

# Council begins interviews for planning chief

■ Only nine of the 14 applicants are called:  
Hanson is considered the frontrunner by some other applicants

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After extending the application deadline once and considering an outside search for a Planning Board chairman, the County Council has decided to interview only nine of the 14 people who applied.

The interviews began Tuesday in Rockville.

Asked why all 14 were not called for interviews, County Council President George L. Leventhal said he bowed to council tradition.

"I would have liked to interview all candidates who received even one inquiry from a council member. I suggested that we interview most of the candidates except those living outside the county," said Leventhal (D-At large) of Takoma Park. "I was told by my colleagues and staff that this was the way that interviews on all boards and commissions have always been done; that this had been the practice of council in the past."

Olney activist Art Brodsky, attorney Alan Bowser of Silver Spring and former Planning Board chairman and council consultant Royce Hanson of Montgomery Village discussed the \$134,000-plus job on Tuesday. Hanson investigated the planning debacle uncovered last year in the Clarksburg Town Center, which led eventually to Derick P. Berlage choosing not to seek a second-four year term as Planning Board chairman.

A second round of interviews with other applicants is scheduled for June 20. Interviews are being held at the council office building and are open to the public, but will not be televised on the county's cable channel.

The remaining five candidates — Gerald R. Cichy, Richard L. Claypoole, Tiaa B. Rutherford, Shelton Skolnick and Thomas C. Snyder — will not be interviewed.

Claypoole expressed his disappointment.

"I can't help but feel that my long history in the county, my proven leadership and managerial success at the highest rungs of the federal government, and my years of public service in Montgomery County made me a highly viable candidate to successfully reverse the fortunes of the Planning Board in this time of lost citizen confidence in its competence and integrity," he said in an e-mail to *The Gazette*.

"I have no problem with the current process," said Councilwoman Nancy M. Floreen (D-At large) of Garrett Park, a former Planning Board member. "I'm looking forward to speaking with the applicants who have been chosen for interviews."

Like Floreen, Councilman Michael I. Knapp (D-Dist. 2) of Germantown

defended the interview process.

"The process is fine. I think it was more feasible this way than with the difficulties of interviewing 14 people," he said.

Earlier this year, Knapp had urged the council to consider a broader county search outside of those who had applied for the job. His colleagues disagreed, and no additional search was held.

After Tuesday's interviews, Knapp said he still believes there is a lot of untapped talent in the county.

While council members have given the interview process a passing grade, civic activists and even some of the applicants disagree.

"[The council] has its discretion, but if I was a council member I would have interviewed all of the applicants especially with the scrutiny that the entire process has been under," said Skolnick, a Silver Spring attorney and an at-large candidate for the County Council who was not chosen for an interview. "I also would have recommended that the interviews be conducted in a room with television capabilities, just for the sake of openness. There were good candidates interested in this job, and an open process is another way to encourage people to apply for these positions."

Montgomery County Civic Federation member Jim Humphrey criticized the council for not interviewing all 14 applicants.

"I am surprised that there was not at least an initial level of questioning of all applicants," Humphrey said. "I would hope that it would be a fair and open process that would allow for at least a sample of questioning of all the candidates."

The council also has been criticized for its seeming preference for Hanson.

"I think Royce is it," Brodsky said after his interview Tuesday. "I think the chances for anyone other than Royce Hanson are slim to none."

Leventhal said that there is no consensus on a chairman yet, but that some of his colleagues may have their favorites.

"You've only got a shoo-in if you've got the votes," Hanson said Tuesday. "I would be happy to be chairman and see it as an opportunity to help a county in which I've lived a large part of my life."

The winning applicant must get at least five of the council's nine votes. All three of Tuesday's applicants said they would serve a complete four-year term if chosen. Bowser, who is registered to vote in New Jersey, said he would register in Montgomery, where he has never voted.

A vote is expected in July.