

Eight Named To Secret Commission

Only Andrews objects to committee that won't report potential conflicts of interest as it guides council on future budgetary matters

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By Paige L. Hill

Though the Montgomery County Council publically announced the eight local businessmen who will head up the county's new Organizational Reform Commission on fiscal planning, it is remaining mum about what the members will be doing once the commission is formed. And the tight-lipped treatment will continue, as the commission is not required to hold public meetings or reveal any conflicts of interest.

"The commission, composed of county residents who are experienced in government, business or non-profit service delivery, will help guide the county toward creating efficient models of providing services and operation," County Council President Nancy Floreen (D-At large) said in a statement July 20.

The commission will be comprised of Scott Fosler of Chevy Chase, who has served as president of the National Academy of Public Administration; Daniel Hoffman of Rockville, who for the past nine years has experience managing organization transformation and process analysis efforts as a senior associate for PricewaterhouseCoopers' Washington Federal Practice; Vernon H. Ricks Jr. of Potomac, a former Takoma Park City Council member who has served on the boards of directors of Maryland Municipal League and the National League of Cities, and Len Simon of Bethesda, the president of the Edgemoor Citizens Association and an employee of the Washington-based firm Simon and Company, Inc., that works with local governments. Ricks and Wegman were named co-chairs of the commission.

Some of the men would not comment on the nomination or the commission. The rest did not return phone calls.

The commission, which was created by Resolution 16-1350 and sponsored by Councilman Roger Berliner (D-Dist. 1), will make "recommendations for potential reorganization or consolidation of functions performed by county government," according to Floreen. The council nominated four men and County Executive Isiah "Ike" Leggett nominated four men, and then each recommended one man for a co-chair position.

Members of the commission need not disclose potential conflicts of interest or hold meetings publicly, but Councilman Phil Andrews (D-Dist. 3) seems to be the only one who objects.

"This group will work very closely with the county's budget, and if we don't know who has stockholdings in one company or on the board of another, we could be getting recommendations that give tax breaks to those groups of interest," Andrews said. "I cannot see any way that this isn't a public meeting board under Maryland state law."

The commission must submit a status report and a work plan to the council and the executive no later than Sept. 30. The final report is due by Jan. 31. The report must contain the commission's recommendations to reorganize or consolidate functions performed by county government or county-funded agencies.

"How are we supposed to know we are getting an unbiased recommendation unless we can see the whole picture?" Andrews said.