

MIDDLETOWN

Board members dispute solicitor appointment

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Sparking outcries of state Sunshine Law violations, the Middletown Zoning Hearing Board publicly appointed Gene Kellis as solicitor in a 3-2 vote, after the two dissenting members alleged their colleagues acted without consulting them or the public.

Members Thomas Gallagher and Russell Kavana dissented at the Wednesday night meeting, claiming they had been barred from participating in an unofficial vote to oust former solicitor William Bolla.

"I found out that we had a new solicitor in the Bucks County Courier Times," Kavana said.

According to Gallagher, Bolla was appointed in a 5-0 vote at the board's Jan. 9 meeting and no mention of his possible dismissal was made at the Jan. 23 meeting. Between the Jan. 23 meeting and this week's meeting, Gallagher said, Chairman Michael Gaul, George Grant and Harry Arnold voted behind closed doors to dismiss Bolla and appoint Kellis.

Gaul reportedly dismissed Bolla via a voicemail and later an email, officials said.

Gallagher said Gaul left him a voicemail prior to contacting Bolla, but Gallagher did not receive it until 11 p.m., when he decided it was too late to return the call.

Gallagher, with Kavana's support, is drafting a petition to the Bucks County District Attorney, the state Attorney General and the state Ethics Commission.

"I guarantee you that I will press this to the nth degree, because this is blatantly wrong," said Gallagher.

Kellis is a founding partner of Kellis & Soffer LLP and has served as zoning hearing board solicitor for Warminster and Bristol Township. He ran unsuccessfully for Middletown supervisor in 2004 and was appointed labor attorney in 2006.

Both Kellis and Gaul declined to comment this week. The Courier Times was unsuccessful in reaching Grant or Arnold for comment Friday afternoon.