

OUR OPINION

Burning ban needs more thought, public input

A smoldering controversy over a proposed ban on open burning in Kingston Township is flaring into a rancorous debate that is about more than whether property owners should have the right to incinerate yard waste. That is not only because of the potential ban itself, but the way in which it was revived.

The issue had been tabled by the supervisors at their August meeting, ostensibly to "get it right," in the words of outgoing supervisor John Versari. But he and Neil Allen were ousted in the November election, which threw into the mix the possibility of a new alignment of supervisors on this and other issues come January. Then, at the November meeting, as the clock neared 11 p.m., supervisor Carl Goodwin moved to open discussion on new business, and once that was approved, motioned for adoption of an ordinance that would disallow all outdoor burning except for cooking, campfires and training. While the late-night maneuver drew scorn from audience members, it quickly passed 4-1, with only Chris Yankovich showing the fortitude to oppose it.

In a nutshell, the arguments against adopting a comprehensive ban are that it will make disposal of items such as leaves and household paper inconvenient, and will create a financial hardship for people who can't afford to have tree limbs and other large vegetation removed from their property. That is particularly true since Kingston Township does not provide municipal pickup of yard waste.

Those on the side of a ban have their eyes on future grant money that is available only to municipalities that halt burning of recyclable material — which includes yard waste — and feel that no one should have to be assaulted by noxious smoke and odors emanating from a neighbor's burn barrel.

It would seem a reasonable compromise could be crafted that falls between an outright ban and laissez-faire conflagrations. That might include eliminating burning in close neighborhoods, restricting burning to particular days and times and limits on what could be burned. Even the ordinance outline Goodwin proposed had some exceptions, one of which is "grubbing" — define that one — in agricultural zones.

That brings us back to the way in which this proposal was given new life. It turns out there is no ordinance waiting in the wings, only vague language about forbidding open burning. So, aside from the unseemly manner in which the issue was reintroduced, it seems there was very little effort put into researching restrictions with an eye toward what is best for residents.

The new board, which takes office January 4, needs to give this question a more thorough review, and not from only one perspective. Once that is done, no action should be considered until a real ordinance has been presented to the public for their scrutiny and comments.

Happy New Year? We hope so

Terror alerts, troops under fire, a shaky economy. It hardly seems appropriate to ring in 2004 with gauzy aphorisms about wonderful prospects and optimistic predictions. Remember Dow 36,000 and the New World Order?

But perhaps it is at times like these that we find out what is truly important in life, and for at least a moment appreciate how much better off Americans are than most of the world's population, and not only in material terms. Just one example: ours is a nation in which the sacred and secular exist side-by-side in relative comfort, as opposed to those in which it is the business of the state to enforce observance of one religion, sometimes by lethal means. Another: because America's people have come from all levels of society and geography, those of us with a particular ancestry can usually find plenty of company, or — even better — can proudly exhibit our heritage without fear of being labeled inferior or unwelcome.

We are far from perfect by both of those measures, but, as the saying goes, our government and society are the worst on earth, except for all the others.

This also may be the best time to make resolutions that go beyond individual wish lists. In addition to losing weight and quitting smoking, perhaps we should commit ourselves to more careful study of the issues that affect America and the world so that we can make better choices in the voting booth. At a more personal level, we can vow to treat every person we meet — whether a family member, friend, co-worker or stranger in line — the way we would like to be treated. That would surely make for a happier new year.

