Urbana. (For reference, see <https://edgarcountywatchdog.com/> and, <https://www.adl.org/resources/glossary-terms/patriot-movement>).

Urbana, our City, is under attack. With their personal attacks, distortions of truth, and persistent stream of unsubstantiated allegations, Hansen and his associates have become a regular fixture of public comment sessions during City Council meetings and many of our City's boards and commissions meetings. Their incivility has already harmed Urbana, and it continues to do so. Some City staff have left, and filling vacancies on boards and commissions has become increasingly difficult because people are understandably afraid of being targeted for merely doing their job well or volunteering their time and expertise.

What can we do? Firstly, vote! This is not a normal election. The future of the City is truly at stake. Moreover, if we look at the entire ballot, we can see that the problem is City-wide and not limited to just one Ward. Please, inform your neighbors and encourage them to vote also. Importantly, please attend and lend your voice to City Council meetings and/or meetings of boards and commissions of interest to you. And most of all, when you hear uncivil speech during the public comment session, please join in, speak up, and publicly state that personal attacks and hate-speech are unacceptable in Urbana. By standing together, we can reject extremism and reinforce that hate has no home here; that we as a community stand for and value inclusivity, civility, and making this a welcoming community.

Erik Sacks
Urbana City Councilperson, Ward 2

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