

Supervisors make board meetings more citizen-friendly

By Greg Pearson
STAFF WRITER

Citizens no longer have to stay up past their bedtime to speak before the board of supervisors. Board members voted last week to have three public comment periods: one at the end of the afternoon session, another near the beginning of the evening session and the last one at the end of the evening session. Previously, the public comment period in the evening was only at the end of the board's agenda, which was often very late at night.

Citizens are still allotted up to three minutes each to make their comments. Midlothian Supervisor Dan Gecker asked fellow board members to not be so rigid in using a light system that signals the end of a speaker's three minutes because "it intimidated speakers."

The supervisors also removed a provision that prohibited speakers from making "insults which tend to violence or breach of peace." That clause was seldom enforced by the previous board, but the new board struck it.

A change in the 2008 procedures now allows discussion of administrative shortcomings without prior notice to the county administrator. The previous procedure only allowed criticism of staff when submitted in writing in advance with the county administrator not being responsive or for topics not on the agenda.

A minor revision spells out more clearly that when a board member abstains from voting, the abstention is considered to be a vote. During the vote on the Branner Station rezoning, some residents alleged that the 2-1 vote in favor had failed to be a majority vote of the board because two members had abstained. At the time, County Attorney Steve Micas insisted that the board's procedures made an abstention a vote.

The board also voted to not allow District Improvement Funds to be appropriated after Election Day if a board majority is not re-elected. Last month, Clover Hill Supervisor Art Warren voted against numerous appropriations by the outgoing board. Annually, each supervisor receives county funding that can be distributed by public vote to pet projects — typically high school booster and athletic clubs' needs.

Warren also requested the formation of a five-member Multicultural Advisory Committee to keep supervisors updated on issues pertaining to the county's more diverse community. The idea came from comments made during a recent public hearing on ways to stem illegal immigration in the county. The board will discuss the possibility of organizing a multicultural committee with Dale Supervisor Jim Holland as board liaison at its Jan. 23 meeting.

Management study

The board referred a proposed \$135,000



Page Dowdy/Chesterfield Observer

Chesterfield County's Latino, Asian and other minority communities continue to grow. As a result, the county's board of supervisors is considering forming a Multicultural Advisory Committee to stay updated on issues of diversity.

management study to the Budget and Audit Committee for further study on the scope and time periods to be covered. Gecker and Holland were appointed to that committee which includes county staff.

Last November, County Administrator Jay Stegmaier recommended the contract be let to TATC Consulting for an "independent evaluation of county management practices and procedures, contracting procedures and processes and to identify opportunities and make recommendations to make the county more efficient in spending taxpayers' money."

At the time, what seemed like a routine procedural matter was alleged to be a cover-up by two citizen activists. Col. Ronald Hall (ret.) insisted the evaluation should be done by county staff while Matoaca District resident Brenda Stewart said the study period does not go back far enough to review the purchase of school sites at what she says were inflated prices.

The school system and its board select school locations and determine purchase prices, and the County Attorney's Office assists in executing the transaction. As proposed, the study is to include "school board contracting and procurement procedures," but only goes back two years and would not include the school sites questioned by Stewart. Stegmaier has said two years is "a pretty long time" for a management study.

Courthouse Road plan

The board set a public hearing for Feb. 13 to consider passage of the Northern Courthouse Road Community Plan. On Dec. 18, the planning commission recommended the board consider the commission's version instead of the planning department's, which calls for more commercial development between Midlothian Turnpike and Hull Street Road. The previous commission was split 3-2 with the majority supporting less commercial development along Courthouse Road.

Residents in the corridor generally wanted

less commercial development while property owners along Courthouse Road and the Chesterfield County Chamber of Commerce favored the staff's proposal with higher density.

Elections

As reported in this newspaper's Dec. 5 issue, the 2008 board elected Warren as chairman and Gecker as vice chairman. Warren is the "elder statesman," having served on the board since 1992. Though Gecker is in his first term, he previously served eight years on the planning commission.



Warren



Gecker

Upper Swift Creek Plan

At the request of Matoaca Supervisor Marleen Durfee, the board sent the entire Upper Swift Creek Plan back to the planning commission for more study. Gecker wanted the board to provide "more direction on water quality issues," saying three of the commission members are new, and it would hasten action on the plan. Durfee estimated the plan would be back to the board in 3-6 months.

A majority of supervisors don't believe the plan in place, which was approved by the 2007 board, properly protects the Swift Creek Reservoir as a source of drinking water. Most supervisors want levels of service for roads and schools incorporated into the plan, which could allow the board to deny residential rezonings when schools are too overcrowded or nearby roads aren't up to standards.

Cultural center

During public comment, Woodlake resident

Howard Meyers asked the board to consider converting the current Clover Hill High School into a county cultural center as Henrico did with one of its old schools. The replacement school for Clover Hill will open in fall of 2010.

"It's inconceivable that a county the size of Chesterfield doesn't have a cultural center," he said. Meyers estimated he's attended 250 concerts and plays but almost always has to drive out of the county for cultural entertainment. Chesterfield's single venue is an outdoor arena in Pocahontas State Park where groups often play to sparse crowds.

Chesterfield has pledged \$7.5 million to the Chester Arts Foundation for a cultural center when it can raise matching funds. The foundation is far from its goal.



Resident Daisy Dowdy enjoys a moment with nursing assistant Doris Wilson.

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Upcoming Brandermill Woman's Club meeting will feature cosmetic surgeon

Dr. Joseph Niamtu will be the guest speaker at the Brandermill Woman's Club's (BWC) regular meeting on Feb. 13. Known for his humanitarian work in Third World countries, Niamtu will talk about how cosmetic surgeons' volunteer efforts have changed the lives of those from emerging nations and discuss the latest noninvasive cosmetic surgery options.

The meeting begins at 10 a.m. at the Brandermill Country Club with a discussion on the upcoming "Old Bags Auction and Coffee," the BWC's major charity event in April. The committee planning the auction is asking for donations of gently-used or new, quality purses that will be auctioned in a lively interaction between bidders and a local celebrity auctioneer. The event will also feature some

very special, over-the-top items. For information on this event, contact Betty Jo King at 763-5666. Participation is limited, and tickets will go on sale in March.

The BWC is also promoting some new activity groups, including the "Restaurant Adventurers" and the "P.M. Roving Diner." Also, the "Fun Lunch Bunch" has been combined with the Film Critics group. For information on these groups, call Jayne Wright, activities chairman, at 639-6466.

Membership inquiries should be directed to Ann Gatz at 639-6868.

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