

The people spoke

## Vote of confidence

*Russ Kavana lost his bid for a seat on the Middletown Board of Supervisors, but won enough votes to be a credible appointee.*

Winner or loser? A candidate who finishes last in a four-way race clearly lost. That was Russ Kavana's situation when he ran for Middletown supervisor last year.

Though he received nearly 3,900 votes, Kavana was 800 votes behind the top vote-getter but just a couple hundred behind the other winner, the second-place candidate. The third-place candidate was later appointed to the board when a supervisor resigned post-election.

That scenario is in play again with the resignation of ex-supervisor Lisa Pflaumer. Kavana, a former supervisor and currently a member of the zoning board, would like the job. Two supervisors, Jasper Caro and George Leonhauser, say he deserves it.

The other two supervisors, Robert McMonagle and Chuck Thompson, the post-election appointee, oppose Kavana. Thompson said Kavana ran a dirty campaign and that voters rejected his bid for a seat on the board.

Back to that winner-loser question: You could argue, reasonably, that while Kavana lost the election, he won enough votes to be considered a deserving replacement. After all, he wasn't trounced. Indeed, he was only 121 votes behind Thompson, now on the board. Call Kavana's barely losing tally a vote of confidence.

We haven't mentioned Kavana's party or that of the other supervisors because we strongly believe that party shouldn't matter. What a candidate wants to do if elected should be the primary consideration. Experience and background should be strongly considered as well.

Looking at it from the perspective of the latter criteria, Kavana is a strong candidate. Whether he engaged in sleazy campaign tactics, as Thompson charged, is an allegation he should be prepared to support. Kavana denies it. And without solid examples, Thompson's opposition looks purely political since Kavana is a Republican and Thompson a Democrat.

McMonagle, also a Democrat, should explain his reservations if not political. But Republicans Caro and Leonhauser appear to be making a partisan pick as well, since they haven't outlined what Kavana would bring to the job besides experience.

That said, no Democrats have voiced interest in the job; at least no names have been offered. If some eager candidates appear, regardless of party, the four supervisors will have some work to do.

Meanwhile, Kavana looks like the natural choice.

Ordinarily we favor an open process that includes public interviews. But Kavana is the only candidate. And while voters consigned him to fourth out of four candidates, he earned the votes of nearly 4,000 citizens. As with Thompson's appointment, the people spoke — officials should listen.