

And then there were nine

BY ALI AKHYARI

The regular Sullivan's Island Town Council meeting was almost a regular debate on November 18, helping to stretch it into a three hour long event. Several issues stirred the Council members and residents alike, while perhaps the most discussed topic was Council member Jerry Kaynard's ordinance to add two more people to the Planning Commission.

By the slimmest of margins, Town Council passed second reading of an ordinance that will add two more members to the Town's Planning Commission for a total of nine. Ordinance 2008-8 was introduced by Kaynard, who says he wants to "harness the energy of more interest in government" that residents have expressed, as evidenced by the two extra people who were not selected for the Planning Commission this past year.

"It's an issue of having greater participation," Kaynard says. He adds that it's a privilege to serve in government and the Town should accommodate the extra people who are interested in serving. However, there was at least as much interest in serving on Town Council this past election when people were left out. Kaynard says his "freshman" status on the Council kept him from suggesting increases across the board.

Furthermore, he argues that if more people are allowed on the Planning Commission, more diversity will be achieved as well as more fresh ideas. Kaynard was supported by Council members Mary Jane Watson, Buddy Howle, and Everett Presson, who argued that some people may not feel represented on the Planning Commission and it wouldn't hurt anything to add a couple of people.

Those against adding the seats noted that there did not appear to be any problem with the Planning Commission, nor any groundswell from the community suggesting that the Planning Commission needed more representation. Perkis noted that the Planning Commission did not ask for more help and the suggestion of adding more people didn't come until after the Planning Commission elections, wherein two candidates were passed over for incumbents.

"My objection is not an objection to participation or new ideas," Council member Pat O'Neil said. "I'm completely unconvinced there's a problem." He said the current Planning Commission is very diverse, noting that there are front beach and inland members and that Hal Currey, the Planning Commission Chairperson, oversaw one of the largest developments to take place on the peninsula, suggesting that there is representation of business minded people as well.

Councilman Howle asked why the Council should only act if there's a problem, arguing that the Council could also be proactive and make things better. Speaking on a separate noise ordinance that would affect the Commercial District, business owner Bill Dunleavy stated that the Town should not pass an ordinance unless there was a "real problem". Planning Commission member Nicky Bluestein, who replaced Pat Votava, argued that the Commission is "stale and lacks vision", adding that it could be improved by adding two more "brilliant minds". However, some were not convinced that Kaynard's intentions were completely pure or, at least, that it sends a bad message.

"It doesn't pass the smell test," Mayor Carl Smith

stated, noting that two people didn't get on the Planning Commission and now the Council is trying to add two more seats. Term limits would be a better solution if diversity and inclusion is the goal, he said. Watson stated that she would hate to lose good people on the Planning Commission because of term limits.

Council member Pat O'Neil noted that Kaynard has had to abstain from votes dealing with the Commercial District because of conflicts of interest. In fact, Kaynard recused himself on another vote that evening for that very reason. O'Neil asked if Kaynard felt that there was conflict in trying to add two more members to the Planning Commission as they are getting ready to deal with the Commercial District Master Plan, which will dictate regulations surrounding the Commercial District.

"This discussion should not be about that," Kaynard argued. "There's no ulterior motive. I resent being questioned on the issue of ethics. It's about participation." Presson supported Kaynard, saying that he did not believe anyone was trying to "stack the board".

"The Planning Commission is like an incubator of ideas," Kaynard said. "I have no other interests than for more participation."

Residents who spoke on the issue were split five to four in favor of adding two more members to the Planning Commission. The Council passed the ordinance by a 4-3 vote with Council members O'Neil and Perkis as well as Mayor Smith dissenting.