

**SPECIAL MEETING
SEWICKLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL
SEWICKLEY, PENNSYLVANIA**

MAY 1, 2020

The special meeting of the Borough Council was called to order at 6:10 p.m. with Council President Jeff Neff presiding. The meeting was held via video conference.

President Neff led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call showed the following members present:

Hendrik van der Vaart	Tom Rostek	Todd Renner	Jeff Neff
Cynthia Mullins	Julie Barnes	Christine Allen	Sean Figley
Larry Rice			

Also present were Mayor Brian Jeffe, Borough Solicitor Richard Tucker and Borough Manager Marla Marcinko.

The ground rules were posted on the screen and read out loud for the public.

Comments from Mayor/Council President/Council Members

President Neff read a prepared statement. He welcomed everyone and stated that the meeting was at the request of Council members Barnes, Rostek and Allen. He shared information on his upbringing in Sewickley. He has a long history with members of the community and spoke about their influence on his life. He spoke about his experience and time as a volunteer firefighter and his work experience as a property manager. In 2015, he was asked to fill a vacant seat on Council. He was elected as President of Council in 2018 and 2020. He commented on the positive work that has been done over the past few years. On April 20, 2020, business owners organized a rally in downtown Pittsburgh to express concerns about the ongoing lockdown of the State. He stated that businesses are being decimated and the length of the shutdown is a concern for many. He is currently running for State Senate and involved in these larger issues. He and his wife, Faith, attended the rally. He both spoke and took pictures with a number of people. Toward the end of the rally, he noticed a group of men and went over to speak with them. He was asked to take a picture with them and was holding his campaign sign at the time. When he later saw the photo, he realized that it looked "terrible". The group in the photo was the Iron City Citizens Response Unit (ICCRU). While he has denounced racism, he realizes that this does not erase image. He stated that he is not a member of this militia group or any other. He recognizes that many are disturbed by the image and realizes it was poor judgment to pose for a photo with the group. He denounced racism in all forms, as well as white supremacy. He is a person who likes, accepts and respects everyone. He is a caring person and does not have a discriminatory bone in his body. He made a mistake and apologized to Council and the members of the community and asked for forgiveness.

President Neff recognized Mayor Jeffe. The Mayor thanked President Neff and stated that he has no specific comments to offer at this time. He would like the audience to be heard and will offer comments at the end.

Mr. van der Vaart stated that he received many emails both in support of and opposition to Mr. Neff continuing to serve as President. He stated that most know Mr. Neff and are willing to look beyond the narrative that has been put forth. He spoke of Mr. Neff's experience in the community and the positive work he has done. He stated that he consistently prioritizes the long-term well-being of the community and makes difficult decisions. He is inclusive and welcoming and his integrity is beyond question. He had the support of full Council when he was elected as Council President. He stated that the larger discussion should be on increased civility and respect. He understands the concerns of citizens but recognizes the concerns represent differences of opinions and that we should be respectful of those. He asked that we not tear down the community for short-term political gain.

Ms. Allen stated that she has spent most of her adult life in Sewickley. When elected, she took an oath to obey and defend the constitution of the United States and the constitution of the Commonwealth of PA and carry out the duties of the office with fidelity. She takes this to heart and it goes beyond party affiliation. She has been contacted by dozens of people over the past 10 days. People are concerned and afraid and she shares their concern. Attendance at a rally shows an apparent disregard for public health and the Governor's stay-at-home order. She stated strong opposition to neo-Nazism and expressed concern with the association that has been created between Sewickley and white nationalism. This is a defining moment for Sewickley. Civil discourse is important, everyone deserves to be heard and we need to listen. Tolerance stops at neo-nazis and white nationalism.

Ms. Mullins read the following statement:

First, I would like to say I welcome this opportunity to speak directly to Council, to the Mayor, to Council President Neff and our neighbors who have joined us. And I would like to thank my council colleagues who had the foresight to ask for this meeting.

Since Tuesday of last week I feel like this council and this community have been ripped apart. For me, there's just an overwhelming sense of sadness that the respect and collegiality that we tried so hard to cultivate here has been damaged. The standard of leadership that I had come to rely on from you, Jeff, has disappeared.

In the past whenever I needed to speak to you, you responded to me personally often within minutes and almost always by the end of the day. And whether we agreed or disagreed, I was confident that your number one priority was Sewickley, our constituents, and our council. That changed on Tuesday a week ago. As the week wore on it became clear to me that your focus had shifted to your political campaign and that this community and this council have been moved to the back burner. That is why I issued a statement on Friday asking that you step down from your leadership position and hand the reins to someone else while you concentrate on your campaign.

For me, this discussion isn't about anyone's First Amendment rights or anyone's Second Amendment rights. And it's not a referendum on your character. This is about effective leadership not for the 37th District but for Sewickley Borough, our constituents and our council.