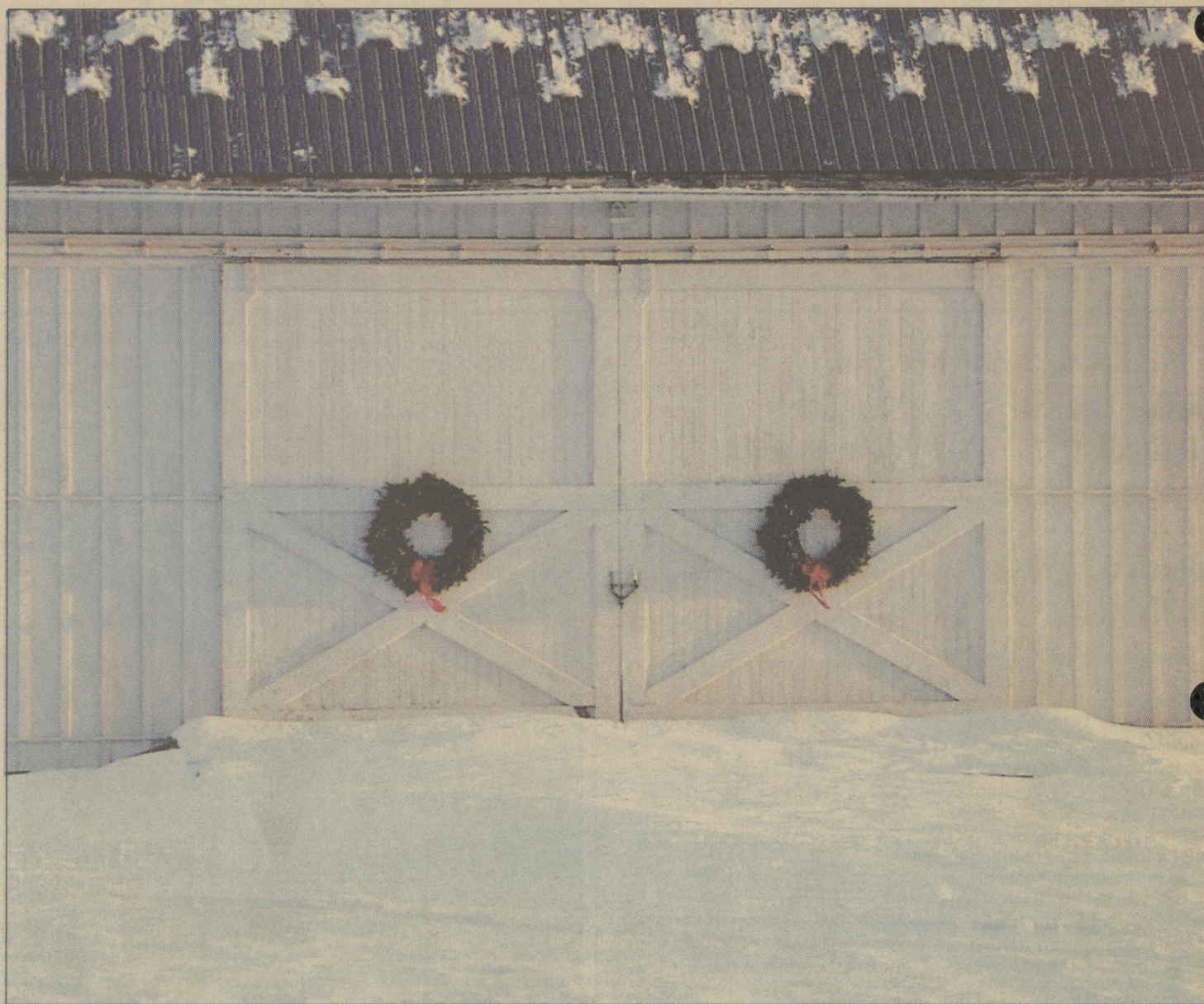
Letters, columns and editorials

Editorials, which are the opinion of the management of The Post, appear on the editorial page and are written by the editor unless otherwise indicated. Any artwork represents the opinion of the cartoonist, and columns are the opinion of the author.

