

Board OKs 'conflict of interest' forms

By Billy Ball
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MONROE The Union County Board of Commissioners approved "conflict of interest" forms Monday after a tense debate with county advisers.

The board voted 3-2, with Commissioners Allan Baucom and Parker Mills in opposition, to require the disclosure forms of the county Planning Board, Board of Adjustment and the Board of Equalization and Review.

Commissioner Tracy Kuehler moved that the board make the disclosure statements a precursor for volunteers on the county advisory boards, after years of public accusations that developers have been voting on their own building projects.

The forms will apply to all boards after Monday's adoption, not including sitting board members, forcing members to reveal business ownership and real estate interests.

"It doesn't matter what other counties have done, it matters what we do," board Chairman Lanny Openshaw said. "I don't mind being the first."

Baucom and Mills, along with a handful of county advisers, said Monday that the proposal would deter qualified applicants from volunteering.

"What's the purpose in this?" Baucom said, adding that commissioners could be perceived as using the forms to qualify candidates.

"It's a thin line," County Manager Al Greene said.

Kuehler said she is worried county advisers have as much power as commissioners without their ownership interests being public record.

Commissioners are required to disclose their ownership and real estate interests.

At one point, Baucom said only one former sewer adviser has been implicated in misusing her power, referring to former sewer advisor Irene Broaddus.

Broaddus was accused by developers this year of extorting them for sewer access, a charge which Broaddus has denied.

The board approved the statements despite heated opposition from several on-hand advisers, including agricultural adviser Don Kerr.

"I just think that's an invasion on privacy," Kerr said. " If we don't trust someone, they shouldn't be on the board."

But Commissioner Kim Rogers said the forms do not require advisers to disclose private financial information, only ownership and real estate.

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