

Insistence that organization abide by city's wishes leads to accusation of bullying

Under pressure that one person characterized as bullying from city officials, the Port Washington Main Street board of directors on Monday reconsidered a Common Council suggestion that it add the executive directors of the Chamber of Commerce and Tourism Council and city planner to its ranks.

Mayor Tom Mlada, a member of the Main Street board who proposed the change in membership, and several aldermen urged the board to approve the measure, saying it would help cement the positive relationship that exists between the groups.

Board members who voted in July to reject the council's suggestion voted 6-3 Monday to table the measure until their Sept. 9 meeting.

But the fact that a contingent of city officials — including four of the city's seven aldermen and former mayor Scott Huebner — attended Monday's meeting to discuss an advisory resolution left some members feeling pressured.

"He (Mlada) is really trying to put a lot of pressure on the board," member Scott Schweizer said Tuesday. "I just think it's ridiculous to try to bully a board of volunteers.

"There's a lot more going on than meets the eye here. It's politics, it's personnel, it's the future direction of Main Street."

Board member Marcia Endicott said she, too, felt pressured.

"I don't understand why this is in the forefront when we have so much else to do right now," she said. "I don't know why they're pressing so hard."

But Mlada said the measure isn't about politics but about recognizing the input of the executive directors, who are currently non-voting members of the Main Street board.

"This has to do with one thing, and one thing only," he said. "I think it's in the best interest of the board. This is not about the best interest of one individual."

Main Street is not a city board but an independent organization of downtown business and property owners dedicated to revitalizing and promoting the downtown district.

It's run by a volunteer board of directors and its operations, everything from sponsoring

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festivals to business retention and attraction efforts, are financed through an assessment on downtown properties and an annual city contribution of \$25,000.

But Mlada said Chamber Executive Director Lisa Crivello and Tourism Executive Director Kathy Tank, as well as Randy Tetzlaff, the city's director of planning and development, play a vital role and bring a valuable perspective to the Main Street board as well as coordinating efforts between the agencies, and they should be rewarded with voting rights.

The Chamber of Commerce approved adding Tetzlaff, Tank and Main Street Director Sara Grover to its board, Mlada added.

"Please support this," Ald. Dan Becker said. "This resolution is not political. It's about having three organizations working toward the same goal."

Huebner told the board that the measure would "bring everyone together for the betterment of downtown. For all their work, they should have a say. Why wouldn't you want that?"

Opposing the effort to have the executive directors appointed to the Main Street board is tantamount to "slapping those guys in the face," Huebner said, noting the directors spend a significant amount of time working for the betterment of the city.

Approving the measure would also help assure the public its investment in Main Street is being maximized and they have a say in the organization, Ald. Doug Biggs said.

Crivello and Tetzlaff told the board that they don't always believe their contributions are valued.

There have been times when she's gone to meetings only to be told, "This meeting is only for real board members," Crivello said.

But Endicott disagreed, saying the board values the input of the directors.

Several board members expressed concern over the concept of adding the directors to their ranks, noting potential conflicts of interest.

The directors are all paid employees of their agencies who work closely together, board member Cathy Wilger said, adding that could affect such things as employee evaluations done by the board.

Instead of the executive directors, she suggested adding a member from the Tourism and Chamber boards.

Board member Maria Kiesow said there could be a conflict if Main Street was voting on a grant for another agency.

Those are cases in which the directors would have to recuse themselves from the discussion

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and vote, Crivello said.

Board members noted that while the current executive directors work well with Main Street, that hasn't always been the case.

"What happens if one of those positions changes and we're not as comfortable with the new director?" asked Main Street board chairman Rob Helm.

The Main Street bylaws allow the group to ask for a substitute, Executive Director Sara Grover said.

Main Street board member Harry Schaumburg, who made the motion to rescind the board's previous closed session action and hold a public discussion and vote, said he initially favored the idea.

"It's a curious mix to add people who have an entirely different commitment," he said. "You're shifting something in terms of the makeup of the board. It seems to me when you have employees, they're looking at things differently than I as a business owner, a property owner. I don't see what we gain by making them members."