

POST-TRIBUNE

Plan commission member cleared by Chesterton Town Council for conduct during meeting



Chesterton Town Hall. (Jim Woods/for Post-Tribune)



By **JIM WOODS** | For the Post-Tribune

Chesterton Advisory Planning Commission member [James Kowalski](#), criticized by a councilwoman for his treatment of a developer and uttering a vulgarity during a public meeting, stated that he was cleared of misconduct allegations after a June 13 Town Council executive session.

Chesterton Town Council President Sharon Darnell, D-4th, confirmed by email that Kowalski was told he had been cleared by the Town Council. She had no further comment.

Kowalski, 73, a veteran member of the Advisory Planning Commission and Board of Zoning Appeals, was thankful when he learned about the council's decision. He admits that he was worried and had some "sleepless nights" before the council rendered its decision.

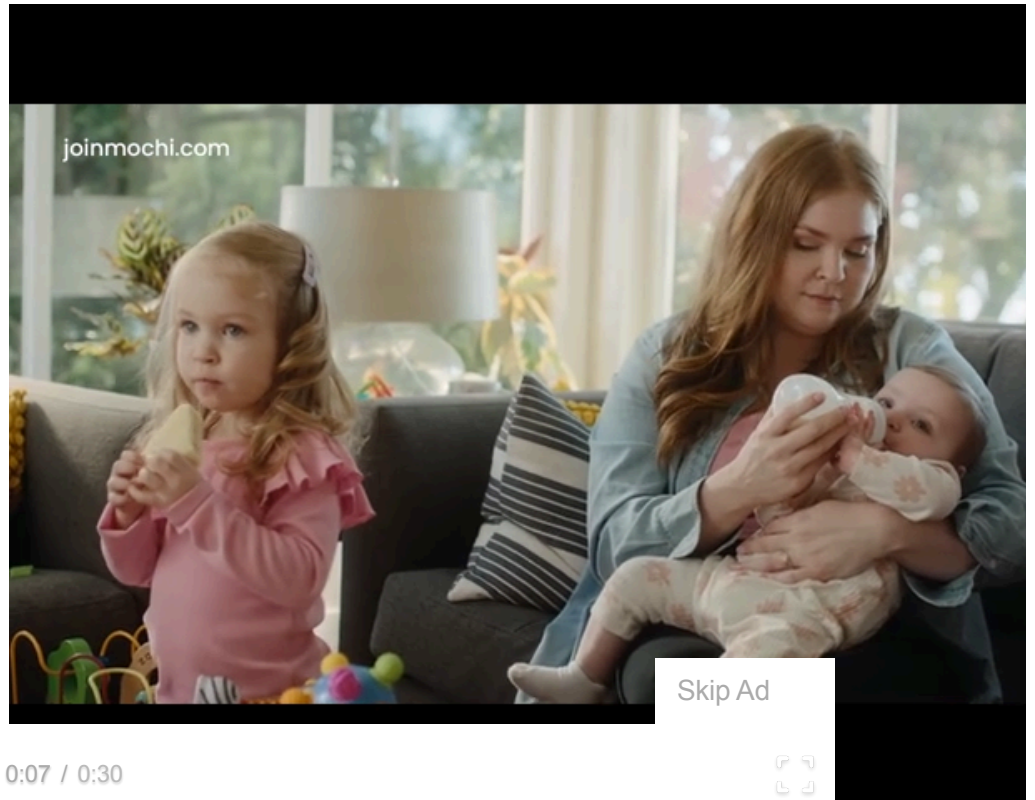
"I've got a job to do. I put the community in front of my own opinions. That's my creed," Kowalski said. "I try to do the right thing. Do you have to pay the price for doing the right thing for what you thought?"



Councilwoman Jennifer Fisher, R-5th, at the May 30 Town Council meeting requested the executive session, citing state code that it was to receive information concerning an individual's "misconduct."

Fisher said the council did have an executive session on June 13 to discuss allegations of misconduct.

“I’m not sure what he (Kowalski) means by cleared,” Fisher said. “There were no pending charges.”



Fisher said a result of the meeting is that board members were going to be reminded of their obligations under the Shared Ethics Commission rules that the town follows.

Some of the standards of conduct include treating every person with dignity and respect and acting in a professional, responsive and courteous manner.

Fisher was upset with Kowalski after a May 15 Advisory Plan Commission meeting, when the proposed development of the Brassie Golf Club property was discussed.

During the presentation by PMM Chesterton, Kowalski was sharply critical and at one juncture used the vulgarity for bull waste.

After the meeting, Fisher told the Post-Tribune, “It is really inapproriate for

Kowalski apologized for using the word “BS.” But Kowalski said his real concerns dealt with the proposed density of the project — 600 housing units on 200 acres — and its impact on the community.

PMM Chesterton is currently reworking its proposal for the Brassie property.

Councilwoman Darnell, during the May 30 council meeting, seemed to come to Kowalski’s defense, noting that people should have a “First Amendment” right to express their opinion during a meeting. She is a plan commission member who shares Kowalski’s concerns about the proposed density of housing on the Brassie property.

Fisher has made it a point that Chesterton needs to improve its reputation in the economic development community.

The town last year created the position of economic development and operations, appointing Rebecca Parker. The town also retained two consultants to help with economic development-related issues.

Fisher said they are striving to have a more collaborative approach with prospective developers.

The town’s economic development team met with PMM Chesterton before the plan for the Brassie Golf Club property was presented. Fisher also noted Chesterton’s Advisory Plan Commission has been known for its adversarial approach to developers.

Jim Woods is a freelance reporter for the Post-Tribune.

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