

May 7 Commissioner Meeting

In February, the first of several Town of Oriental employees gave his official resignation. Now a third of the entire town staff have given notice. All of this has happened just since the new board of commissioners was sworn in in December. But I believe the final straw for these employees can be attributed primarily to the actions of one commissioner, Bonnie Crosser. Commissioner Roe put it best when he told me 'we know that what happened to Drew and Tammy was a colossal screw up'. Most of the other commissioners have also shared this sentiment with me individually.

When we, the people of Oriental elect a commissioner, we entrust them with taking care of our town, it's residents and employees. We expect honesty, integrity and transparency from our elected leaders. And when a leader

we elect fails to meet these standards, we expect accountability. We expect the Board to acknowledge the mistakes that it's members have made. And we expect the Board make changes that provide assurance that it will not happen again.

I'm here now to ask this Board to provide in detail, the corrective action they will be taking to ensure that this does not happen again. This is not rhetorical – I want an actual answer from this Board before the next meeting.

As a Certified Fraud Examiner with over 30 years of investigative experience, it is my view that the actions of Commissioner Crosser appear to have been in retaliation against Tammy Cox for refusing to allow Mrs. Crosser to circumvent accounting and procurement policies. And that these retaliatory actions caused the resignation of two town employees putting this town at risk for regulatory fines and

additional costs the town would not otherwise have incurred. To date, the Financial Liaison, Mrs. Crosser, has found no financial misconduct, which is consistent with the findings of other audit work already performed. But the way she has executed her 'audits' is costing this town a fortune in both time, money, resources and reputation.

Mrs. Crosser has also demonstrated a pattern of behavior of repeated attempts to bully and disrespect fellow commissioners and shown an unwillingness to collaborate with some members of the Board.

What I am asking for is for the Board to publicly and on the record:

1. Acknowledge that Mrs. Crosser's actions as a commissioner and Financial Liaison that contributed to Drew Cox's decision to resign should have been risk-based and

vetted by the Board as a whole rather than determined only by Mrs. Crosser.

2. Acknowledge that Mrs. Crosser's public admonishing of another commissioner after the last meeting was inappropriate. There were witnesses so let's not pretend it didn't happen.
3. Explain in detail how the Board will hold Mrs. Crosser accountable. Perhaps at least by censure by this Board and by removing her from the role of Financial Liaison.
4. Explain what steps are being taken to assure the residents of this Town that this will not happen again. A good start would be to either outsource the financial liaison role to a qualified, independent third-party or to do away with it altogether as was originally recommended by the Town Attorney and the NC League of Municipalities and like every other town, city, and village in North Carolina has already done.

County Commissioner Candy Bohmert and Tourism director Marsha Palpham asked to meet with me out of some sort of concern that the questions I wanted the commissioners to answer and my alignment with others in this town that Mrs. Crosser should resign were going to hurt Croaker Fest and Tourism generally. It's pretty hard to connect the dots there – Chicago, New Orleans and Orlando have long histories of conflict in their city governments but no one stopped going to Disneyworld. But the County Commissioner and Tourism director began verbally abusing me before I even finished introducing myself. Commissioner Overcash was in the room with us and Mayor Sally Belangia right outside the door. They then tried to intimidate me for the next hour, even threatening to have me sued for asking questions of my elected officials, which is my right as a resident of this town.

When we finished, Mayor Belangia expressed her shock that what she had heard through that door was coming from a sitting county commissioner – behavior in clear violation of the Pamlico County Code of conduct Commissioner Bohmert just voted to approve in March.

Neither of them wanted to talk about how difficult it might be to continue to be an employee of this town without resolving these issues and course correcting this Board. Or that the remaining employees will still have to worry what might about what might happen if they fall out of favor with someone on the Board. Or how the reputation that this commission now has could make it even more difficult to replace the town employees who left. Who would want to take a job here for less money than just about anywhere else in this state knowing that they have to work under these conditions?

Jennifer Roe stood here before us recently and stated that we should never ask for the resignation of a town commissioner. I could not disagree more because that implies that there is no accountability for commissioners and that they are above the rules. We, the people, who elect our commissioners are the oversight for them and are the only ones who can hold them accountable for their behavior. If an elected commissioner cannot be trusted to act in the best interest of the town, asking for their resignation may well be appropriate in some circumstances.

As I have said before, I share the opinion of other members of the community that Bonnie Crosser should resign. But at a minimum, this Board has a responsibility to fix what is broken and keep this from happening again so this town can move forward.