On Tuesday April 21st this militia photo dropped out of the blue at 7 o'clock in the evening. I was shocked. I thought, is this real? Is it you? I didn't jump to any conclusions. Then the photo circulated Tuesday night, Wednesday and most of Thursday while Council and the Mayor received an avalanche of comments and criticism. We finally got word from you on Thursday afternoon that you would have a response for

Council and the Mayor. Ten days and 70 odd emails later I had not received anything directly from you on this matter. Instead I had to hunt around Facebook and the newspapers to piece together your responses. I don't need to go over all of them.

I'd really like to focus on your statement to the Beaver County Times. You said that this is "a desperate attempt by Democrats on council to try and capitalize on the situation for their own agendas." And you go on to say that you have received so many positive comments that "I find it hard to believe these calls were actually being made."

I would like to point out that every single one of your Democratic colleagues on this Council voted for you in January 2020 to act as our council President for the next two years. It was a unanimous vote.

I would also like to point out that the majority of the dozens of emails and texts I have received asking for you to step down from leadership have come from Sewickley borough and my Ward 2 neighbors. I didn't make them up. These emails have come from neighbors on Thorn, Frederick, Grove, Linden Place, Little Way, Pine, Academy, Henry, Centennial, Canterbury and Backbone.

I said at the outset that this is not a referendum on your character. We have received many testimonials from area residents. Many of them have come from the surrounding area including Leet Township, Leetsdale, Ambridge, Moon, Sewickley Hills, Quaker Heights, Aliquippa, Aleppo and Oakdale. And that's fine. Those good people are part of the wider 37th District electorate that you're focused on.

But it is false to tell them that your Democratic colleagues are responsible for this situation and that resident calls for you to step down are make believe. Your actions have put us in this situation. None of us did. That photo was a branding opportunity for your campaign. That's what political campaigns are all about—optics, branding. And in the process of staging that photo-op you also branded this community and our council.

No one has said that you should have known what that patch potentially meant. I did not know, but once I did I made sure our constituents got the message that I condemn white supremacy, racism and hate in all its forms.

I don't know much about campaigning for the state senate. I suspect that this controversy in which you've painted yourself as the victim of rival campaigns and Democrats on council has fired up a certain segment of the primary electorate that you need to turn out for you. This has garnered you a lot of attention. It seems to me we have been used as pawns in a political campaign. And when I say "we" I mean our residents and this council.

There have been acts of politically motivated vandalism in Ward two. You know that. We've discussed it. Threatening letters have been sent to neighbors. That's been reported to the mayor, council and the police chief. Now we have a militia group following these proceedings and participating on your campaign Facebook page. They say they "have your back."

We are going to have an election. Soon residents will begin to display yard signs. My question is will that be safe? Or will we see more hateful letters and more vandalism? Will we see folks with semi-automatic weapons walking down Beaver Street? Will we see them in Council chambers? Will that make us safer? Will that enhance our image?

This morning I reread all of the emails I received. There isn't one that denigrates your character. Many of them say that they have known you for years and you're a good guy but that they do not want this image associated with our town. It's not your character they're questioning, it's your judgment—and ours. The consistent theme is that this was a bad decision that casts our town in a bad light and that Council's failure to act is an expression of tacit support for divisiveness, extremism and hate.

And that is why I contacted you directly to say that I prefer we elect a new president of council.

Thank you for listening.

Mr. Figley stated that he has known Jeff for 40 years. He stated that he has always been open-minded and fair and has strived to be a part of the community. He read the article in the City Paper and also looked at the Anti-Defamation League's website. He stated that not everyone uses the valknot as a symbol of racism. He also looked at the Intelligence Service of the Federal Republic of Germany and found nothing on the ICCRU. He went to their Facebook page and there were photos of members without masks, which included minorities. He sent an email to the ICCRU and received a response, which he shared with Council. Their bylaws prohibit sexism, racism and other discriminatory behavior. He received 70+ emails, which were fairly evenly split between support for Mr. Neff and those who wished to see him step down. He shared some of the bylaws of the ICCRU and stated that they have a non-discrimination statement. He stated that the ICCRU was not at the protest to scare anyone. Most of them were small business owners. He stated that Mr. Neff served as a volunteer firefighter for 28 years FD, 15 of those as Chief. He is involved with the QV Football Association. He volunteered to serve on Borough Council and has been twice elected to the office of Council President. Mr. Neff stepped in following the retirement of Mr. Flannery. To label his action as poor judgment is a subjective opinion. At worst, he made a mistake.

Mr. Renner stated that he has known Mr. Neff for decades and has had the privilege to serve with him. He stated that no Council member has worked harder. He stated that Mr. Neff has his support and he accepts his statement, explanation and apology.

Ms. Barnes read the following statement:

First, I want to say, it is not my interest or my job to judge anyone's character. And that is not what I'm here to do.

