

Mazurek: Why Switch Solicitors?

In Lower, Monzo's Out and Baldini's In

By JACK FICHTER

VILLAS — Lower Township's longtime solicitor Tony Monzo was replaced at council's reorganization meeting Jan. 3, a decision Councilman Wayne Mazurek said was made by a Lower Township Republican Organization caucus, not by discussion of township council.

Mazurek, council's lone Democrat, pointed to an empty chair, next to Township Manager Kathy McPherson, which was normally occupied by Monzo. He said he asked to have a resolution appointing Paul Baldini to replace Monzo removed from the consent agenda and moved to the regular agenda so the topic could be discussed.

"It demands discussion here and now," said Mazurek. "A discussion that we have on this important issue of a solicitor can't take place at a Wawa, a diner, or a Republican caucus, whatever that is, it's got to be done here in front of the people and nowhere else."

He said if future decisions would be made at Republican caucuses, he would like to see those meetings advertised, so he and the public could attend.

Mazurek said when the public hears of such activities, "it kind of adds fuel to their disdain and distrust of their elected officials."

Monzo gave the township "10 excellent years of service," Mazurek said

and questioned why other members of council felt changing solicitors was better for the township.

He added he had not seen Baldini's resume and asked who proposed him as solicitor.

"There was no vote taken on replacing Mr. Monzo with Mr. Baldini," said Mayor Walter Craig, who is Lower Township Republican leader.

He said he discussed with council members elect, Glenn Douglass and Tom Conrad, what would take place at the annual reorganization meeting.

"One of the things that came up was the question of whether or not we were happy with the performance of the municipal solicitor," said Craig. "I guess it comes down to, in my sense, a level of trust and a level of confidence."

"I don't think I have that level of trust and confidence in retaining Mr. Monzo," he continued.

He said he believed other members of council shared the sentiment.

Craig said possible candidates for solicitor were discussed at a Republican Party caucus. He said Baldini was not the only lawyer considered for the position.

Craig said the planning board, which Baldini serves as a solicitor, was very pleased with his performance. He said he has known Baldini for more than 20 years.

Baldini defended Craig in municipal court on a drunk driving charge last



PAUL BALDINI

year. Craig was convicted of that charge Sept. 13 but has not yet been sentenced due to a pending decision on the use a new type of breath detection device.

Craig said the "majority of council has to have confidence and trust that they can go to their township solicitor, any time, and get the answers they are asking for and get the action they are calling for."

"I haven't had that in Mr. Monzo and that's why I made the decision to move forward to replace the township solicitor," he said.

"Myself, I trust Tony Monzo," said Mazurek.

Deputy Mayor Robert Nolan echoed Craig's comments. He said he felt the township "needed a breath of fresh air," by appointing a new solicitor.

Nolan said Monzo was a "gentleman and a very fine professional." He said he never questioned Baldini or Monzo of their political affiliations.

"It has nothing to do

with politics," said Nolan.

Mazurek cast the lone "no" vote with the other four council members voting in favor of appointing Baldini as new solicitor appointment.

McPherson told the Herald, Baldini's salary would be \$25,875.

Reached by phone, Monzo told the Herald he only found out he was being replaced when McPherson told him she saw Baldini's appointment on the meeting's agenda about six days before the reorganization.

Monzo said he called Craig during the weekend prior to the meeting. He said Craig and Nolan told him some of their reasons for replacing him, but he could not fully comment on the matter.

Monzo said he was disappointed.

"I feel that I have totally committed myself to Lower Township, and myself, as well as everyone who works here has put in a tremendous effort in handling Lower Township matters over the 10 years," he said.

Monzo said he became solicitor in 1997, a time of significant turmoil in the township.

He said the township has had some tough legal cases this year involving the Sweet Briar Motel, a sex offender ordinance that drew national attention, and difficult negotiations for a contract with township police.

"We've done a great job on all of those matters, even though the sex offender case did not come out in our favor, it wasn't for a lack of effort and it was a difficult case," said Monzo.

Superior Court Judge Valerie Armstrong ruled Dec. 22 the township's ordinance restricting where convicted sex offenders can live was invalid on every ground raised by Steven and Jennifer Elwell in their lawsuit challenging the ordinance.

Monzo said the decision was made with full public support to defend the township's position. He said he believed a decision to replace him was made before an opinion on the Elwell case was issued, before Christmas.

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DuPont Pulls Plug on VX Plan

By JACK FICHTER

WILMINGTON Del. — DuPont announced Jan. 5 it would not participate in transporting VX nerve agent wastewater from the U.S. Army's Newport Indiana Chemical Depot for treatment at DuPont Chambers Works Plant in Deepwater, and dumping it into the Delaware River.

According to a statement, DuPont had "met all the technical requirements to ensure the project could be accomplished safely without adverse impact on our employees, the commu-

nity or the environment."

However, during a three-year evaluation of the proposal, it became increasingly clear that the approval process will be lengthy and arduous, said Nick Fanandakis, vice president and general manager of DuPont Chemical Solutions Enterprise.

According to a press release, DuPont remains committed to continue to work with the U.S. Government, in particular the Department of Defense.

Citing risks of spills, truck hijackings and unknown danger to marine life, Delaware Riverkeeper Network filed a complaint in federal District Court two weeks ago against the U.S. Army to stop the transport of VX nerve agent

waste to this state.

Five other organizations also joined the suit citing a federal statute that bans transportation of chemical weapons across state lines.

"This kills the Army's plan to bring VX to the Delaware River. This is a great day for the River and the people of New Jersey, Delaware and the states that the nerve agent waste would have been trucked through" said Maya van Rossum, of the Delaware Riverkeeper.

"This is the right decision by Dupont—there is no way this ill-fated scheme would have survived the law suit we just filed and no way it could have been legally permitted by NIDEP."

It is often merely for an excuse that we say things are impossible.

François La Rochefoucauld