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HARDWICK, MA

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May 4, 2021

Board of Selectmen
Town of Hardwick
307 Main Street
Gilbertville, MA 01031

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TOWN CLERK
HARDWICK, MA

RE: Resignation

Dear Board of Selectmen:

It is with sincere regret to inform you of my intent to leave my position as Town Administrator for the Town of Hardwick due to work conditions that are unacceptable and unhealthy to me as an employee of the town as well as the impact these conditions have on my physical and mental wellbeing. Please accept this letter as formal notice of my resignation effective following two weeks of compensatory time accrued.

First, I want to express that I have enjoyed working for the Town of Hardwick and feel blessed to have had the opportunity to work for the people and make a difference on their behalf. One of the most rewarding employment opportunities to make a difference was to work with Board of Health Chairman and Agent, Tex Sarabia, and the many volunteers to provide local covid-19 vaccinations for the most vulnerable population in our community. In addition, I am extremely blessed to have beautiful relationships that have been created because of my employment. The Town of Hardwick is so fortunate to have so many employees that truly work for the people and take pride in their workmanship. They are committed and work selflessly for the common goal of accomplishing each with the best interest of the town.

I too, have done the same and further sacrificed financial gain and personal time towards the bright future of financial sustainability and economic growth. In an estimated five (5) years the Town could be on the full course of recovery so essential for all residents and becoming a destination. I gave the Town of Hardwick countless hours I did not recoup as compensation time, because there was the priority of town's massive financial and sewer infrastructure issues. In good conscience, I simply chose to work. In addition, I left my position as Town Administrator in New Braintree (\$25K) because I was so afraid of letting the town down, while trying to prepare the grant application to USDA for the desperately needed sewer upgrades that the town could not move forward on without significant funding. This resulted in \$17M+ in USDA grant funding and \$5 M in State bond towards the \$27M+ sewer projects. Not only is the infrastructure in need of an upgrade, but the Town is under administrative consent order by the DEP and EPA (containing fines if the violations are not rectified). This was accomplished despite the continual obstacles created by two of the Board of Selectmen members much of which again was lack of both action and support in this difficult endeavor on behalf of the Town.

I bring this to your attention to demonstrate that I have had no agenda and no personal gain except for learning a great deal in municipal governance and ability to hone my skills in problem solving on a municipal level as well as creating strong respectful relationships with legislative officials, Federal and

State Agencies and Officials. Naturally, these relationships are based on truth and the desire to assist the Town of Hardwick in terms of infrastructure, financial recovery, and setting the course for a better future.

Over the past several years I have experienced undue poor treatment all of which has been reported to you or witnessed by you. To date no action has been taken by you to rectify or cease the onslaught of publicly verbal or written attacks of my character and work performance by the Headmaster of Eagle Hill School, Peter J. McDonald, and his staff. Mr. McDonald has made many false accusations, assumptions, insinuations without true basis. It is fair to say that many emails received from Mr. McDonald contained insults, name calling and disrespect or were drafted only as obstacles in the towns ability to move forward with the USDA funding and further to distract from the facts of the sewer line extension. I believe that this behavior has been in retaliation for bringing forward the truth and facts pertaining to the sewer line extension. I truly did not anticipate the issues with that sewer system being brought forward and obtaining the solution to the problems for the entire community as one that would result in finding myself at complete odds with a board or commission. Further, I could not have expected the Board would not take action to stop this behavior while perpetuating the continuous toxicity created.

Over the last three years it has become commonplace for certain employees, local officials, engineers and even USDA Official Jennifer Lerch to be named as liars by Mr. McDonald. He and Eagle Hill staff under his supervision, have publicly offended the integrity and experience of certain town employees such as me and Wastewater Pollution Control Superintendent, Scott Potter, multiple engineers, and other local officials. Again, the board has taken no action, other than to question the work and authority of the town's very own teams working on this rather than supporting their work by review and communication and carrying on the business on hand as supported by the existing documentation and work. There is absolutely no resource for those of us that are employed by the town to seek and receive the support of the Executive Officers of the Town as made evident by the board's willingness to allow mistreatment as demonstrated by the lack of action or recourse.

Please note that the above referenced emails and other correspondence has been shared with Town Counsel over the several years of occurrence. The above referenced has been shared over the last several years with town staff within the building who have borne witness to the effects these emails, meetings, etc. have had on me. I have physically shut down and unable to process mentally while at work. My family has had firsthand experience of the toll this takes on me and ultimately them as well. This too, has been no secret to the board members over the years. I confided in each board member that I am a trauma survivor who works hard on keeping the PTSD controlled. It is a continuous and most likely a lifelong regiment to maintain productive mental health. I deal with it. However, there are triggers that have a profound effect. It has been a struggle to work like this while attempting to be productive and push past the restrictions these episodes create. In addition, the workload is such that there is no possibility for one person to complete and to carry this load with no support and the continuous strife does not make for an environment to be effective and successful.

