

Groups call for resignation of county council chair Eileen Quiring

County leader wants to hold off on 'listening session' with community groups following backlash on her remarks about systemic racism locally

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Clark County Council Chair Eileen Quiring is pushing back on calls for her resignation following remarks dismissing the idea that there is systemic racism in Clark County, wishing for "insults" against her to stop before having a conversation with local organizations about inequities.

During a "council time" meeting hosted remotely July 1, Quiring expressed reluctance to

answer the call from a number of groups to have a "listening session" about systemic racism with council. At the meeting, Councilor Temple Lentz said the council received an email from YWCA Clark County, NAACP Vancouver, the Southwest Washington League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) and the Clark County Volunteer Lawyers Program requesting a listening session to address systemic racism in the county.

That request follows calls for Quiring's resignation after the chair said "I do not agree that we have systemic racism in our county, period," during a remote meeting June 24.

In a letter dated June 27, NAACP Vancouver formally called for Quiring's resignation,

stating that her disbelief of systemic racism in the county "reflects ignorance at best," pointing to issues in schools, hiring practices and policing. As of July 2, a change.org petition for her resignation had more than 5,400 digital signatures.

Quiring acknowledged that the council had been copied on emails calling for her resignation, adding that she has received a comparable number of messages of support.

"I would say that I have just about as many people supporting me as the emails that are flooding into our email boxes to ask me to resign, to leave, because I had a different opinion," Quiring said.

The controversy surrounding her statements last month led to her not wanting to have a listening session until the rhetoric around them calmed down, Quiring explained.

"I certainly want to sit down and talk and reason together (but) I'm not sure this is about reasoning together," Quiring

said. "This is more insults to the chair and my viewpoint."

Lentz said a listening session would be "a good first step" to following what was laid out in a unanimously-approved resolution from council June 16 that acknowledged systemic racism existed in Clark County and made a commitment to identify and enact policies that would work to rectify inequities, adding she didn't see any insults within the letter making the request for the session.

"I see it being a response to insults and division," Lentz said about the letter. "I believe that the folks who took great offense to what was said last week have a right to feel that way."

Quiring took issue to what appeared to be a focus directly on her as council chair in the letter request.

"Until the YWCA loses that (direction) I'm not willing to have them even hold this session until I know who else is going to be on it," Quiring said, adding she didn't want to eliminate potential participants, but broaden who would take part.

"That's my concern — it's going to be more limited to people with one point of view, and we're not going to learn anything except what those people think," Quiring said. She expressed a desire for some individuals participating to be older than 40, people "who have experienced a little more of history, and maybe not experienced some of the re-writing of history that has taken place in some of our education system."

"Nationally we see a lot of hyperbolic things. We see statues coming down," Quiring said, adding that although statues weren't falling in Clark County there were attempts to take down something, "and that's a duly-elected official."

she said.

Quiring said she wanted to avoid "going to a listening session where I get beat up and told I'm ignorant and that I need more education," Quiring said, adding she had taken Black studies curriculum in college.

Councilor Gary Medvigy was supportive of a listening session while agreeing with Quiring that currently the calls for her resignation would cloud the discussion.

"We just need to tone it down and turn this into a positive experience if we can," Medvigy remarked. He pointed to a similar meeting Vancouver had conducted, though he agreed that before such an event, "we need to stop the insults. We need to stop the mob, kind of, mentality here."

Medvigy said that he wanted to make sure participants in such an activity were representative of the county, and not "just a Vancouver-centric listening session."

"There's a lot of good people out in the unincorporated area and throughout the county who certainly should listen, but are insulted by the accusation that they are somehow responsible or participating in systemic racism," Medvigy said.

"We need to have this conversation, but I think we need to have it with an open heart, without the divisiveness," Medvigy said.

Councilor John Blom also voiced his support for the listening session, adding that he did not want the June resolution to be the extent of what council did toward acknowledging inequities.

Lentz suggested council invite representatives of the different groups to talk about the letter specifically, and what those groups would like to see in a listening session, which the majority of council consented to.

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NORTH COUNTY NEWS IN BRIEF

Clark County Council seeks applicant for regional library board

The Clark County Council is seeking an applicant to fill one of three Clark County at-large positions on the Fort Vancouver Regional Library District Board of Trustees. The position is a partial term that will begin on Aug. 1 and end on Dec. 31, 2021.

The position is designated for someone living in Clark County outside of Vancouver city limits and Camas city limits. Residents from all eligible areas are encouraged to apply and the council seeks applicants who can bring a broad range of perspectives and experiences to the role.

Library trustees are responsible for policies and fiscal oversight regarding the operations of the Fort Vancouver Regional Library district which includes 13 libraries, two self-serve locations, two bookmobiles and centralized library support services for about 500,000 people. The service area is more than 4,200 square miles and includes all of Clark County (except the city of Camas), all of Skamania and Klickitat counties, and the city of Woodland. FVRL also provides contract services to the Yale Valley Library District in Cowlitz County.

The appointment must be approved by the boards of commissioners of Skamania and Klickitat counties and the Clark County Council.

Interested applicants should submit a letter of interest and résumé to Michelle Pfenning at the Clark County Council Office, PO Box 5000, Vancouver,

Washington 98666-5000, or by emailing michelle.pfenning@clark.wa.gov.

Application deadline is 5 p.m. Friday, July 31, 2020.

— The Reflector

Battle Ground man, 23, struck and killed by vehicle in North Clark County

A 23-year-old Battle Ground man was struck by a vehicle in the 12700 block of Northeast 359th Street late Wednesday night, July 1, and later died from his injuries, according to the Clark County Sheriff's Office.

Jordan A. Soliday was struck by a vehicle driven by a 57-year-old Brush Prairie resident just before midnight.

"Upon arrival, first responders discovered a man lying in the roadway," according to a press release from the sheriff's office. "He had been struck by a Ford Transit work van traveling west on NE 359th Street. NE 359th Street is a 50 mph two-lane rural roadway with no shoulder located north of Battle Ground."

The driver of the vehicle said Soliday crossed directly into his path from the south side of the road. The driver, who tried to provide aid for Soliday along with a passerby, remained at the scene and provided a statement for the sheriff's office. He was not cited or arrested.

Soliday died at about 5:30 a.m. Thursday after being taken to an area hospital with critical injuries.

The Clark County Sheriff's Office Traffic Unit is actively investigating this collision.

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