

Dear TRENDS Editor,

As the Chair of the Riverdale Board of Health, I want to clarify some of the factual mistakes in an article “Nurse says seniors helped save her job” penned by Leslie Scott in your Wednesday, June 13 edition. I also want to help the residents understand the Board’s direction in this matter.

It’s upsetting and unfortunate to see such poor reporting, especially when public matters regarding people and services are on the line. I want to assure every Riverdale resident that your Board of Health took extraordinary measures to be fair and open in our decision process regarding nursing services. In fact, we had extensive discussions over three BOH meetings. Above all, our decisions were guided by our desire to be delivering a professional service with proper management controls at the lowest cost and to the benefit of all citizens. Most important, our discussions have always been focused on how best to manage the position, not the person.

As for the article’s mistakes, there were many. First, my name is Feld, not Fled. While no one but me and my dad care about this error, it is a rude error, and one that would have been easy to check. The reporter did not attend any of our meetings, and made one phone to my home at the end of the business day prior to her deadline, leaving a cell number, which when called, was unanswered. I even called a second time the next day, and was informed the story was filed. Clearly, no diligent attempt to fact check was made.

The more serious factual errors, combined with our employee’s interview, would easily leave the reader thinking the Board of Health was purposely punishing an employee and leaving the town with no nursing coverage. Nothing could be further from the truth. I will not comment on the statements of our former borough nurse. She is entitled to her opinions, and I encourage free speech. I also encourage responsible speech. Unfortunately, I feel your report failed in this respect.

Let’s discuss the budget numbers you folks got wrong.

Nursing salary figures and savings were wrong. The proposed budget plan for the public health nurse’s salary was slightly over \$32,000 for 15 hours a week of service. Your story implied that the reduction of hours is a drastic and unprecedented move. In fact, however, the 15-hour budget is a relatively new idea. About a year to 18 months earlier we raised the hours from 10 to 15 a week for several reasons, in particular to respond to new demands related to local preparedness for homeland security. For several years, 10 hours was not the norm, it was actually 9 hours a week.

The 2007 Pequannock nursing services proposal was for \$8,861 a year. The annual savings under this contract to Riverdale would be \$23,365, not \$9,330 as reported. By contrast, decreasing the current public health nurse’s hours from 15 hours a week to 10 hours a week would save Riverdale \$9,328.00, and that is before considering pension and social security payments. This is considerably different from the \$3,000 per year figure noted in your article.

Your article made it appear that we moved from an in-house service to an outsourced provider. Not true. For about two decades, Riverdale had a shared services agreement with Lincoln Park for health officer, sanitarian and, up until a few years ago, outsourced nursing services.

The BOH invested three meeting's worth of time to the discussion of the pros and cons of moving back to a shared services agreement. The public had significant input, and all of our discussions were held in open session. At the end of the day, the board decided to reverse its decision to reduce the nurse's hours and instead move to a shared services agreement with Pequannock. The decision was based on the superior coverage available from the township, with a full time nurse and two part time nurses available to us when needed during their regular office hours (an expansion of availability), better management of the resource, since their staff reports to the health officer, and significant cost reduction, equal to about one third of a tax point.

I regret that the board's decision will result in the elimination of a part time position with an employee that has bonded with some of our citizens in the last three years, however this decision was made to address the needs of the entire community.

I know that our residents, once they welcome our new nursing services provider to town, will learn to appreciate their caring and professionalism. We have had a great experience with the Pequannock health officer and his staff on other issues, which is why we have a high level of confidence in this natural extension to our agreement.

In my experience, every Riverdale employee puts in a 100% effort to deliver good service to our residents. We also have a near legendary reputation for watching our spending and keeping our taxes down--and that is a healthy habit for any government.

I regret that recent stories have painted a picture that is inaccurate and inappropriate. I admit that I still hold the editorial management of the TRENDS in high regard, and hope they publish this letter as a way to set the record straight.

Best wishes and good health to all.

Larry Feld
Chair
Riverdale Board of Health

