



Union Township supervisor adjourns meeting mid-public comment

By **Randi Shaffer**, *The Morning Sun*

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16 COMMENTS

Union Township’s supervisor drew the ire of some local residents when he closed the public comment portion of Wednesday night’s meeting early after expressing displeasure in the way the conversation was going.

“I can adjourn the meeting any time I want,” Supervisor Russ Alwood said after pounding the gavel during Union Township resident John Zerbe’s allotted three minutes for public comment.

“Meeting’s adjourned,” Alwood said. “We’re adjourned. We’re adjourned. We’re adjourned.”

At the start of the meeting, Alwood asked that those who would later participate in public comment refrain from speaking about “political issues.”

“We cannot say anything that is going to be political in this board meeting — I want you all to know that,” Alwood addressed the audience. “Tonight I don’t want to have any comments that’s going to be anything on political issues.”

Alwood said that, rather than speaking during the extended public comment session, he would prefer if residents stopped in the Union Township office during business hours to talk to management.

Union Township resident Mary Barker stepped forward during extended public comment to voice her displeasure at Alwood’s announcement.

“We came here to talk in public, and now our voice is being censored,” she said. “We will take this issue up publicly. You will not be able to suppress us.”

Alwood interrupted Barker two minutes and 24 seconds into her portion of public comment when she called him out, stating “We can’t talk about what Russ doesn’t want us to talk about.”

“It’s not about me; it’s about what the (Michigan Township Association) told me today and yesterday,” Alwood said. “I called twice.”

Trustee Roger Hauck said it was his understanding that the MTA said no board members could talk about political issues, not that the public could not.

Alwood asked Clerk Margie Henry to clarify.

“They said that to bring up any political issues was not allowed in a township meeting,” Henry said.

Barker objected.

“Everything in township government is political,” she said. “You’re all elected officials.”

Not all township trustees agreed with Alwood’s decision to restrict topics during the public comment portion of the agenda.

Trustee Phil Mikus said he could not fathom the idea.

“I can’t endorse this position that you’re taking,” Phil Mikus said. “I don’t want it to be seen as a reflection of the entire board’s acceptance of your interpretation of what you heard.”

Alwood adjourned the meeting just 18 seconds into Zerbe’s comment, when the resident asked whether Alwood could offer a definition as to what was considered “political.”

“Not tonight,” Alwood responded, before adjourning the meeting.

Mikus stated that because extended public comment was item No. 9, he was not given his chance to speak during agenda item No. 10, final board member comment.

Alwood resumed the meeting for final board member comment, but stressed that the extended public comment of the meeting was closed.

“I can adjourn the meeting any time I want,” he stated.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Randi Shaffer has been the Isabella County reporter for the Morning Sun since 2012. An alumna of CMU, she is in the process of obtaining her MSA degree. Obsessions include hockey, yoga and vegetables. Reach the author at rshaffer@michigannewspapers.com.

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Back to top