

**TRANSCRIPT OF MIKELE DAHLEN TESTIMONY
WICOMICO COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING 3/19/24**

Good morning, my name is Mikele Dahlen and I serve as the President of the Shadow Hills Homeowner's Association. On behalf of the Association, we wish to express our deepest concerns about the highly detrimental impacts that our community will suffer in consequence of the MOU between Wicomico County and Live Wire, LLC, for the Safari at the Quarry off-road events.

We were neither informed nor consulted prior to execution of the MOU, and we strongly resent the County Executive's complete lack of transparency in this regard, as well as her ongoing unwillingness to communicate with us in any meaningful or productive manner, and her complete disregard for our legitimate concerns.

I am here today to put on the public record an extremely distressing phone call that I received from Ms. Giordano on March 5, 2024, made from her personal cell phone. To ensure accuracy and for evidentiary purposes, notes were taken contemporaneously with the conversation, and the call was audibly witnessed in its entirety by my husband, James Dahlen.

Upon receiving the call from Ms. Giordano, I was initially hopeful that she intended to have a productive conversation regarding our community's concerns. Unfortunately, this was not the case.

I can only describe the conversation that ensued as being intensely hostile and intimidating. Ms. Giordano immediately took an adversarial posture, and literally began the conversation by yelling at me, and continued to do so for 8 to 10 minutes. I was simply shocked to have been verbally accosted in such a vitriolic manner—particularly by a government official, while given no opportunity to respond in the midst of her tirade.

Please allow me to share some of the comments that she made during that conversation, and responses that I would now like to offer.

- **Ms. Giordano yelled that we had no right to question her actions or what the County does with its own land.**

As her constituents, taxpayers and citizens of Wicomico County, we have every right—even an obligation to question her actions and make her aware of our grievances, provided that we do so respectfully, in good faith and through the appropriate processes as we have done since the very beginning. I would also remind Ms. Giordano that the CITIZENS of Wicomico County own that land, and that it is not her personal possession to dispense with at her whim.

- **Ms. Giordano yelled “*You all need to just stop, no matter what you do this event is going to happen whether you like it or not.*”**

This statement was made with the clear intent to intimidate. We will not, “STOP,” Ms. Giordano, and will continue to strenuously oppose these events through every appropriate channel available.

- **Ms. Giordano loudly rebuked our efforts to appeal to the County Council and to speak publicly at Council meetings for redress of our grievances.**

Once again, this was an inexcusable attempt to intimidate us into silence. But we will not be silenced. We will appropriately continue to work with the legislative branch of the Wicomico County government to protect our community.

- **Ms. Giordano venomously articulated that our HOA was, “*entitled, selfish and arrogant*” for opposing the Safari at the Quarry events and the MOU.**

Other than being entirely inappropriate in its message and the tone of its delivery, I will respond to this comment by stating that we are asking for nothing — there is absolutely no sense of entitlement to something that we do not possess or have not already earned. We simply wish to defend ourselves against the frivolous and unnecessary land use that defines these off-road events in order to preserve the value of our homes; the peace, tranquility and safety of our neighborhood; and the many natural resources that exist on the event site. We are pursuing what we believe to be in the best interests of our community and the general public--just as Ms. Giordano and Live Wire are pursuing what they perceive to be in their own best interests. But there's one big difference: Our efforts are only intended to protect— not to cause damage to others. Our homes are immovable and fixed in one place— but these events can be held anywhere that others will welcome them--perhaps even in Ms. Giordano's own neighborhood. It is unfortunate that Ms. Giordano believes it to be arrogant to use fair and appropriate means to oppose the actions of an elected official with whom we disagree.

- **Ms. Giordano accused the members of our community of being, “*bad citizens*” and continued by saying, “*If your goal was to make a businessman feel unwelcome in Wicomico County, you have definitely succeeded.*”**

These statements were articulated in an obviously derogatory manner in an attempt to discredit our motivations. Good citizenship is defined by actively and conscientiously pursuing, through appropriate and lawful means, what one believes to be in their own best interests, and with concern and sensitivity to the interests of others in and around their community. I believe the residents of

Shadow Hills have met this threshold. Furthermore, it is not our objective to make anyone feel unwelcome, and we support entrepreneurship. But when a business activity irreparably harms our community, its property values, and its quality of life, it is our right and obligation to oppose it. Live Wire stages similar events in many other areas where they are welcome, from Ocean City to Berlin to Virginia Beach,

which are far better suited to such activities rather than a quiet residential neighborhood.

