

15 nominees for county ethics committee to be culled

By Catherine Dominguez, cdominguez@hcnonline.com Published 7:12 pm, Monday, March 27, 2017

Montgomery County commissioners will pick its five-member ethics committee from a list of 15 people nominated. The discussion starts during Tuesday's court meeting. According to the recently adopted county ethics policy, a committee comprised of five community members will review any ethics complaints against most of the county's elected officials and all employees to determine whether there is a violation. Commissioners will appoint two members, while the county auditor, purchasing director and human resources director will recommend three people apiece. Commissioners will choose one of the recommendations from each department, plus their two nominees, to get the five-person committee.

The nominations include Dorothy Woodall, Larry Foerster, Tommy Gage, Troy Stuckey, Misty Perinne, Adam Dietrich, Juanita Stanley, Geraldine Lamb, Kelli Cooper, Dale Inman, Frank Ildebrando, James Wiggins, Ronald Hale, William Dornbos and Matthew Koppelman.

In a previous article, County Attorney J D Lambright said the process will allow a person to seek an appeal in front of an independent arbitrator. The policy went into effect Feb. 1 but gave the commissioners 45 days to organize the ethics committee.

Precinct 3 Commissioner James Noack suggested the ethics committee established by the new policy be unanimous in its findings to avoid frivolous claims.

The nominees

Woodall – Nominated by County Judge Craig Doyal. Woodall is a retired school teacher and currently serves as a Montgomery County Ballot Board judge.

Foerster – Nominated by Precinct 1 Commissioner Mike Meador. Foerster is a local attorney who works with numerous municipalities, emergency services districts and municipal utility districts.

Gage – Nominated by Precinct 2 Commissioner Charlie Riley. Gage is the former sheriff of Montgomery County, serving 12 years as well as several decades in law enforcement.

Stuckey – Nominated by Riley. Stucky is the owner of Stuckey's Contract Services LP.

Perinne – Nominated by Precinct 3 Commissioner James Noack. Perinne serves as a central regional sales manager with IFE Group.

Dietrich – Nominated by Precinct 4 Commissioner Jim Clark. Dietrich is an attorney with Harrison & Dietrich PLLC.

Stanley – Nominated by the Purchasing Department. Stanley is a grants administrator for the Lone Star College System and former grant administrator for Montgomery County.

Lamb – Nominated by the Purchasing Department. Lamb is a former county employee; however, her nomination form did not indicate what department.

Cooper – Nominated by the Purchasing Department. Cooper is a local business professional who owns WaWa Marketing and Publishing LLC and Custom Patio Structures LLC.

Inman – Nominated by the county auditor. Inman is the owner and primary agent of Nationwide Insurance Agency, a senior pastor at Calvary Road Baptist Church and an adjunct faculty member at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

Ildebrando – Nominated by the county auditor. Ildebrando is a retired marketing director.

Wiggins – Nominated by the county auditor. Wiggins is a certified public accountant with his own firm since 1985.

Hale – Nominated by the Human Resources Department. Hale is retired from Precision Drilling (Gray Wolf Drilling).

Dornbos – Nominated by the Human Resources Department. Retired Montgomery County Hospital District human resources director.

Koppelman – Nominated by the Human Resources Department. Koppelman works in customer service with Hemple USA.

Ethics saga

While Montgomery County District Attorney Brett Ligon and Lambright have been in favor of a policy, the issue resurfaced earlier this year when Ligon spoke to commissioners regarding the Texas Department of Transportation's new guidelines for grant funds that require a county to have, and show proof of, an ethics policy with specific requirements.

A set of ethical guidelines adopted by the court in April fell short of TxDOT requirements, delaying grant applications by the DA's Office, Montgomery County Sheriff's Office and Precinct 4 Constable's Office.

During the court's Jan. 10 meeting, Ligon told the court to "reach for the stars" with the policy. Lambright agreed and said the new policy does just that. "The county's current ethics policy is one page and 13 sentences long," Lambright told the court, noting he wanted to make sure the plan was far-reaching and not just something to satisfy the state grant requirements. "The (new policy) is about 17 or 18 pages long and goes into an awful lot of detail. We wanted to put something in place not just for today but for down the road."

Assistant County Attorney B.D. Griffin said the new policy provides transparency. "It will bring, in the long run, clarity," he said.

Policy highlights

The policy includes all county employees, except court-at-law judges and justices of the peace, who have guidelines already set and enforced by the State Commission on Judicial Conduct. The District Attorney's Office and district judges also are considered state employees and would not fall under the policy, except when handling county business.

Lambright said the new policy will require disclosure of business relationships; but, for Commissioners Court members, it will not require an abstention from discussions or action. Another hot-button issue addressed in the new policy is nepotism.

The approved policy states "county elected officials and department heads will not advocate the employment, appointment, promotion, transfer or advancement to a paid county position of a family member and will not supervise or manage a family member unless the employee was employed prior to the election or appointment of the county elected official or department head."

Lambright said the policy is not retroactive. Violations of the policy, as determined by the committee, will result in a reprimand.