

Board takes steps to return to chief-of-police system

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middletown

The board will probably vote on switching back to a police chief at its Nov. 24 meeting.

Middletown is moving back toward a chief of police system after less than a year under an acting public safety director.

The township supervisors voted 4-1 at Tuesday night's meeting to have solicitor Mike Savona draft an ordinance that would repeal the ordinance adopting the public safety director system. Savona said the ordinance switching back to chief of police should be advertised by Nov. 17 and ready to be voted on by the board at its Nov. 24 meeting.

Even though he favors a public safety director, Supervisor Robert McMonagle made the motion to change back to chief of police. He said it appeared from the Nov. 3 election results that Middletown residents prefer that system. Republicans Tom Gallagher, Patrick Mallon and Drew Kreiling, who all favor a police chief, were elected over three Democrats who preferred the public safety director system.

While he favors a police chief, supervisor and former township Officer George Leonhauser was the lone dissenter on Tuesday's vote. He said he saw the move as a ploy by McMonagle and the present board majority to install a person of their choosing in the police chief's spot before the new board takes office in January. McMonagle said Tuesday night he would like to hire acting public safety director Patrick McGinty as police chief. Leonhauser wants to advertise for the position and interview interested applicants.

"It would be a travesty for a lame duck board to appoint a new police chief," Leonhauser said. "The only reason you're doing this now is you want to appoint who you want. There should be an open application process with everyone judged on their merit."

McGinty, formerly a lieutenant, was appointed acting public safety director in January after several outside applicants interviewed and turned down the permanent spot. During the interviews, McMonagle accused Leonhauser of trying to sour potential candidates on the public safety director position, a charge Leonhauser denied.

McMonagle said McGinty has been doing a good job as acting public safety director and would make a good police chief.

"The last application and interview process did not go well," McMonagle said. "To repeat that process for show does not serve anyone. I think (McGinty) has earned an opportunity to be police chief so I see no need to replay the circus."

Leonhauser said the board would get better candidates for a police chief position because it's not considered to be as "political" as public safety director. Public safety directors serve basically at the pleasure of a municipality's governing body while a police chief enjoys much better protection against political interference, Leonhauser said.

"Do not hamstring a new board by making a decision about a police chief they may not agree with," resident Andy Warren said.

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