

Police chief named amid controversy

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Middletown

Police Chief James Kane is a 31-year police veteran who helped the township department achieve state accreditation in 2008.

After 18 months of discussion, two court petitions and a very heated meeting in the town hall Monday night, officials in Middletown appointed Lt. James Kane police chief.

Kane, a 31-year police veteran with two master's degrees, was "truly the best candidate" to lead the 70-member police force, said board of supervisors Chairman Tom Gallagher.

Kane led the police department to state accreditation in 2008. He also initiated and led the township's D.A.R.E. program for several years.

Members Drew Kreiling, Patrick Mallon and George Leonhauser joined Gallagher in appointing Kane. Supervisor Robert McMonagle, the lone Democrat, strenuously opposed the appointment.

During the meeting, McMonagle publicly criticized Kane as a divisive figure. He also called the candidate selection process a sham and alleged intimidation of the supervisors by police.

As McMonagle spoke, dozens of audience members booed and shouted in protest. The meeting room was packed with residents and members of the police department. The intense shouting disturbed at least one resident.

Andrew Flager of Levittown said he was shocked by the behavior.

"This is the first time I've been to a meeting in 40 years," Flager said. "I'm very intimidated by what's happened here.

"This is not a good example of democracy in action," Flager added. "It seems almost like mob rule."

In the hours before Monday's appointment, McMonagle filed a petition for "emergency injunctive relief" to stop the board.

In a hearing before Bucks County Judge Clyde Waite, McMonagle argued that the police chief search committee was formed with "no public advertisement, solicitation, or invitation to interested residents."

The search committee included an assistant district attorney, a county detective and a former Newtown Township police chief. The committee said it interviewed 14 candidates and recommended seven finalists to the board of supervisors.

Gallagher said "everything was done above board. I'm sorry Mr. McMonagle feels differently." At mid-day Monday, Waite denied McMonagle's request for an injunction.

Former Middletown police Chief Frank McKenna retired in January 2009 after 20 years as head of the department. For more than a year after McKenna's exit, police Lt. Patrick McGinty served as the town's acting public safety director.

McKenna on Monday praised Kane as a highly educated and experienced leader. McKenna said Kane has "so many degrees, I used to call him Dr. Fahrenheit."

The salary and benefits that could be offered to Kane were not disclosed Monday night. A contract must still be negotiated, board members said.

As acting director, McGinty was provided a base annual salary of \$104,750 plus a longevity payment of \$5,984.

One of the top contenders for the chief job, Philadelphia police Lt. George McClay said he was twice interviewed by the Middletown supervisors.

A 24-year veteran of the city police department, McClay said he felt the supervisors had taken a sincere interest in him as a candidate.

"I think they took the candidates seriously," he said. "What they did was not unusual. They conducted a very wide search and then selected someone from the inside."

Middletown Democratic Party Chairman Harry Arnold tried to prevent any vote by Kreiling on Monday.

Arnold criticized Kreiling for failing to pay property taxes in 2009. According to county tax records, Kreiling failed to pay county, school and township taxes amounting to nearly \$7,000 for his home on Quincy Drive.

Kreiling said family financial issues made it impossible to pay those taxes in 2009. The supervisor said he has standing agreement with the county to pay those tax bills by 2011.

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