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Panic at the disco?

Sea Isle commissioners act like they're actually worried

Under the guise of being responsive elected officials, Sea Isle City's commissioners appear to be in a panic.

With an upcoming referendum to decide the fate of Sea Isle's form of government, the commissioners have gone into full-court press to avoid an outcome they appear to fear.

First, they approved a referendum that contained heavy editorializing. If they had their way, voters would have seen wording that said if they approved the new form of government, they were basically saying yes to a \$475,000 tax hike to go along with it.

Fortunately, a judge nixed this blatant approach at frightening would-be voters. The new wording will just address whether Sea Isle citizens want to keep their three-member commission or switch to a mayor-council form of government with a five-member council.

Having a judge shut them down on that front, the commissioners decided to steal a page – and the main idea – from petitioners who sought the government change. In addition to revising the type of government, petitioners said they wanted the city to hire a business administrator, believing one could help save money in the long run.

At their last meeting, commissioners hastily approved a resolution to spend \$120,000 a year to hire a business administrator for the town. Their claim is that residents told them they wanted an administrator.

Of course they heard support for it. The idea came from the referendum petitioners – the same petitioners the commissioners dismissed as trying to drive up the cost of local government. Now commissioners are saying they are just doing what voters want.

Huh?

First they try to frighten off voters by threatening a big tax hike, now they decide the spending is advisable ... a few weeks before the vote.

If this isn't panic, we don't know what is.

We thought the commissioners' referendum wording was heavy-handed. Trying to undercut the referendum by stealing a prime component of the governmental overhaul is absurd.

The whole point of the referendum is to decide if this is what the voters really want. Let the voters decide.

Until the commissioners pulled this latest stunt, we figured they were still confident voters would stick with them – as they have in a similar referendum before – and that voters would show they like the way commissioners have handled the budget, including keeping a tight lid on tax hikes.

Before, commissioners could claim – with some justification – that petitioners for a new type of government were disgruntled because they couldn't beat the incumbents at the polls.

Now it's starting to look like the petitioners have won before voters even get to the polls.