

RIVERHEAD TOWN

Board gets angry at one of its own

Private talk about public position stirs closed-door issue

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The Riverhead Town Board said it will not hold any closed executive sessions until members get legal advice on what can and cannot be disclosed outside of those meetings.

Board members said at the board's work session on Thursday that they were angry that Councilwoman Jodi Giglio had discussed the potential hiring of an employee for an unspecified town department outside of a previous closed-door meeting.

"When we're in executive session, I'm assuming that I need to be professional and not discuss personnel items outside unless those are items that are discussed in here, and I think as a board member we need to know," said Councilwoman Catherine Kent.

Town Supervisor Laura Jens-Smith said after the meeting



Town council members are irked about the filing of a town position being discussed away from the board.

that information regarding personnel — be it hires, disciplinary matters or health issues — should be discussed behind closed doors and kept private because of the sensitivity of the information.

Town Hall officials declined to specify which department or job candidate sparked the debate. Giglio said Friday that the position is a new superintendent for the town's water district. The board authorized a help-wanted ad for the position at its Nov. 7 meeting.

Giglio said she wanted to speak to a previous candidate for the position, who had said they were no longer interested in it, about reconsidering.

"I don't understand what the grandstanding is," Giglio said. "It's simply politics. The only things we should be talking about in executive session are litigation, legal matters, HIPA matters with an employee's well-being, disciplinary actions and things like that. But when it comes to hiring someone with one of the biggest positions in

the town, I want to make sure we're hiring the best possible candidate."

Councilman James Wooten told Giglio that he also disagreed with her sharing information outside of the closed meeting.

"There are certain things that happen in executive [session] that I don't like, but I don't go around and screech it to the world," Wooten said.

"Yes, you do," Giglio replied.

"No, I don't," Wooten responded, pointing to the

board's bench, where they sit and vote during regular meetings. "I vote up there, I let my vote speak for me, but I don't try to undermine the process."

Town Attorney Robert Kozakiewicz told the board that he wrote in a January 2018 opinion to them that "just because something is discussed in executive session doesn't make it confidential."

Kozakiewicz said Riverhead's ethics code states it would be a violation of ethics to discuss "privileged" information outside of executive session, such as a legal matter that could fall under attorney-client privilege. He added that none of the executive items on Thursday's agenda, including the potential hires, falls under the "privileged" category.

The board had at least three matters for executive session on the "potential hiring of an employee" on its Thursday agenda. Jens-Smith said after the meeting that she is still waiting on a clear answer about what can be discussed outside of executive session.

"I think before we keep going into executive session, we need some clarity on that," she said.

Driver charged after Coram crash kills man

One passenger was killed and another was hospitalized after a single-car, hit-and-run crash in Coram on Sunday morning in which the driver was later arrested, police said.

A 2005 Nissan Murano was going east on Middle Country Road at about 4 a.m. when it crossed the westbound lane and struck a metal pole near Homestead Drive, Suffolk police said in a news release Sunday.

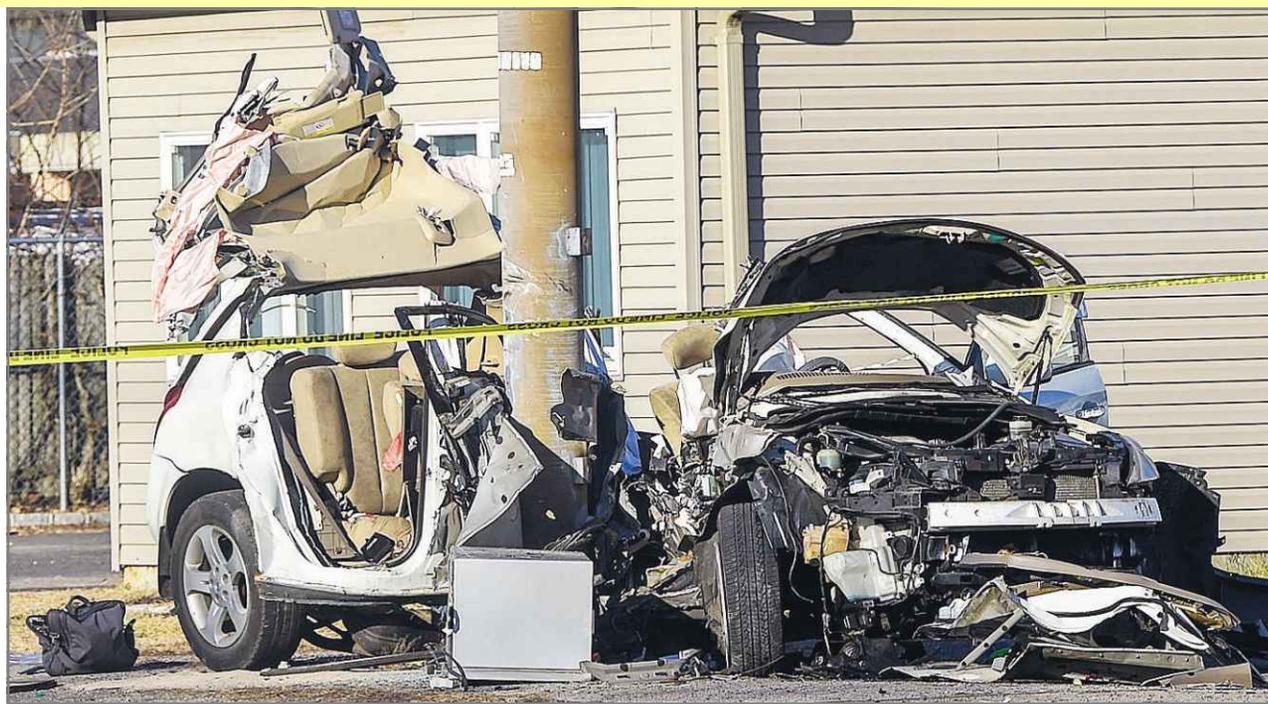
The driver, identified by police as Cruz Emelio Tum-Tipaz of Potunk Lane in Westhampton Beach, ran away north through a parking lot, leaving two passengers behind, police said.

One passenger, a man identified by police as Juan Morales Cuterez, 28, of Westhampton, was pronounced dead at the scene. Another passenger in the SUV, Eledao Bolaj-Garcia, 53, of Westhampton, was taken to Stony Brook University Medical Center for serious but not life-threatening injuries.

Tum-Tipaz was charged with leaving the scene of an accident resulting in death and was being held overnight at the Suffolk police Sixth Precinct.

Suffolk County major case detectives are investigating the crash. Anyone with information is asked to call the Major Case Unit at 631-852-6555 or Crime Stoppers at 800-220-8477.

— VERA CHINESE



One man was killed and another injured in a hit-and-run crash Sunday morning when an SUV hit a metal pole.