

Board approves debates at municipal center

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middletown

Debates or forums at the township municipal center could be televised live and then rebroadcast to reach a wider audience, the supervisors said.

The township municipal center is the best place for political debates or forums as long as the township doesn't have to pay for them, the Middletown supervisors decided in unanimously passing a resolution at a recent meeting.

Supervisors Chuck Thompson, George Leonhauser, Jasper Caro, Kathy Heuer and Robert McMonagle said debates held at the municipal center would be open to the general public. Such events also would reach an even wider audience because they could be televised live and then rebroadcast several times over the township's cable television government access channels 22 (Comcast subscribers) and 30 (Verizon FIOS subscribers).

However, the resolution also states the political parties or organizers of debates must pick up all costs because the supervisors didn't feel it was appropriate to spend township tax money on political events.

"Every election, as far as I'm concerned, is critical," said supervisors Chairman Chuck Thompson. He was appointed to the position to fill a vacancy and is running for a full six-year term this year.

"This one is especially important because it involves our hometown, and the more people that can see debates and be educated about the candidates and the issues, the better," continued Thompson, a Democrat.

The Villages at Flowers Mill, a 675-home age-restricted development in Middletown, often holds political debates, which are open only to residents of the development. Because of that, Thompson said he would be reluctant to accept an invitation to debate at Flowers Mill, which is adjacent to the municipal center.

Don Suplee, president of the homeowners association at Flowers Mill, said no debates are planned at the development this year but if that changes, he would talk to fellow board of directors members about holding the debate at the township municipal center.

Republican supervisor candidate Tom Gallagher agreed that holding debates at the township municipal center is a good idea.

"I don't have a problem with the resolution," he said. "I think both sides would need to get together and agree on a moderator and also get all the ground rules for the debate decided on before it occurs."

Gallagher said his party has asked the Bucks County League of Women Voters to set up a debate in Middletown.

"I respect the league's fairness and the impartiality of the debates they've done in the past," he said.

The parties in the debate will agree on the number of rebroadcasts before the debate, up to a maximum of six, the resolution stated. It originally had the supervisors deciding on the number of rebroadcasts, but Leonhauser said that might lead to either Republican or Democratic supervisors making a decision based on how they felt their party did in the debate.

The resolution states that all candidates for an elected office must be invited to any forum or debate held at the municipal center, and also lays out various other guidelines for holding such events at the township facility.

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