

Town board has new, questionable practices

A recent special Town Board meeting raises several disturbing procedural and policy questions about two issues that should be of concern to all residents:

- The Town Board's failure to comply with the Open Meetings Law

- The Town Board's desire to "shop local" regardless of price

On April 25, the Town Board held a properly noticed special meeting to discuss the Yorktown School District's request to use the Legacy multi-purpose field. In addition to people directly involved in the issue, three reporters, a resident who introduced himself as "just an observer," and myself, acting in my capacity of Town Board observer for Citizens for an Informed Yorktown, attended the meeting.

At the conclusion of the meeting, Supervisor Michael Grace thanked everyone for coming and people began leaving the meeting room, including one Town Board member, two of the reporters and myself. The third reporter was occupied following up on the athletic field story.



GUEST CORNER

SUSAN SIEGEL
FORMER YORKTOWN
SUPERVISOR

The following day I learned that after the "meeting" had broken up, the Town Board actually continued meeting to discuss a procurement issue. The only people in attendance were the remaining four Town Board members, staff from the Parks and Recreation Department and members of the Recreation Commission. The rationale for the "impromptu meeting" was the need to select a contractor to repair tiles at the Shrub Oak pool ASAP.

I also learned that one of the key issues discussed at the meeting was a disagreement over whether to give the tile job to the contractor with the lowest price or to a local contractor with a higher price. (The board had had a similar discussion on April 10 when it reviewed competing bids for

laboratory testing services; the local vendor's bid was \$6,500 more than a second bid.)

The upshot of the "impromptu meeting" was that someone was going to get back to the three contractors for new price quotes and that the Board would revisit the issue at its May 1st meeting.

The April 25 meeting should leave homeowners wondering:

1. How was it decided, and when, that the price quotes had to be discussed that afternoon?

2. Why weren't all Town Board members, and the public, advised that the Board would continue the meeting to discuss an unexpected, time sensitive additional item?

3. Why isn't the Town Board following the Town's procurement policy? According to the policy, department heads are authorized to select vendors when price quotes are required. The Town Board only gets involved in the selection process when the Town goes out for a formal bid, which was not required for the tile job. So why did the Town Board get involved in the selection process?

4. Whether homeowners are willing to pay higher taxes when "shopping local" means higher costs for the Town.

It also seems ironic that while the rationale for the April 25 discussion was to expedite the tile work, by not following established procurement procedures, the work was actually delayed by at least a week.

And, the public was not privy to yet another discussion of how our tax dollars are being spent.

At the Board's May 1 pre-session meeting, the supervisor informed his fellow board members that two new quotes had been received. While they were only \$700 apart, the local contractor

with the higher price was offering several warranties, each for different aspects of the work and for different time periods, while the lower priced contractor was only offering the standard manufacturer's warranty. The board decided that the better warranties justified the higher price and a resolution was unanimously passed at the regular portion of the meeting authorizing the Supervisor to sign a contract with the vendor offering the "better" deal.

For more information about Yorktown's compliance with the Open Meetings Law and procurement issues, visit yorktownbettergovernment.org.

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