

Upper Arlington council halts rule change

Angry residents say council members ignore input

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Now is not the time to make major rule changes, Upper Arlington City Council members decided tonight.

Facing a groundswell of angry residents who have accused the council of shoving trash privatization and a neighborhood rezoning down their throats, council members reversed course.

Earlier today, council appeared headed toward changing rules to allow it to pass legislation after two readings instead of three.

Other proposed changes, recommended by its three-member rules committee of President Don Leach, Linda Mauger and Erik Yassenoff, also were dropped.

They included allowing the approval of legislation providing economic incentives after one reading and making only five votes, not six, enough to suspend the two-reading requirement.

But council members agreed to punt those proposals at tonight's meeting. Members Ed Seidel Jr. and Mary Ann Krauss had previously joined the rules committee in supporting them, while Councilmen Frank Ciatola and Wade Steen opposed the changes.

The decision followed input from residents since the changes were discussed at a council conference session June 2, Leach said.

Five council members contacted today still expected the proposed changes to go forward, but recent dissatisfaction expressed by many Upper Arlington residents and a desire not to be viewed as shutting out the public changed that, Leach said.

One group of residents is supporting an initiative petition against the council's recent decision to privatize trash services. A second is backing a referendum against a more-recent rezoning on Tremont Road that

would convert two houses into an office building.

Michael Schadek, a resident leading the movement against the trash-privatization vote, said this afternoon: "I am vehemently opposed to these rule changes. I think our council is officially out of control now.

"They're limiting resident input all in the guise of streamlining the process," he said. "The process wasn't broken. It has worked well for many years. We need to an inclusive system. We don't need to limit resident input."

Resident Vicki Kerman also is troubled by the proposal.

"The city is trying to fix problems that don't exist," she said. "And in the process they continue to erode residents' rights, including resident input and making it easier for city staff and council to shove things through."

Council members who supported the changes before the meeting said Dublin, Gahanna, Worthington, Columbus, Grove City, New Albany and Kettering allow two or fewer public hearings for legislation.

Leach said the council will continue to examine other possible rules changes at its conference session next Monday.

Resident Jim Becker told the council he was "disturbed by the process."

"I want to know from where this idea sprang," he said. "We keep hearing about (seven) municipalities that do this, but what about the 931 that don't? ... These are citizens' rights, not rules of council."

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