

MIDDLETOWN

Supervisors chairman may step in as temporary manager

One supervisor said the township should tap an employee or hire a consulting firm to fill in temporarily as manager.

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With the search for a new Middletown township manager down to eight candidates, supervisors Chairman Robert McMonagle said he might step in as manager temporarily until a replacement for Richard Gestrich is found.

Gestrich, township manager since 2006, leaves today to be city manager in Oviedo, Fla. Middletown officials interviewed eight candidates during the last three days, but it could be several weeks before someone can take over.

In the meantime, McMonagle, a Democrat, said he might step in as manager under the title of township administrator.

"It's one of the ideas being considered," he said. "I could take a leave of absence from my full-time job [in the Upper Moreland School District] to do it, and if I did it I'm hoping it wouldn't even be for a month. There's nobody among the supervisors with more experience, and our list of other people who could do it has dwindled."

Assistant township Manager Frank Farry resigned over issues with his candidacy for state representative. Parks and Recreation Director Debby Lamanna has also been acting manager in the past, but she said she's extremely busy with summer recreation programs, especially since coordinator Marian Gilbert left to take the parks and recreation director's job in Lower Southampton.

Republican Supervisor Jasper Caro said he doesn't favor McMonagle taking over.

"I don't believe any of the supervisors should fill the position of manager," said Caro. "If we need someone on a temporary basis, we should get one of our department directors or another employee, or hire an outside firm that provides interim management services."

Democratic board member Chuck Thompson said he didn't have a problem with the possibility of McMonagle filling in. "I think he's very well qualified and would do a good job," Thompson said.

McMonagle said many of the candidates being interviewed for permanent manager need to give anywhere from 30 to 60 days notice to their present employers. While officials wouldn't name the candidates, McMonagle said four are managers in other municipalities, two in Bucks and two in Montgomery County.

There's a slight chance there could be an announcement on a new permanent manager at Tuesday night's meeting, McMonagle said. However, the likelihood of second interviews and other factors will probably push any announcement beyond next week, he added.

"There is one guy I considered supremely well qualified, but he asked for a salary of \$150,000 a year and I think that's well beyond what we're able to pay," said Thompson. "We were paying Rich [Gestrich] \$117,000 a year and right now I'm not convinced we need to go over that to get a top-quality manager."

Middletown is looking for its third manager since John Burke resigned in 2004.

"We want somebody who really wants to come here and stay here, make it his or her home, and give us some stability," Thompson said. "You really can't get control of everything going on in the township when you have this kind of revolving door at the top position."