



From the desk of...

Menashe P. Miller

*Mayor
Township of Lakewood*



March 15, 2016

Mayor Thomas F. Kelaher
33 Washington Street
Toms River, NJ 08754

Dear Mayor Kelaher:

I was appalled to read yesterday's *Bloomberg* report regarding the increasing number of Orthodox Jews who have purchased homes in Toms River, or who are considering doing so. You are quoted as follows, verbatim: "It's like an invasion. It's the old throwback to the 1960s, when blockbusting happened in Philadelphia and Chicago with the African-American community. 'I want to buy your house. You'll be sorry if you don't.' It scares the hell out of people."

An "invasion"?

It is fundamentally unjust and un-American to compare law abiding U.S. citizens engaging in legal real estate commerce to the hostile entry of a pernicious force. To say so, simply due to the fact that the homebuyers are of a different faith and ethnicity than your own, is pure, unadulterated bigotry.

Mr. Mayor, as your fellow Republican mayor of a neighboring town, I wish I could dismiss your comment as an unfortunate poor choice of words. Unfortunately, I cannot do so. This is part of an unfortunate pattern where you've validated, even stoked, awful stereotypes of your Lakewood neighbors and, by extension, Orthodox Jewish residents of Toms River. Even during your re-election campaign, official campaign material was sent out using "Lakewood" as a dog whistle to intimidate Toms River residents to vote for you.

As a former prosecutor, you certainly appreciate the importance of the values of justice, equality and the rule of law. You know firsthand the devastating violence and other crimes that all too often result from hatred of our fellow citizens who are "different." Just recently, the words "Burn the Jews" were inscribed by a vandal in a Toms River park, a place designated to enjoy the bliss of youth. No words can adequately describe the searing meaning of those words to the descendants of those who were burned and gassed due to the same senseless hate we see today.



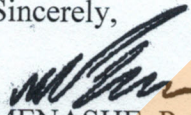
Like any town - including your own – Lakewood isn't perfect. However, we are proud of our citizens, whether they're white, African-American, Hispanic, Jewish, senior, or any other demographic. Elected officials and community leaders of all stripes work together each day to improve the quality-of-life for every one of Lakewood's residents, businesses, and institutions. There is more work to be done, for sure, but the amount of progress we've made in recent years is incredible. Lakewood is beautiful, exceptionally diverse, and one of the country's fastest growing municipalities – with thriving housing markets, shopping malls, business sectors, and educational institutions.

The elected officials and community leaders of Lakewood are eager to work together with our Toms River counterparts to ensure that its residents of all stripes can enjoy the quality of life they dream of. Orthodox Jewish residents share this dream. As a whole, our community is virtually free of crime, and uniquely dedicated to the values of servitude to God, compassion and family. If there are any individuals within our community who have crossed the lines of accepted real estate commerce, we are willing to work together to prevent such incidents in the future.

However, I would like to clarify in no uncertain terms, that we will work together only in the spirit of friendship and partnership. We will not acquiesce to bigotry or intimidation – we will battle these negative forces with every fiber of our being, and every possible avenue.

It is my hope that you will sincerely apologize for your hurtful comments, and turn the page in the relationship between our respective municipalities and communities. All of our residents deserve a brighter future.

Sincerely,



MENASHE P. MILLER
Mayor of Lakewood