What's guiding me is the ethical principle that public service is a public trust. Here's what that means. When we get elected, everyone in Sewickley, whether they know us well or not, has entrusted us with power, and they expect us to exercise that power in their interests. That makes us stewards of the public trust.

As stewards of the public trust, we have the duty not just to act in the public's best interest, but to avoid even the appearance of impropriety. So that's where the problem is for us.

It's not about Jeff's intentions when he stood for the photo. It's that the menacing nature of the photo itself has eroded the public's trust in us. That's the problem.

That loss of trust is clear to me from the dozens of emails that I've received over the past week.

We all know that trust takes time to rebuild. And as public officials, it is our duty to do what we can to restore the public trust. We do that by reassuring the people who were scared by this photo that it's menacing image does not represent our character or our leadership. The only credible, substantive way that we can do that is to elect a new president. That's why, even though it's very difficult, it is the ethical duty of this Council to either accept Mr. Neff's voluntary resignation or to vote for a new President.

Mr. Rice stated that he understands Mr. Neff's regrets in judgment and appreciates his apology.

Mr. Rostek read the following statement:

Before the public speaks, I would like to remind everyone that our community is a very diverse place. We have a wide variety of life experiences here in Sewickley. Our community is diverse in age, race, religion, sexual orientation and income. We have residents that have lived their entire life here and those who have newly arrived. Everyone's views are shaped by their life experiences so please listen to each other. Our council members also have different life-forming experiences. Please be respectful of our views as well. After this meeting, I expect that everyone will understand the position of the public and the members of council that represent them as well as the actions that they view as a correct response. Short of some sort of unexpected revelation, I view that this meeting will bring this issue to a close.

Public Comment

John Dunn - 608 Straight St, Sewickley – Served on Council for 2 years and has known Jeff for more than 20. Up until today, Jeff has been the only one to denounce racism and white nationalism. He has expressed remorse and stated that he has no affiliation with the ICCRU. He thinks the attack on Mr. Neff may be motivated by angry business owners or members of Council who have an ax to grind. No one devotes as much time as Mr. Neff to work on Council.

Rico Elmore - 302 Reno St, Rochester PA – He stated that Mr. Neff was welcoming and introduced him to people in the community. He spoke about his service to the community. He stated that he was not acting on behalf of Borough Council when he attended the protest. He expressed his support of Mr. Neff.

AlyssaBeth Parnell - 112 Broad St, Leetsdale – She stated that she knows Mr. Neff through local sports programs and has been impressed by his integrity over the years. He has always been willing to step up to serve when needed. She stated that Mr. Neff always seeks the facts and that the photo was not a great portrayal of who he is. She stated that he was neither affiliated with nor knew the group. The ICCRU was there to stand up for their constitutional rights. She understands how people would feel threatened but their actions were not illegal. She stated that the ICCRU has denounced white supremacy. No laws were broken and constitutional rights were being exercised.

Ann Murphy - 245 Summerlawn Dr, Bell Acres – Stated that she has known Jeff for a short time and sees him as hardworking and offered her support of Mr. Neff. She also attended the rally. Many are suffering and it's painful. She relayed her observation of Mr. Neff that day. She saw the ICCRU and saw Mr. Neff walk down Grant Street and talk to a group of police officers. He then continued down Grant Street and encountered the ICCRU. She saw that he took a picture with them and the encounter lasted less than five minutes. She stated that people are protesting because citizens are eager to get back to work and the protests are bringing awareness. She

asked that people reconsider any ill feelings toward Mr. Neff. The ICCRU is a fine group and are not white nationalists.

Beth Tarasi -1200 Camp Meeting Road, Bell Acres – She is a lifelong resident of Sewickley and was surprised at the photo. She has nothing against Mr. Neff and believes that this was a bad judgment call and it has reflected poorly upon the town. She has received a lot of phone calls about the photo. She requested that Council consider adopting a resolution denouncing white supremacy. She believes it would speak volumes for the community and regain trust. The ICCRU is affiliated with white supremacy and carrying weapons. The protest was against the Governor’s stay-at-home order. She wished Mr. Neff luck and hopes he chooses to conduct himself in a different manner.

Brianne Abraham - 149 Orchard St, Leet Twp – Commented that the impact on the community from the photo is shameful. We shouldn’t make judgment calls based upon someone’s physical appearance. Those in attendance at the rally did nothing illegal and were within their constitutional rights. She hopes the community can come together and stop making judgment calls based upon fear. One mistake should not erase all the good Mr. Neff has done for the community. She commended Mr. Neff for looking past physical appearance and bridging gaps with people who look different.

Pamela Squires - 630 Fountain St, Sewickley – Read the following statement, which she sent to Council:

I grew up originally in Edgeworth and then we moved to Sewickley. My father, Jack Squires, sat on the planning commission for years. He was instrumental in establishing the historical zoning for our town as well as designing historically correct street lighting that still throws a beautiful glow on our village streets at night.

