

EXHIBIT T

Opinion: Eruv Wars V: The mayor of Mahwah strikes back

Alfred P. Doblin, Editorial Editor, @AlfredPDoblin Published 2:41 p.m. ET Oct. 6, 2017 | Updated 5:57 p.m. ET Oct. 8, 2017



(Photo: Kevin R. Wexler/NorthJersey.com file photo)

Mahwah Mayor William Laforet is not a happy man. In a phone conversation Friday morning, he told me he has no intention of signing or vetoing two new ordinances passed by the Township Council. “If I veto them,” he said. “I would be handing them a cherry pie.” He added that they would hold a “pep rally” to rally more support if he vetoed the ordinances.

I don’t know where the rally would be. Certainly not a town park, because between the first-come, first-serve use of tables and benches and the prohibition on holding picnic tables without permission, Mahwah’s parks are just no fun. A list of [nearly 40 things you cannot do in town parks](#)

([/story/news/bergen/mahwah/2017/09/29/nearly-40-things-you-cant-do-mahwah-parks/714756001/](#)) is one of the [ordinances Laforet won’t sign](#) ([/story/news/bergen/mahwah/2017/09/29/mahwah-mayor-not-backing-down-](#)

[after-no-confidence-vote/718492001/](#)). For starters, you can’t lean a bicycle against a tree.

In an emailed statement, Laforet wrote, “Is this really what our community wants from its elected Officials? Banning bicycles from being leaned against a tree?”

Maybe not the community, as a whole, but certainly the council and the supporters of its actions showing up at public meetings. In several conversation with Township Council President Rob Hermansen, I’ve heard that the council is not trying to keep anyone out, that these ordinances — one relating to dos and don’ts in the park and another adding a new layer to the [town’s existing “no-knock” ordinance](#) ([/story/news/bergen/mahwah/2017/09/15/mahwah-council-introduces-no-knock-ordinance-limit-soliciting/668166001/](#)) — have absolutely nothing to do with the uproar over the extension into Mahwah of an eruv, a religious boundary that allows Orthodox Jews to perform certain tasks outside the house on the Sabbath, like pushing a stroller.

Or that the residents claiming real estate agents have been going door to door soliciting homeowners to sell to Orthodox Jews is unrelated to the new “no-knock” ordinance. It’s also unfounded.

During the summer, I asked Mahwah Police Chief James Batelli about the rumors and he told me that there were no police reports of door-to-door solicitations by real estate agents.

Batelli is in the same doghouse as Laforet, because Batelli sought guidance from the Bergen County Prosecutor’s Office about enforcing another Mahwah ordinance, one that would [ban out-of-towners from using public parks](#) ([/story/news/bergen/mahwah/2017/07/28/prosecutor-mahwah-park-ban-could-illegally-target-jews/517984001/](#)) — even if they arrived without tree-leaning bicycles. The Prosecutor’s Office advised against enforcing the ordinance.



A vandalized PVC pipe, marking an eruv, on Airmont Avenue in Mahwah. (Photo: Tom Nobile/NorthJersey.com file photo)

Last week, the Township Council voted “no confidence” in the mayor. The council was particularly peeved that Laforet went on television and said the “no-knock” ordinance, coupled with the new park ordinances, could work against the town as it faces a federal lawsuit and state officials investigate whether the ban on out-of-town park users was tied to a wave of anti-Semitism triggered by the eruv expansion.

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As reported by Record Staff Writer Tom Nobile, Councilman Jonathan Wong said at last week's council meeting, "[Laforet's] statements have now created a position which can be cited to in light of litigation and subpoenas."

On Friday, Laforet told me these new ordinances were like shoving a "stick in the tiger's eye"; the council was goading state officials to conclude that Mahwah was indeed looking to exclude Jews any way it could.

The mayor didn't need to go on television for state officials to figure that out.

The fight against the eruv, the out-of-state park ban, public comments from residents about "these people" — and worse — show that at least a vocal minority of residents and the council don't want Orthodox Jews in their town. The reasons don't matter. Religious discrimination is never justifiable.

Upper Saddle River: [N.Y. group sues to expand eruv \(/story/news/bergen/upper-saddle-river/2017/09/15/n-y-group-sues-expand-eruv-upper-saddle-river/670790001/\)](#)

Mahwah: [Mayor not backing down after 'no-confidence' vote \(/story/news/bergen/mahwah/2017/09/29/mahwah-mayor-not-backing-down-after-no-confidence-vote/718492001/\)](#)

Doblin: [No 'knock-knocks' or Orthodox Jews in Mahwah \(/story/opinion/columnists/alfred-doblin/2017/09/15/doblin-no-knock-knocks-orthodox-jews-mahwah/671616001/\)](#)

Doblin: [An eruv connects Mahwah to Clybourne Park \(/story/opinion/columnists/alfred-doblin/2017/08/11/doblin-eruv-connects-mahwah-clybourne-park/557093001/\)](#)

The mayor wants the council to delay the new ordinances until after state officials have determined whether the removal of the eruv and the park ban were religiously motivated. It's a prudent call. And on a practical level, there is no urgent need to send in a park SWAT team in mid-October. Within a month, the weather will have turned cold. No one will be barbecuing on picnic tables.

But hysteria knows no bounds — or eruvs. For the life of me, I cannot understand why Mahwah officials cannot grasp that what they are doing and how they are doing it will be perceived as anti-Semitic.

These new ordinances are being passed in a climate of fear, fed by rumor and, in some cases, blatant anti-Semitism. Orthodox Jews can move into Mahwah if they choose. It's America.

Instead of writing restrictive ordinances, the council should read the Constitution. Better yet, tack it up somewhere for all to see. Just not on a tree in a town park.

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