

## Racism charges leveled after woman refers to Asian residents as 'carpetbaggers' at Naperville council meeting

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### Body

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April 23-- Apr. 23--A woman who described Asian residents as "roving carpetbaggers" in comments made at a recent Naperville City Council meeting triggered charges of racism this week and council support for an "action plan" to address the city's numerous racial incidents.

Erika DeCarlo's statement was made in support of reversing a council ban on recreational marijuana sales in Naperville, a topic discussed at the April 7 council meeting. It was read out loud so it would be included in the meeting's record.

In it, the Naperville native described Opt Out Naperville -- a group opposed to recreational cannabis sales in the city -- as being made up of many "Asian (mainly Chinese)" members whose motivations were questionable.

"We will not be silenced or bullied by carpetbaggers funded by nefarious dark money PACs," she said in her statement. "I will never apologize for believing in freedom, personal choice and traditional American values."

Bill Liu, chairman of Chinese Community Outreach for Naperville, condemned DeCarlo's comments at Tuesday's council meeting as insulting and demeaning. He said the term carpetbagger is derogatory and meant to describe people who don't belong and take unfair advantage of situations, Liu said.

"The American citizens of Chinese descent, like other American citizens have a variety of opinions that rest anywhere along a great spectrum of both political and economic concerns," Liu said. "To depict any group as a single voting block is ignorant and offensive. To describe any group as carpetbaggers is beyond abhorrent."

Naperville resident Nancy Chen called on the council to condemn attacks on Asian Americans and other residents, which could help eradicate racism and hate crimes in the city.

"Asian Americans everywhere are coping with and fighting against the threat of COVID-19, but they are also facing the threat of violence and harassment," Chen said.

DeCarlo's comment was read out loud at the April 7 meeting because council meetings are now held via video conference in compliance with the coronavirus pandemic ban on public gatherings. Council members and city officials participate remotely through computers and those wanting to weigh in on topics do so using phones or by submitting written statements that are read into the public record.

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Liu acknowledged DeCarlo's right to free speech, but said derogatory and insulting language should not be tolerated.

"Ms. DeCarlo probably will be surprised that she and I stand together on this issue," he said. "However, I cannot disagree more with Ms. DeCarlo's depiction of many Naperville citizens of Chinese descent who support the Opt Out as carpetbaggers. ... The portrayal was demeaning and highly offensive."

Chen said she was "very disturbed" by DeCarlo's comments as well as the allegation that a Chinese American resident was attacked by two women who yelled and spit at him as he road his bike on a Naperville trail. The incident is being investigated by Naperville police.

Chen requested the council adopt a resolution she drafted condemning the recent attacks on Asian Americans and other allegations of racism in Naperville over the past two years.

Among them was an incident at Buffalo Wild Wings in a group of diners, some of whom were African American, were asked to move because a racist patron didn't want to be seated by them; a gas station clerk who told a group of Latina girls and women that they should return to their home country; and a Naperville high school student who posted a social media ad with the photo of a black student and the words "Slave for Sale."

Council members were supportive of Chen's proposal. City Manager Doug Krieger said the city staff is already working on an action plan to discourage race-related incidents in the future, and expects to bring the plan to council next month for discussion.

The plan will be drafted to incorporate recommendations from city employees, community partners and the U.S. Department of Justice, Krieger said.

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