I can still recall our discussions around the dinner table of how much my father enjoyed the camaraderie of the people on the commission. It was a non-political group of people who wanted nothing more than to do better for our town of Sewickley. I called him yesterday and explained what was happening today with the president of council. He was very saddened that something like this could even be taking place. This all began as something that should not of been an issue in the first place and I’ll tell you how this all started for my part.

Council-member Christine Allen, who has taken the Oath of office to represent her Constituents, I am one...lives on Hill Street has been unlawfully blocking the sidewalk for more than three years. Since I am disabled and have been in and out of the hospital this year, I have had to walk my dog mostly in the evening when I have the energy to do so. Since Christine Allen has continued to block the sidewalk on Hill Street so I have had to walk around her car into the street to walk my dog. One evening I had to walk around her car and was almost hit by a neighbors car who is backing up and really didn’t expect to see someone in the middle of the road. No harm was done, I was not hurt it, there was no problem, however it opened my eyes. What struck me was that she was not only doing something illegal for years but it is against the American Disabilities Act which clearly states it is unlawful to block a city or any kind of municipal sidewalk. We have a neighbor in our neighborhood who is wheelchair-bound. She cannot even go onto Hill Street because Ms Alan’s car is completely blocking the sidewalk. I began to notice that children who were playing on the sidewalk had to go out onto the street, around her car. Mothers walking little children in strollers had to go around into the street because her car was completely blocking the sidewalk. I felt the best avenue to go would be to first

talk to her and ask her to move her car. I did, no response. I rightly felt the next person I should speak to is the president of the Council, Jeff Neff since Christine Allen sits on the Council. I did not feel it was a police matter. In my mind it was a non-issue, just move the car. Ms. Allen had no intention of doing that.. I asked Jeff if he could kindly intercede for me and ask Christine to please move her car forward or to park it in the street. He did so which was absolutely the right thing for him to do.

Since that time Christine Allen has declared war against Jeff Neff. The slander of him began in earnest. I have never seen something such as blocking a sidewalk illegally and against all codes of American disabilities act be a seed for something that has become so nasty as to slander another human being in such a way that the council has proceeded to do to Jeff Neff. This is 100% politically motivated. Christine Allen is a Democrat and Jeff Neff is a Republican. Jeff Neff has earnestly served our town for over 30 years, risking his life to save our homes, our lives and the lives of our children. He put in thousands of volunteer hours before he became the chief of the fire department. Now it is his honor to run for Senate and I for one am so proud that one of our own Sewickley people have the honor and a privilege to run for such a prestigious office.

When I read the last article in the Herald, I was frankly disgusted that our Mayor would even go so low as to even consider for one moment removing Jeff Neff from the president of the Council. Jeff Neff has more of a back bone than anyone I know. I ask the Mayor and Council to do the right thing. To shut down the ugly gossip, the ugly slander and the untruths that are deliberately ruining Jeff Neff's reputation and livelihood. I want facts, no rumors, no slander, facts and I support Jeff 100%.

Meghan Sheridan - 521 Straight St, Sewickley – Has been a resident of the Borough for over a decade. This about civil discourse. The exchange of ideas without the threat of violence. It is fundamentally an anathema to the role of an elected official to associate with a militia, which represents a threat of violence. She called for the removal of Mr. Neff as Council president. She stated that this moment calls for a quick refresher on the difference between the values of accountability and loyalty. All criticism of elected officials cannot be characterized as a witch hunt. She stated that she is thankful for Mr. Neff's apology tonight and that it should have been made a week ago.

Christopher Gyening - 4 Crescent Ave, Sewickley – Has lived in the Borough for 2 years. He stated that Mr. Neff has always been responsive to his requests for assistance. The reason to have Mr. Neff serve as President should be based on his character. He believes this to be politically motivated and stated that the character of politicians is often attacked. He stated that Mr. Neff was trying to build bridges at the rally and that everyone recognizes that he is a good person. He stated that Sewickley is an outstanding community.

Nigel Broadbent - 548 N Highland Ave, Oakdale PA – Lives in Oakdale, PA, which is part of the 37th district. The US Constitution protected him through his naturalization process. He stated that 1st and 2nd amendment protections are on trial today. It is alleged that the ICCRU was a militia and the valknot is associated with white nationalism. People have stereotyped character and no crime was committed. Mr. Neff is not afraid to make difficult decisions. He suggested that a meeting should be held on the conduct of Ms. Allen.

Richard Kain - 302 Thorn St, Sewickley – Stated that he grew up in Squirrel Hill and knew victims of the Tree of Life shooting. He commented on the chilling effects on political discourse which occurred at the rally. He agreed that this matter merits an investigation by

Council and it is doing its job. Mr. Neff should be given the benefit of the doubt based upon his years of public service. He stated that there was no imagery of Sewickley in the photo.