- **Ms. Giordano repeatedly referred to our HOA as, “you people.”**

This use of verbiage can only be intended to demean and belittle. I do not believe it's necessary to further explain its inappropriateness.

- **Ms. Giordano chided our efforts to reach out to regulatory agencies in an effort to protect the environmentally sensitive event site.**

The environmental concerns pertaining to the use of the event site are quite legitimate. Our research has revealed that the site—particularly Parcel 168, which is supposed to be excluded--but has now apparently been made part of the trail course, contains wetlands, wildlife hubs and corridors, and an abundant variety of wildlife including bald eagles, as well as the Paleo Channel, which is Salisbury's water supply. Although these lands are presently under-regulated, this does not diminish their environmental sensitivity or value. As good environmental stewards, our community fully intends to continue to work with the Maryland Dept. of the Environment, as well as with other regulatory agencies and environmental groups to protect this unique and dwindling habitat from unnecessary abuse.

- **Ms. Giordano inaccurately alleged that some Shadow Hills residents “accosted” a contractor at the event site.**

This statement is entirely misleading. It is my understanding that when the residents and the unknown driver and passengers riding in an unlicensed off- road vehicle came upon one another, both stopped and initially asked one another to identify themselves and their purpose. Subsequently, a respectful and productive conversation took place for more than a half hour, during which time both sides offered their points of view. At the end of the conversation, both wished one another well, shook hands and parted ways. If only Shadow Hills had been provided with a similar opportunity to have a productive conversation with Ms. Giordano before she signed the agreement, perhaps better solutions could have been found. But we were given no such opportunity--then or now.

Although I attempted many times to deescalate and hold a rational conversation, my attempts were to no avail. I managed to express at some point that she was not allowing me to speak or respond, and explicitly told her with the necessary volume, “*You are yelling at me and berating me and you need to stop!*” And, “*...this is not how a public official behaves, you are out of line!...*” But her tirade continued. At one point I told her that her verbal assault was causing my heart to pound, and she responded by screaming, “*my heart is pounding too!*” and then launched right back in.

I was on the verge of hanging up, and told her that her actions on this call had destroyed my trust in her as a public official. Somehow, this seemed to resonate and she indicated that she was highly stressed about the entire situation, and then the conversation became more

civil but guardedly so. At this point, I attempted to convey my many concerns regarding the detrimental impacts to our community of which other speakers today have described in detail. I expressed my dismay about her not reaching out to our community before signing the agreement with Live Wire, to which Ms. Giordano responded something to the effect of, “we meant to do better in informing and speaking with your neighborhood but it fell through the cracks.” This, unfortunately, was not a satisfactory response. Although I understand that a new administration is very busy, 9 months had transpired between the time that she assumed office and the time that the MOU was executed, which is more than ample time to reach out to affected stakeholders for an issue with such significant consequences.

By the end of the call, I felt physically ill, sick to my stomach and my hands were shaking. I felt unsafe after being so angrily attacked by the County’s highest elected official. My husband and I remain concerned about how Ms. Giordano might further react based on her intimidating and hostile behavior during the call, and how her reactions might affect our children.

As a former Sexual Assault Services Coordinator responsible for four counties in Virginia, I interfaced with many different government officials—both elected and bureaucratic, on issues of legislative advocacy. Although at times we represented different sides of a given issue, NEVER had I been spoken to by a public official in such a disrespectful and malicious manner as Ms. Giordano spoke to me during this call. I hope to never experience such a thing again.

I, therefore, ask the County Council to consider using any means available to censure or reprimand Ms. Giordano for behavior unbecoming of a government official. I am a taxpayer and responsible citizen of Wicomico County and never should have been subjected to such verbal abuse.

Thank you.