

Observations on charter government

Shannon Green, Frederick | Posted: Monday, June 22, 2015 2:00 am

The transition to the charter form of government has been a bumpy one. And that is to be expected. It would be naive to think that revamping our entire government would be without its problems. Over the past few months, I have watched almost all of the County Council meetings, and I have a few observations.

First of all, the two former county commissioners on the board, Billy Shreve and Kirby Delauter, have been throwing lots of wrenches in what could be a smoother transition. While the procedures are new, and all of the council people are learning, Shreve seems to relish in causing problems. He recently admitted to a Frederick News-Post reporter that he likes to aggravate his fellow council members when he votes no on the budget.

The story stated, “[H]e enjoyed the media coverage and watching them cringe.” “They hate it,” he said.

In another obnoxious move, I am sure he’s aware that Robert’s Rules of Order state he should say “aye” when voting in the positive. However, every affirmative vote he has cast he makes it a point to say “yes.” It may seem insignificant and nitpicky; however, I believe it’s indicative of an uncooperative and hostile approach to governance.

Now for his part, Delauter does follow procedure and I would say has been adapting better than Shreve to the changes. However, he has exhibited quite a few unprofessional moments. His now famous interview on WFMD and his subsequent outburst at that same night’s meeting are prime examples of that. As a representative of our government, you should be able to express your opinion calmly and with poise.

What I have the biggest problem with is the hostility shown toward Council President Bud Otis, not only by Shreve and Delauter, but by others in our community who seem to think that political affiliation equals a voting bloc. I’ve heard him called a traitor and a turncoat. While I did not vote for Otis, I have been impressed by his professionalism. Even when he was yelled at during public comments, he thanked the person for sharing her thoughts.

This business of political parties sticking together in a local government really bothers me. The Democratic and Republican parties do put forth different philosophies concerning taxation, social programs, military spending and so forth. And they do figure in people’s thinking when deciding local elections. However, national political philosophies should not be on the top of our list when deciding whom to send to the County Council.

The last two big issues presented to the County Council showed how local issues don't run down party lines. One look at the No Narconon at Trout Run Facebook page shows people from a variety of political leanings working together. And the testimony at the June 9 meeting concerning the Frederick Area Committee for Transportation letter is also a great example of people from across the political spectrum coming together. Local issues are different than national ones. They hit closer to home and don't neatly fit into a Democratic or Republican spreadsheet.

We want council members who are thoughtful, respectful and deliberate. We want people who have experience with the issues and actually care what their constituents think. We want our snow plowed, our schools funded, our county workers well-paid and trained, parks to play and relax in, and medical services for those who cannot afford it.

We don't want grandstanding, name-calling, disrespectful people representing our interests. It's still early and there's plenty of time for change. Only time will tell if that happens.

Shannon Green, who actually enjoys watching County Council meetings, writes from Frederick.