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 High: 87°
 Low: 64°
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- Sports
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 News

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Events Calendar

July 2010						
Su	Mo	Tu	We	Th	Fr	Sa
27	28	29	30	1	2	3
4	5	6	7	8	9	10
11	12	13	14	15	16	17
18	19	20	21	22	23	24
25	26	27	28	29	30	31
1	2	3	4	5	6	7

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Petitions to target Akron City Council

Group wants meetings to include set times for public comments

By Stephanie Warsmith
 Beacon Journal staff writer

Published on Wednesday, Jun 23, 2010

An Akron group wants citizens to have more of a voice at Akron City Council meetings.

Citizens for a Better Akron, a political action committee headed by former councilman Ernie Tarle, the only Akron politician ever recalled, plans to circulate petitions for a charter amendment requiring a public comment period during council meetings.

The group, which is still working out key details, hopes to get an issue on the Nov. 2 ballot.

"I understand that, anytime you allow people to speak their mind, you get people grumbling and off subject," said Tarle, a former Akron ward councilman who tried unsuccessfully for a return to council last year. "That is the price that we pay for democracy. We will try to keep it as reasonable and palatable as possible. In the end, the people need to be heard."

Tarle is getting input from — and has the support of — groups that have put issues before Akron voters in the past, with mixed success. This includes Change Akron Now, which led the failed recall attempt against Akron Mayor Don Plusquellic last year, and the American Friends Service Committee, whose members have been involved in several petition drives, including the successful campaign finance reform effort.

This newest effort, though in its early stages, may spur council to take a look at its own practices.

Council President Marco Sommerville met with John Green, who heads the University of Akron's Bliss Institute for Applied Politics, this week about helping with a study of how public comment periods are handled elsewhere. He said a citizen committee may be formed and would include a member from Tarle's group.

Citizens aren't currently permitted to speak at Akron council meetings, unless a public hearing is held on a specific topic, such as a proposed zoning change or the city's operating budget. People wishing to speak when a hearing isn't scheduled must submit a written request to Sommerville through the council clerk's office the day before the meeting.

The requests are forwarded to the council member who chairs the committee in charge of the topic the citizen wishes to address.

Sommerville said the main goal is to address the citizen's problem by getting him or her in touch with the department head best able to respond. By having the citizen attend a committee meeting, he said, the department head can attend the meeting, hear the concern and work on solving it.

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The330:

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"Coming to council does not really solve a problem," he said.

Numbers disputed

Akron Docs in Haiti:

Orphans in Fondwa

Sommerville took exception to an e-mail sent out by Warner Mendenhall, who heads Change Akron Now, which said Sommerville had blocked "hundreds of people" from speaking at council meetings over the years.

First Bell - On Education:

Akron schools to cut senior staffers

"That is utterly ridiculous," Sommerville said. "I challenge him to prove that."

Green said he would be willing to help council examine the public speaking issue, which he said has been contentious in cities across the country.

Pets:

Video: Get-Fit Moves With Your Pet

Public comment is handled differently both locally and statewide.

The Heldenfiles:

Anime "Iron Man," "X-Men," "Wolverine," "Blade" Set

To address the Akron school board, a citizen must submit a written request two days in advance. Only three topics can be addressed at each meeting, with a maximum of three speakers per topic who can speak for up to three minutes.

Akron Zips:

Poll: What season are you anticipating most?

Residents are permitted to talk at the end of Summit County Council or council committee meetings for three minutes. County staffers are currently studying how public comment periods are handled in other cities and counties to decide if the county's policy needs changed.

Tribe Matters:

Monday's minor league wrap up

Cincinnati also has an open policy, with a half-hour public comment period before each council meeting during which people can speak for two minutes each. Residents also may request to address council committees for up to three minutes.

Cleveland Browns:

Butter sculpture of Browns lineman Joe Thomas unveiled

Cleveland's policy mirrors Akron's, with residents not permitted to speak during council meetings and instead referred to the committee that handles the topic they want to discuss.

Kent State Sports:

Key MAC Games Of 2010 Season

Specific time periods

Cleveland Cavaliers:

Cavs deal West for Sessions

Tarle's group is still deciding on the requirements that will be in its proposal. The e-mail circulated by Mendenhall mentions an hourlong public speaking period at the start of each council meeting and a 30-minute period at the beginning of each committee meeting, with people permitted to talk for three minutes each.

Buckeye Blogging:

10 Hurdles Standing Between Ohio State and Another National Championship

Tarle said the public speaking period during council meetings may be cut to 30 minutes, and the period during committee meetings dropped to 15 minutes.

Varsity Letters:

Report: Another offer for McKinley QB

Some Akron council meetings lately have lasted a half-hour or less, while committee meetings sometimes take less than 15 minutes.

All Da King's Men:

Rep. Paul Ryan Shreds MSNBC's Chris Matthews

Tarle said he expects his group to start circulating petitions by the end of this week or early next week. They must gather 1,050 valid signatures before the Aug. 18 deadline for getting issues on the November ballot.

Blog of Mass Destruction:

RNC To Feature Racist Breitbart

Tarle said he and other local activists also may campaign against a charter change expected to be recommended by the Charter Review Commission that would make it more difficult to get recalls and other issues on the ballot.

Akron Law Café:

All the Dodd-Frank Act Analysis You'll Need for the Weekend

The commission is expected to submit its recommendations, which would need voter approval, to council by July 1.

Car Chase:

Sunday – or Anyday Drives

"I think it's the wrong direction," Tarle said of the proposed change. "I'm a believer that government ought to listen to regular folks — have a top-down management style. They think they know better, should make the decisions, and we'll live with it. Sometimes they do and sometimes they don't."

Let's Talk Real Estate:

Brangelina to Buy in Santorini?

Stephanie Warsmith can be reached at 330-996-3705 or swarsmith@thebeaconjournal.com.

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HRLite House:

From the White House – New Federal Approach to Hiring

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