Dave Wagner - 304 Peebles St, Sewickley – Stated he emailed his concerns to full Council and has spoken with most members. He reviewed the minutes from the last Council meeting to ensure local government was still focused on local issues. He stated that the community is now embattled in second amendment issues. He commented that he heard the first unconditional apology from Mr. Neff tonight. He stated that Mr. Neff brought national identity politics to our little village. He commented that Mr. Neff is a nice guy but exhibited poor judgment and should not serve as Council President.

Kara O'Neill - 123 Hilltop Lane, Sewickley Hills – Has lived in the Sewickley area for 15 years. She has gotten to know the Neff family through their children. While she is not a resident of the Borough, she is a member of the Quaker Valley community. She stated that Mr. Neff has served everyone and sees this as a political issue. She acknowledged that the photo was polarizing. She stated that people who are frightened by people carrying firearms is an opinion. This is not intimidating for many people. The Constitution gives them the right to carry firearms and what they were doing was legal. She stated that people who wish to see Mr. Neff removed should exercise their rights at the polls. She believes Ms. Allen is leading the charge and there are ulterior motives.

Darlene Dech - 823 Ackley Terrace, Sewickley – Mr. Neff is her representative in Ward 3. She stated that she does not wish to demonize Mr. Neff and does not believe he is a racist. She stated the importance of recognizing the difference between intention and impact. She suggested that the entire Council participate in cultural enlightenment programming of some type. Her concern is with Mr. Neff's judgment. Anyone has the right to protest but not at the peril of the safety of others. She commented that he defied state of emergency orders in the midst of a pandemic and ignoring concerns regarding transmission. Science shows that one contact quickly becomes many. She stressed the importance of supporting candidates who support science. She stated that the majority of the population support stay-at-home orders.

Peggy Standish - 626 Pine Road, Sewickley – Ms. Standish did not speak but submitted a statement to the Borough Manager during the meeting, which she requested be forwarded to Council.

Miriam Rader - "Welcoming Everyone" – 838 Nevin Ave, Sewickley – Welcoming Everyone is a non-partisan group that seeks to bring together people from different backgrounds and beliefs from the Quaker Valley area. They find common ground by coming together and seek to overcome that which divides us. Groups that espouse white supremacy symbols and doctrines are absolutely counter to what their organization stands for. She commented that it was disturbing to see the Borough Council President with this group. She believes he used poor judgement but recognized that there is still room for civility and discussion. She was glad to hear Mr. Neff denounce white supremacy and called on him to replace his original statement with one that denounces white supremacy.

Ms. Marcinko requested a consensus from Council as to whether to allow group chat. The consensus of Council was to disable group chat so they could focus and concentrate on hearing what they speakers have to say.

Anne Ronce - 540 Academy Ave, Sewickley – Ms. Ronce posed the following questions to Mr. Neff. Had he received advance notice of the attendance of the ICCRU at the protest? Has he sworn an oath to any other organization, other than Borough Council, and, if so, what are they?

Mr. Figley received a response from the ICCRU to his email and she did not. She stated that the valknut is not banned by the government of Germany but it is listed as being associated with white nationalism, white supremacy and racism. She questioned Mr. Neff's priorities since announcing his decision to run for State Senate and that he appears more concerned with his candidacy than the needs of the Borough. She stated that the current discourse demonstrated the need to livestream Council meetings. Mr. Neff stated that he had not received advance notice of the ICCRU attendance at the protest. He stated that he took an oath when he joined the Cochran Hose Company and maybe Key Club in high school. Ms. Ronce stated that the ICCRU swears an oath to take up arms against the government. Mr. Neff stated that he did not know why she did not receive a response from the ICCRU.

Todd Hamer - 720 Hopkins Street, Sewickley – Stated he has met Mr. Neff a few times. He moved to Sewickley 13 years ago. He expressed concern that Mr. Neff had ignored the stay-at-home order and believes that this did not set a good example. He stated that he has no personal issue with Mr. Neff but believes that if leaders cannot follow rules related to health and safety, why should the community follow the rules set by Council. He feels this was a “bad look”, the apology was a non apology and blaming democrats is unacceptable. He stated that he will lose all respect in community leadership if Council does not take action. He commented that Mr. Neff “liked” something negative that was said about him on social media. He commented that Mr. Neff should step down or Council should obtain some training, at the least.

Erica Pirrung - 720 Hopkins Street, Sewickley – She stated that she emailed every Council member individually, as well as the Mayor. She only received responses from Ms. Mullins, Ms. Barnes, Mr. Rostek and Ms. Allen. She commented that she was disappointed that Mr. Neff defied the Governor's stay-at-home order and did not practice social distancing. This did not represent good leadership and she expressed that it was shameful to put vulnerable residents at risk. She felt his apology was too late and that he did not accept responsibility. He did not regret his actions and was only sorry that others were offended and then attacked other members of Council. She commented that everything you do matters when you hold public office. The President of Council represents Sewickley. His actions brought negativity to the community and divided everyone.

