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Campbell asks Salisbury mayor to open probe

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SALISBURY -- Mayor Jim Ireton plans to look into an investigation he already deemed closed after receiving a letter from Councilwoman Debbie Campbell telling him to do so.

Campbell requested Ireton make public any documents or tapes from an 11-year-old investigation involving surveillance of her office while she was employed with Salisbury Neighborhood Housing Service. The investigation was brought forward by Police Chief Allan Webster to former Mayor Barrie Parsons Tilghman in April when the chief discovered a surveillance tape was missing and suspected it to be in Campbell's possession.

"As I stated to the police chief, the former mayor and the press, I have never seen this tape. I was never given a tape. I never requested a tape," Campbell said. "They were not satisfied with my answers and I can only surmise why my political opponents have tried to make so much out of nothing."

However, Campbell said Tuesday that recent newspaper articles have left the public with more questions.

"I have more questions, too," Campbell said. "I am hopeful that the Salisbury Police Department's immediate and full disclosure of all documents and records associated with the break-ins and the subsequent police investigation will provide members of the press and the public with answers to any outstanding questions they may have."

City Council Vice President Gary Comegys said Campbell's request for the release of evidence is nothing more than a stunt to deflect attention from herself.

"She first says she doesn't know anything about (the tape). Then she says she did know all about it, but denies being in possession of police evidence; it all just seems like a political ploy," he said. "And, really, what would be accomplished by releasing what she wants released? The evidence everyone's talking about is missing from the evidence locker."

Ireton in August ordered Webster to cease and desist any further investigation of the issue but said Tuesday he would adhere to Campbell's request and secure any documents not already made public for dissemination.

"I have Mrs. Campbell's request and if there is anything that isn't already in the domain of The Daily Times to be given, I will try to find it for her," said Ireton, who again on Tuesday would not allow Webster to be interviewed for this report.

Numerous documents were obtained by The Daily Times since June when Campbell and colleague Councilwoman Terry Cohen submitted letters to Ireton criticizing Webster and requesting the mayor place the letters in the chief's personnel file. In his response, Webster said he suspected Campbell was acting out of retaliation, a comment later tied to the surveillance tape investigation.

Comegys -- who was defeated by Ireton in the mayoral contest earlier this year -- was struck by Ireton's cooperation after having instructed Webster to discontinue any research into the incident.

"The mayor all along has hid behind this being a personnel issue, and now that his ally, Mrs. Campbell, has asked that evidence and documentation be made available to the public, he's going to do it?" he said. "(Ireton) told the police chief not to talk about it publicly; (Ireton) ended the chief's investigation into this matter. And now, just because Mrs. Campbell says so, (Ireton) is going to re-open this case?"

Comegys said Webster should be afforded the same support from Ireton that Campbell is receiving.

"If he's going to do whatever Mrs. Campbell tells him to do, then he should be fair and allow the chief to continue his investigation into this matter so the real truth can be offered to the citizenry," he said.

Comegys also questions why Campbell -- technically nothing more than a citizen of the city -- can ask for the release of Salisbury Police Department property.

"That evidence is the property of the Salisbury Police Department," Comegys said. "Does this mean any friend of the mayor can ask for evidence in an investigation and the mayor is just going to order the police chief to provide it? I'd also ask this: Let's say the police are investigating someone who happens to be friends with the mayor; can any friend of the mayor call (Ireton) up and tell him to order the police chief to stop investigating a crime? What if the governor did that? We already know what happened when a president did that -- his name was Nixon. The whole way this has been handled has been atrocious."

Council President Louise Smith said if anything truthful comes out of the request, it's for the better -- regardless of who made the request.

"This is a call to the mayor," Smith said. "And I call upon the mayor to do the right thing and pursue this to the truth."

Smith said Ireton has not given her any information on the incident or the investigation and she and her constituents are confused. Smith submitted a Freedom of Information Act request to the city on Sept. 16 asking for the police report filed in conjunction with the alleged break-ins Campbell said prompted her to request surveillance equipment at SNHS 11 years ago.

"I simply wanted to get the truth out to the citizens," she said.

Smith has not received a response from the city, which has 30 days to reply.

Ireton could not give a time estimate as to when he might have the information Campbell requested.

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