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Chapel Hill council elects not to appoint

Katie Jansen

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Twenty minutes into its work session Monday evening, the Chapel Hill Town Council had decided not to fill the vacancy open since the end of March.

Before the council considered whether or not to vote and appoint one of the six applicants, they heard statements from the public. The majority of those who spoke expressed support for filling the seat rather than leaving it empty.

Laura Moore, who said she has worked with applicant Amy Ryan on boards and committees in the past, said Ryan was the ideal candidate because “her commitment to our community has been unwavering for the past several years.” She asked supporters of Ryan to stand, and at least a dozen residents present answered the call.



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Lynne Kane said that although several qualified candidates applied, she supported Michael Parker.

“He has a deep understanding of what would be good for Chapel Hill, and I’ve seen him make decisions that benefit all of Chapel Hill,” she said.

Other groups took a more reserved approach. Jane Kirsch, representing Chapel Hill Alliance for a Livable Town, said that CHALT understood that the possible appointment was occurring closer to an election than past appointments have been.

However, CHALT expressed its support for Ryan if the council did decide to appoint a candidate.

Council member George Cianciolo said that he supported filling the vacancy because the council had seven months left, pointing out that problems could arise during the summer even though the council doesn't have formal meetings.

However, Cianciolo said he did not want to make the vote without a full council. Council member Donna Bell was absent Monday.

Cianciolo moved to take a vote at the council's May 11 meeting. He said he wanted to make it clear to the public that a decision would be made rather than keeping both the public and the applicants "on the hook."

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Mayor Mark Kleinschmidt said that local ordinance stated that if a decision wasn't made Monday, the vote would automatically move to the next meeting – and every meeting thereafter until a decision was made or an election occurred.

Council member Jim Ward, who at the previous meeting said that he would like to keep the vacancy open until November’s election, moved to take a vote Monday evening.

The motion was not seconded, although council member Maria Palmer said she wanted to make clear to the public that she would be happy to take a vote at a meeting where all council members were present.

Ward argued that an absence wasn’t a good reason to delay a vote, pointing out there was no guarantee for 100 percent attendance at the next meeting.

Bell, who was appointed to her seat in December 2009, previously expressed support for choosing a candidate to fill the seat.

With no second for Ward’s motion, the agenda item will again come before the council May 11.



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