Marilyn Mulvihill - 111 Victory Lane, Leetsdale – She expressed her appreciation of Mr. Neff's service to community. Her concerns are that Mr. Neff posed with a group of men with unsecured assault rifles. She stated that this is very intimidating to people, particularly survivors of gun violence. She commented that Mr. Neff had the opportunity to come out and immediately oppose white nationalism, which he did not do. Mr. Neff violated the Governor's order, which sets a bad example. He had an opportunity last Wednesday to disavow or condemn hate speech or white nationalism. She believes his actions have sullied the reputation of Sewickley and he needs to step down.

Sharon Pillar - 824 Centennial Ave, Sewickley – She thanked Mr. Neff and Council for undertaking this process. She has lived in the Borough since 2004. She found the photo disturbing and alarming and commented that militia are often associated with white nationalism and white supremacy. Those running for office should be aware of optics. Sensitivity and caution are necessary in leadership roles. She expressed concern that he did not denounce white nationalism in his original comments and was disturbed and alarmed that he protested the Governor's order. This is not acceptable behavior for a trusted elected official and she urged him to step down.

Jeevan Pillar - 824 Centennial Ave, Apt 1, Sewickley – He stated that Mr. Neff ignored science related to the guidance for social distancing and stressed the importance of listening to science

and health care workers. Mr. Neff stood with a militia group who wore patches linked to white supremacy. He stated that he does not think Mr. Neff is a racist and believes he has a high level of integrity. However, the action is inexcusable in 2020 and he should step down from Council.

Hadley Haas - 1309 Linden St, Glen Osborne – Commented that Mr. Neff made a political decision to attend the rally. He posed for a photo with an armed militia group. He is running against a moderate that has the support of the local Republican party. He appealed to a radical, anti-establishment wing as a campaign strategy. She expressed concern about his ability to lead a bipartisan Council in a diverse community. She felt that the matter could have been put to rest if he had denounced white nationalism and supremacy early on. She stated that he blamed democrats and minimized the concerns of others and did not appear sincere. She feels that protesting is a slap in the face to the front line health care workers. She stated that a person's life is not defined by one decision alone and she thanked Mr. Neff for his service. She requested he step down as Council President.

Gerri Vonhofen - 660 Charette Place, Sewickley – Stated nothing in the photo is illegal and this is about personal perceptions of appearance and twisting things to fit an agenda to get rid of Mr. Neff. She stated that it is irrational behavior to try to punish someone for your own perceptions and opinions. While Sewickley is an inclusive community, some are very intolerant and narrow-minded. Tolerance includes forgiveness. She stated that Mr. Neff is a dedicated and truthful man and the personification of integrity. This should be enough for people to dismiss this matter. She stated that he has already apologized and stands for what is right.

Matt Galluzzo - 729 Nevin Ave, Sewickley – Stated that this is not about character but choices, optics and leadership. In this case, personal political ambitions and activities collided with the responsibilities of a Council President. He should be serving as the face of this community. The negative optics could have been avoided. He called on Mr. Neff to step down or Council to follow the process for removal.

Sean Logue - 27 W Main St, Carnegie – Stated that he attended the rally which was about the Governor shutting down PA and on a timeline that is synonymous with Philadelphia and New York. He stated that the Governor's order is not law. He stated that the protesters were within their rights and the crowd was diverse. He met the ICCRU and stated that its leader is Latino and at least 2-3 black males are members. He said that race was never discussed and they did discuss the need for small businesses to reopen. He stated that the outrage was fueled by the City Paper. He sees this as a political hit job on Mr. Neff and that the progressive movement is in a forever war with whoever is in their way. People want to get him out because he is a threat. It was his constitutional right to pose for a photo and he lawfully exercised his constitutional rights. He stated that this is fake outrage.

Jed Vonhofen – 660 Charette Pl, Sewickley – Stated that Mr. Neff did nothing wrong and did not break any laws. He questioned how Council would deal with another Council member who had broken the law with parking or blocking a sidewalk. He stated that Mr. Neff's composure through the meeting speaks to his leadership.

Michael Brown - 454 Backbone Rd, Sewickley Heights – Stated that he switched to the Republican party after he met Mr. Neff. Mr. Neff has stood behind him and his family. He stated that no one has questioned his motives or credibility and that he is the right guy to lead Sewickley.

Rob Riker - 234 Graham St, Sewickley – He thanked Council for their service and particularly Mr. Neff for conducting the meeting with dignity. We need to face challenges without partisan

grandstanding. Sewickley has been successful in keeping larger political rancor out of its Chambers. Mr. Neff needs to consider whether the community is served well by his actions. Choose politics or a role on Council.

Karen Schmidt - 762 Orchard Terrace, Sewickley – Has lived in Sewickley for 15 years. She does not know Mr. Neff well but likes him. She stated that her husband had served on Council. She stated that Mr. Neff supported protesters, which she does not support. Freedom comes with consequences. She stated that he should not have violated the stay-at-home order, which requires social distancing. She agreed that Mr. Neff has made great contributions to the community. Being a formal representative of the Borough sets him apart. As a small business owner in Sewickley, she feels that any association of the Borough with an armed militia will be harmful to her business. She stated that he should step down as President and that she does not feel comfortable with him representing the Borough.

Tim Peace - 6 Leet St, Leet Twp – He stated that Mr. Neff did not post the photo. It was posted by Ryan Deto, Pittsburgh City Paper, which was shared with him by an anonymous Twitter source and then shared and sourced by Chris Allen and Meghan on social media. He researched the ICCRU valknot symbol and found that the Anti-defamation League was the only organization that tied it to white nationalism. He stated that the article in the Post Gazette stated that the symbol also represents unity. He stated that the ICCRU denounced racism and that it didn't take much time to research these things. He stated that Council members were conveying to people in the community that they should be afraid. Ms. Allen stated on social media that she was afraid. He feels that others have whipped this into a frenzy. They didn't do their research, which was irresponsible. False information about ties to white nationalism was easily disproven.

Sandra Marr - 311 Thorn Street, Sewickley – Has been a resident for 19 years. She stated that Mr. Neff has been an effective leader on Council and is fiscally responsible, She stated that he has apologized for an honest mistake and that Sewickley was never mentioned in the article. He should not be removed as he has been an effective leader and has more good work to do.

Carol Schurman - 27 Thorn St, Sewickley – She thanked Council for holding an open forum. She stated that she is distressed by Mr. Neff's actions and participation at the rally. She stated that it was a poor decision to pose with a group that does not represent the values of Sewickley. She agreed that he has the right to participate and support the rights of gun owners and that he has done more than most. She felt that Mr. Neff went out of his way to politicize and promote his bid for Senate at this contentious rally and that this was poor judgment at best. She stated that he should be held accountable by censure or removal as President.

Doug Booher - 2221 Spring St, Pittsburgh – Stated he provides an outsider's perspective and that people should be more accepting of a bad decision. He stated that Mr. Neff has done a lot for the community, including putting his life on the line. He sees this a character assassination and believes it boils down to a Council woman who parks on the sidewalk that sent a picture in to the paper.

Tom Eshenbaugh - 105 Broad St, Leetsdale – Has known Jeff for 4-5 years and believes he is an outstanding man. He stated that the City Paper should not be "taken to heart." He read a tweet that spoke negatively about President Trump, which was "liked" by Ms. Allen. He felt the tweet was offensive. He stated that it's clear that this is politically motivated. He stated that Mr. Neff was out defending local business. He expressed his support for Mr. Neff.

Amy Dole - 165 Bradley Ln, Sewickley – She stated that Mr. Neff was one of the first people they met when they moved here in 2015. She believes that the images are what people are

projecting. She stated that she is more disturbed at Council members who are talking to illegitimate sources. She stated that there is a Council member that is breaking the law and disrespecting neighbors and that this behavior is more deplorable. She stated that all Council members have defended Mr. Neff's character and are creating the drama. She commented that the stay-at-home order may be illegal. She commented that her background is in science and that science is not fact and there are different ways of looking at it. She stated that we need to focus on Council itself. She stated that Mr. Neff has been wonderful and done amazing things for the community and that people are stereotyping groups off opinions.

Noah Fardo - Henry Road – Commended Mr. Neff for his calm disposition during the meeting. He stated that he is a fan of Mr. Neff and that a valid argument can be made that the photo brought negative attention to Sewickley. He commented that Mr. Neff has devoted thousands of hours to service to the Borough. He stated that Mr. Neff is a man of character and integrity. He stated that he does see both sides but does not think it is right to ruin someone's career over one bad decision.

Eldwin Eric Williams - 129 Mountain St – Expressed support for Mr. Neff. He stated that he is African American and some of the men in the photo are his personal friends. He stated that Mr. Neff is a good and fair guy whom he has known for about a year. He made a mistake and shouldn't be punished. He urged that he remain in his role as Council President to continue to represent Sewickley.

The public comment section of the meeting was closed at 9:15 p.m.

President Neff expressed his appreciation for all of the comments, both for and against, and thanked everyone who chose to give up a Friday night to participate. He stated that he listened to everything that has been said and will process those comments.

President Neff called on Mayor Jeffe and the Mayor stated that he had no comments at this time, citing that he wished to hear from Borough Council.

Mr. Rostek read the following statement:

This past week, Mr. Neff participated in a public protest opposing the state's shelter in place order. He did not attend this protest as an individual, but as a political candidate. As part of this protest, Mr. Neff allowed himself to be photographed with a heavily armed militia. In the photo, he is displaying a campaign poster, making it clear that he is expressing his public, political position and was identified as such as the president of Sewickley Borough Council.

Unsurprisingly, these actions became widely known and were challenged by many, both residents of the borough and those in the greater Pittsburgh area. Mr. Neff's first response was defiance and to blame those who would take exception with his behavior. The second round of responses were in a classic non-apology form best described of the "sorry if you are offended" variety. None of these responses have acknowledged that he acted wrongly or that he has taken responsibility for his actions. This meeting was the first time that Jeff provided an proper apology and I thank him for that.

I have received dozens of responses from our residents. Most express outrage, embarrassment and fear of what impact this may have on our community or for them as individuals. Some have expressed support for Mr. Neff and view his actions as an easily

condoned mistake. What is important to note is, regardless of the opinion of him or the requested response, there is a clear consensus that his actions at the protest were not in the best interest of our community.

Mr. Neff has a long history of public service and involvement in the community, but the presidency is not a trophy to be handed out as an award for past good deeds. The president of council must be a person who has the confidence and trust of its membership and the community as a whole. Because of his actions, I believe the public trust has been violated and the just response from borough council is to install a new borough council president.

A motion was made by Mr. Rostek, second by Ms. Barnes, to remove Mr. Neff as Council President and install Mr. Rice to the office.

Mr. Rice stated that he does not have the personal "bandwidth" to accept this role. He stated his appreciation for the confidence placed in him and reiterated his reluctance to accept, as his time is currently over-committed.

Ms. Mullins stated that Mr. Rice would make an excellent Council President and pointed out the fact that he is a Republican, which supports the position that this is not a political move on the part of Council members.

Mr. van der Vaart stated that this issue has been made worse by the actions of the democrats on Council. He commented that the matter could have been worked through differently and that local politics should be devoid of partisanship. The matter was over-politicized by a member of Council.

Ms. Mullins commented that Mr. Neff is running a political campaign for State office and questioned whether he can do the work of Council and manage a political campaign.

President Neff apologized to Ms. Mullins and Ms. Barnes. He stated that Ms. Barnes, as a freshman Council member, was the first person to call him about this matter. He stated that he approached Ms. Mullins to serve when there was a vacant position on Borough Council. He stated that it took him 16 hours to read all of the posts on Facebook about his actions and that it has been an emotional roller coaster. He commented that he handled the management of the Borough for 5 months following the retirement of Mr. Flannery. He stated that he may re-evaluate his role on Borough Council following the primary election next month.

Ms. Allen stated that she wished to make some factual corrections to some of the public comments. She stated that she did not share or perpetuate circulation of the photo of Mr. Neff. She is concerned for her personal safety and that of the community. Council members are hearing from different interest groups and constituents calling for a response. She expressed concerns with violating the Governor's "stay at home" order and the need to maintain social distancing. She commented that there is now a perception that Sewickley Borough invites white nationalism. She commented that real estate agents have expressed concern about the impact this will have on the local real estate market. She supported the call for the meeting as she believes in the importance of social discourse. She posed a question to the Solicitor as to how we mitigate the damage done and potential liability. She stated that she parks her vehicle legally and is offended by statements that she does not do so and does not cooperate with her neighbors. She stated that she has experienced harassment, is fearful and feels threatened. She stated that she has always respected Mr. Neff's dedication to public safety.

Mr. Rice called the question on the floor.

A roll call vote of Council indicated the following:

AYE: Mr. Rostek, Ms. Mullins, Ms. Allen and Ms. Barnes
NAYE: Mr. Rice, Mr. Figley, Mr. Renner, Mr. van der Vaart, President Neff

Motion failed 4-5.

President Neff stated that there is another matter for Council to address at this meeting. The Borough is in receipt of the resignations of all three members of the Board of Directors of the Sewickley Parking Authority.

A motion was made by Mr. van der Vaart, second by Mr. Renner, to accept the resignations of Sandra Marr, Brian Turk and Andreas Schulze Ising from the Board of Directors of the Sewickley Parking Authority, with regret. Mr. van der Vaart thanked them for their service to the community and creativity. Motion carried 9-0.

President Neff made the following appointments to the Board of Directors of the Sewickley Parking Authority:

Larry Rice to fill the unexpired term of Brian Turk, which will continue through 12/31/20.
Cindy Mullins to fill the unexpired term of Sandra Marr, which will continue through 12/31/21.
Julie Barnes to fill the unexpired term of Andreas Schulze Ising, which will continue through 12/31/22.

Mr. Renner inquired about the financial reports for the SPA, which had been requested by Ms. Marcinko. Ms. Marcinko stated that she did receive the reports from Bookminders and she will forward copies to the Board.

President Neff stated that the Request for Proposals which was issued by the SPA will be reviewed.

Being no further business, on motion of Mr. Rice, second by Ms. Mullins, the meeting was adjourned at 9:48 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

MARLA P. MARCINKO
Borough Manager/Secretary

JEFF NEFF
President of Council

