

SOUTHAMPTON VILLAGE

# PBA wants mayor out as commissioner

Cite pol's 'lack of support' for cops

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The Southampton Village Police Benevolent Association has passed a vote of no confidence calling for the removal of Mayor Jesse Warren as police commissioner of the department, citing in part his support of an organization with an “anti-police message.”

The PBA recently conducted the nonbinding vote in favor of Warren’s ouster, according to an Aug. 18 letter addressed to the village board of trustees and obtained by Newsday. It is not clear how many of the department’s approximately 30 members took part in the vote. The letter cites six ways the mayor “has shown a lack of support and leadership for the de-



Mayor Jesse Warren

partment,” including support for the unnamed organization.

Warren has displayed “Black Lives Matter” signs in the two stores he owns in the village, spoke at a vigil in June following the May 25 death of George Floyd in Minneapolis and posted messages in favor of the BLM movement on social media.

“The PBA respectfully requests Commissioner Warren be immediately replaced with

someone that provides leadership and a willingness to work and communicate with the Department and the PBA,” reads the letter signed by village PBA president Michael Horstman.

The letter goes on to state that Warren requested the Southampton Town police assist the village in COVID-19 guidelines enforcement without discussing it with the PBA, conducted a “subversive investigation” into a graffiti incident, refused to hire a public safety dispatcher, did not approve purchase orders for the department and discussed “defunding” the department with village residents.

When reached Monday, Horstman declined to comment on the letter or the vote.

Trustee Kimberly Allan said Tuesday that the matter was between the police department and the mayor. Trustee Richard Yastrzemeski said he understood the officers’ frustration, citing the national climate.

Trustees Mark Parash and Andrew Pilaro did not return calls seeking comment.

Warren denied the allegations, noting his proposed 2020-21 budget raised police spending from \$7.6 million to more than \$8 million and said he did hire a public safety dispatcher. He said he requested surveillance footage after pro-police and vulgar remarks about the mayor were posted to a wall in Southampton’s Doscher Park but was denied since the investigation is active.

Warren said he did not request that the town police assist the village and that the directive came from Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo. He added that he suspects the letter was politically motivated.

“I fully support our law enforcement community,” Warren said. “It’s unfortunate that our police union is being manipulated in what is very clearly a smear campaign driven by a certain for-

mer mayor who is trying to get his son elected. I’m confident most village residents will see through it. I applaud the officers who continue to put their lives on the line every day.”

Zach Epley, son of Warren’s predecessor, Mark Epley, is running for a seat on the village board in the Sept. 15 election. Warren is not up for reelection this year.

Mark Epley, who was mayor from 2005 until 2017 before deciding to step down, on Wednesday denied that he had influenced the PBA.

“It’s him [Warren] not wanting to take responsibility for any of his actions,” Epley said.

“The Black Lives Matter movement is not anti-police,” civil rights attorney Frederick Brewington said. “It is a historical tool to bring about recognition of the value of Black lives that has for far too long been ignored. This [PBA] action is yet another example of blatant ignorance.”

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