Letters to the editor are welcome and will be published, subject to the following guidelines:

- Letters should not exceed 500 words.
- No writer may have more than one letter addressing the same topic published during a 30-day period, except as a reply to another letter.
- Letters must be signed and include the writer's home town and a telephone number for verification.
- Names will be withheld only if there exists a clear threat to the writer.
- The Post retains the right to accept or reject any letter, and to edit letters for grammar and spelling, as well as to eliminate any libel, slander or objectionable wording.

In addition to letters, we welcome longer pieces that may run as columns.



Deck the barn with wreaths of holly? Photo by Charlotte Bartizek.

LETTERS

Late-night move for burn ban has noxious odor

Editor,
I read the Post article ("At 11 p.m., board restricts burning," Dec. 14) with dismay. I'll first offer that I am in favor of a strong restriction on open burning, so I do not disagree with the motion that was passed. However, my opinion on the motion raised and passed at 11 p.m. that evening is irrelevant — what is relevant is the method by which the motion was raised and acted upon.

Clearly, the timing chosen by supervisor Carl Goodwin was intentional, not accidental. It is unfortunate that the same concern that prompted him to introduce the issue at 11 p.m. did not also allow him to understand that it was inappropriate to do so. At best, it creates a perception that this issue was acted on in an underhanded,

"back door" kind of way. At worst, it is a failure of elected leadership to honor a commitment to openness and true democracy. In any event, it leaves a bad taste in the mouths of anyone concerned about the integrity of local politics — and fuels feelings among those who oppose open burning restrictions that they were treated unfairly. Goodwin may have wanted to bring closure to the issue, which is a worthwhile goal, as this issue has dragged on for an extended period of time. However, the path he chose to try to resolve the matter will undoubtedly lead to additional discussion and debate. Incoming supervisor Jeffrey Box was completely on target when he remarked that it "was an insult to democracy." Those elected to serve

the interests of the public should not time their work to avoid the public eye.

As mentioned above, I agree with the motion that was passed. My concern lies with future motions and other issues for public debate. It is reasonable to believe that the level of trust between the Kingston Township supervisors and the residents of Kingston Township has been damaged. Will the supervisors call last-minute meetings to avoid or limit public debate? Will matters not on the published agenda be raised and acted upon as an unexpected "surprise?" Will the tone of future decision-making be one of secrecy and avoidance of the township's residents? The supervisors may respond "no, of course not," but the reality is that recent experience suggests

otherwise.

Having relocated to the area about a year ago, I've been both amused and appalled by the nature of local politics. Politics in the Wyoming Valley area seems riddled with cronyism, conflicts of interest, inflated political egos, and leaders who put personal interests of family members and friends above the best interest of the general public. It appears that the supervisors of Kingston Township are contributing to an environment where taxpaying voters may question the motives and intentions of their elected leaders. Let us hope that this recent incident is an isolated exception, and future decision-making will be conducted differently.

Douglas Hertel
Shavertown

Ban opponents looking for reasonable compromise

Editor,
In a letter that appeared in last week's Post, Kingston Township Supervisor Carl Goodwin claims articles that were published in newspapers concerning the burning ban have been biased and misleading.

The facts are that this issue was brought up at a township meeting around 11 p.m. in the evening, when most people had gone home. It could have

waited until a better time.

The 300 residents that signed a petition asked the board to compromise on burning; that is all we have asked. To say that we have disrupted meetings is an insult. We have a right to be heard. It's our township, it does not belong solely to Carl Goodwin, although it seems he wants it that way.

We have asked the current board to table this until the

new board comes on in January.

In his letter, Mr. Goodwin states that smoke from burning doesn't stop at your neighbor's border. Well, does the stinky smoke from my neighbor's wood burner in his house? Are we going to ban them next?

Did you ever think that each time we have a supervisors meeting, the smoke from your cigarette bothers other residents who are outside? Well, it

does. I should not have to deal with your cigarette smoke. Secondhand smoke kills people; no one ever died from a neighbor burning tree limbs.

We are willing to compromise, and we are not asking much. It's time to get this township running again, Mr. