

Board changes meeting times, days

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middletown

Changing to Monday night meetings will avoid conflicts with the Neshaminy school board, the new township supervisors chairman said.

Those who follow Middletown supervisor meetings will have to get used to a different night and time.

After meeting for years on Tuesdays, the new Republican board majority decided at the Jan. 4 reorganization meeting to hold meetings the first and third Mondays of the month at 7:30 p.m.

The supervisors had previously met the second and fourth Tuesdays at 6:30 p.m.

The main reason for the switch to Mondays was to avoid conflicts with meetings of the Neshaminy school board, said new Republican supervisors Chairman Tom Gallagher. The Neshaminy School District includes Middletown, and the school board holds its work session meeting the second Tuesday of the month and its regular meeting the fourth Tuesday.

Residents wishing to attend both meetings were being forced to choose, said Gallagher.

Moving back the starting time an hour also gives working residents who want to attend a supervisors meeting more time to get there, he added.

"In discussions with a lot of people during the campaign, they said 6:30 just wasn't a reasonable starting time for people trying to get home, get dinner, and get to the meeting," said Gallagher. "They were starting meetings when some people were still driving home from work stuck in traffic on I-95."

The supervisors' next meeting will be at 7:30 p.m. Tuesday because of the Martin Luther King holiday on Monday. Tuesday meetings have been scheduled on two other dates, Feb. 16 and Sept. 7, because of Monday holidays falling on the previous days. The July 5 Monday meeting has been canceled and will not be rescheduled.

Former Democratic supervisor Chuck Thompson, who was defeated in the November election, criticized some of the new board's policies.

"The Republican majority has established a meeting schedule that may be confusing to some of our residents," he said in an e-mail to the newspaper. "As best as I can figure out, meetings will be held on the first and third Monday of each month. However, this will change if a holiday falls on a Monday, which happens quite frequently. In those weeks, the meeting will be held on Tuesday instead. What was the problem with simply holding them on a day that would be unlikely to change, say the first and third (or second and fourth) Tuesday?"

Thompson also chided the new board for holding the public comment session toward the end of the Jan. 4 reorganization meeting. There had been public comment sessions both at the start and toward the end of meetings under the previous board.

"The decision of the Republican majority to schedule public comment at the end of the meeting is a blatant attempt to discourage residents from voicing their concerns or opinions," said Thompson. "Combined with the fact the start of the meeting was moved from 6:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., residents may have to wait until 10 p.m. or later to address the board."

Thompson also said the new board did not allow public comment during several agenda items Jan. 4, including votes to appoint professionals like the township solicitor and engineer.

Gallagher said Thompson's criticisms are misguided and premature.

"We haven't even held our first regular meeting yet," said Gallagher. "The only piece of true business at the reorganization meeting was approval of the bill lists and I called for public comment on that. The other things were not public comment items."

Gallagher said the board will decide on its public comment policy at the Tuesday meeting.

Public comment could be held at the beginning of the meeting, the end, or both, he said. Also, public comment will be allowed for each agenda item at regular meetings, Gallagher added.

"Every single issue will have public comment associated with it," he said. "Chuck Thompson should let us have a meeting or two and see how we operate before commenting on this stuff."

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