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TOP STORY

JOE'S POLITICAL FIX

Holleman: Her charitable works helped get her elected. Then Maplewood learned about her past

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"I just love watching the abundance of love spread," said Shana Alicia Poole-Jones, who sits on her front steps on Wednesday, May 6, 2020. Photo by Laurie Skrivan, lskrivan@post-dispatch.com

Laurie Skrivan

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Following a wave of positive publicity about her charity work during the pandemic, Shana Jones won a seat in April 2022 on the Maplewood City Council.

Along with the media exposure, Jones' campaign enjoyed the support of several political players in the St. Louis County suburb — including the person who will be nominated Tuesday night to become the new Maplewood city manager.

But only five months after being elected, Jones abruptly resigned, saying she wanted to expand **Keep Pushing Inc.**, a nonprofit organization she formed before the pandemic.

Her departure, however, may have been hastened when word began to circulate that Jones' past included a felony criminal record.

“Maplewood is behind me,” Jones said Monday. “My life has moved on from Maplewood.”

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Before ending the interview, Jones said Maplewood officials knew about her felony convictions.

“I’ve always been upfront,” she said.

Maplewood Mayor Nikylan Knapper, who was elected in 2021, flatly stated she had no idea about Jones’ past convictions.

“She is seriously mistaken,” Knapper said. “That is not true.”

Jones’ former campaign treasurer, Christy Kramlich, also denied that Jones had shared the criminal details of her past.

“Absolutely zero knowledge,” Kramlich said in regard to Jones’ past criminal record.

Jones’ deputy campaign treasurer, and largest campaign contributor, Amber Withycombe, declined to return calls.

Withycombe is at the center of a contentious municipal tussle since she emerged as the front-runner to become Maplewood city manager, even though she has no work experience in the field.

Withycombe was recommended for the \$175,000-a-year job by Knapper, a friend and political ally. Knapper’s campaign treasurer is Withycombe’s partner, Joshua Kryah.

The agenda for the Maplewood council meeting includes discussion of the city manager hiring process at 5:15 p.m. Tuesday. A resolution to hire Withycombe is set to be introduced at the 7 p.m. meeting.

As to Jones’ criminal history, she pleaded guilty in 2004 to three felony counts of forgery and one felony count of identity fraud, according to online records from the Superior Court of Clayton County, Georgia.

Jones was sentenced to three years in prison on each of three forgery charges and one year on a felony identity fraud charge, with the sentences imposed concurrently, court records indicate.

In 2019 in North Carolina, Jones pleaded guilty to one count of felony forgery and was placed on two years' probation, a spokesman for the Pitt County Superior Court said.

Jones, also known as Poole-Jones, came into the public eye in St. Louis in 2020. Local print and electronic media, followed by some national outlets, reported on her grassroots aid efforts during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

The operation began at her home on Folk Avenue in Maplewood, where people could take items from a table set up in her front yard. It became known as the "Grab N Go Table," which has a **Facebook page** featuring scan codes for making donations.

Kramlich said talk began in 2021 about the possibility of Jones running for a council seat in 2022.

"I remember I sat on her couch, looked her in the eye and asked her if there was anything in her past that could come back and bite us," Kramlich said. "She said 'no.'"

Jumping forward to August 2022, Kramlich came home to find a mugshot photo tucked between her front doors — from the Georgia Department of Corrections.

"I recognized it as Jones," said Kramlich, who then found records that appeared to verify the past record. She called Jones in early September and confronted her on the matter.

"She admitted it," Kramlich said. "But she said that she did her time and that she'd changed."

Kramlich said that Jones also told Kramlich that Knapper was aware of Jones' past.

"But I called Nikki (Knapper) anyway and told her we had a problem," Kramlich said. "She came over to my house and just kept saying 'Oh my God,' as she looked at each page" of records.

“Then she called Amber (Withycombe) right there from my house and told her what was going on,” Kramlich said of Knapper.

The city remained silent officially about Jones’ situation, but that did not stop it from unofficially being a hot topic around Maplewood.

Former Councilwoman Jenny Schmidt said she does not agree with the city’s decision to remain silent. Schmidt was on the council from 2017 until April 2022.

“Yes, it was a complicated issue. But how was this not made public?” Schmidt said, then noted that it was the gossip was widespread. “Everybody knew.”

Sarah Crosley, who served on the council from 2020 to 2023, defended the city’s strategy of not making a statement.

Crosley called it “the right decision” and credits former City Manager Michael Reese with offering the best guidance on the matter.

In October, the city paid Reese \$130,000 in a severance agreement, a parting that several sources say stemmed from conflicts with Knapper.

“I valued his integrity,” Crosley said. “It’s too bad (the city) had to spend six figures buying him out because they couldn’t keep him.”

Jones also has been involved in a number of civil lawsuits related to debts in recent years. Online court records indicate that some of the judgments against her in St. Louis County Circuit Court go back to when she was on the Maplewood council:

In June 2022, Dobbs Tire and Auto won a judgment of \$2,512 against Jones.

In August 2022, the Missouri Division of Employment Security, which oversees employer payment of unemployment taxes, won a judgment against Jones’ nonprofit organization for \$1,032.

In June 2023, a judgment of \$6,217 was entered against Jones, and another \$6,217 was placed on Keep Pushing Inc. The lawsuit by Kalinga Productions involved commercial space on Manchester Road in Maplewood.

In all three cases, online records give no indication that the judgments have been satisfied.

In a pending court action, Jones and her nonprofit group are suing Marsad Smajic, claiming he changed locks on properties he was leasing to Jones in south St. Louis and removed items belonging to her.

In an interview, Smajic said he plans to file a countersuit, claiming Jones paid little in rent that was due on his properties.

Jones was on the winning end of a 2021 suit. A St. Louis County judge awarded her \$5,500 from a company that sued Jones after she circulated flyers on rental assistance to tenants at a north St. Louis County apartment complex.



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