Respectfully, I ask you to reflect on this and use it as a tool to make the necessary changes to protect your employees from retaliation, humiliation, degradation, etc., and put resources in place to ensure

employees that the workplace will be free of discrimination and hostile work environment will not be tolerated.

The same can be said to your lack of action to the abuse of authority the Police Chief, James Ayotte demonstrated. Examples of such are briefly described as follows:

In 2018, in preparation of the FY2019 I brought forward inappropriate spending at a meeting with Police Department and the Finance Committee Chairman, Cheryl Wolfe. This meeting was held as with three other town departments following the review of their budget requests showing significant increases and the review of each departments spending trends throughout the year. The Police Department's spending required further discussion and did not support the requests for increase, but rather supported the recommendation of reducing the budget based on the inappropriate spending. When questioned on the spending in certain line items and discussion of such the Chief became noticeably irritated and abruptly ended the meeting. Over the next several days I was notified by several of the town employees, that Chief Ayotte instructed his personnel not to speak with me and if they did, their employment would be terminated. Please note that the Police Department was in the municipal building with surveillance of the building which was of full access to the Chief.

After an Inter-Municipal Town Assistant Committee meeting held in New Braintree, I spoke with Select board members Julie Quink and Kelly Kemp regarding this situation and alerting you that this is unacceptable and that I was simply doing my job for fiscal responsibility in the budgeting process. You took no action in addressing this except to tell me that he tends to get upset but will get over it. I believe that if it were another employee (not the Chief) it would have been handled by you differently.

There have been other instances of his abuse of authority in terms of discipline of officers, such as making an officer write one hundred times a statement of what the Chief was unhappy with. Done to embarrass and intimidate an employee. Another example, being the use of taxpayer funds to engage officers in work that is not within their scope of duties i.e.: building renovation projects as well as surveilling my residence for non-police related surveillance, but rather personal retaliation against me further driven at the request of the Headmaster or Eagle Hill School. The surveillance and other actions taken by the Chief had been confirmed. As Mr. McDonald has stated numerous times that he will stop at no lengths to protect Eagle Hill School, he has certainly proven his words by actions of retaliation against former Chairman Kenan Young and I. You have been privy to and have perpetuated their efforts to cause distraction from certain truths at our expense.

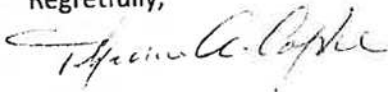
Most recently, the reality of not being able to continue in my position as Town Administrator became underscored by the recent conversations with Board of Selectmen members Julie Quink and Kelly Kemp and the key roles played in the local elections pertaining to the Board of Selectmen and Sewer Commissioner's. This desire for a "needed" change in leadership is not the desire of the people. Instead of supporting the very foundation on which the USDA could commit the extraordinary funding, you chose to support "change", chose to support a candidate that has no relationship with USDA nor any expertise on the situation at hand. But has plenty of relationship with Eagle Hill School Headmaster and Erik Fleming a member of the EHS Board of Trustees who also led the campaign for Robert Ruggles for the benefit of Eagle Hill School as it pertains to the sewer situation as well as future projects being

planned by Eagle Hill School. In discussing priorities for the Board of Selectmen, the first priorities of the Board is to rebuild a good relationship with Eagle Hill School. With the composition of the Board of Selectmen and the majority of the Sewer Commissioner's being connected in one way or another by design of a private entity who has significant interest and control, it is impossible for me to remain employed with the Town of Hardwick. The focus of a relationship with Eagle Hill School rather than the taxpayers, sewer users and residents especially of Gilbertville and Wheelwright a decision of priority is at minimum an irresponsible decision. The Board's focus at this point should shift to the best interest of the Town and improving (establish) a relationship with state (DEP, DLS) and federal agencies (USDA, EPA) that are focused on the Town's best interest and providing the solution to a bright future for Hardwick.

Under the advisement of my therapist, I am taking a medical leave using my accrued 159 hours of sick time. Further I will be using 24 hours of personal time in addition to the 144 hours of vacation time allowing me to regroup and begin the healing process.

In addition, accept this letter as my formal resignation effective Thursday June 24, 2021.

Regretfully,



Theresa A. Cofske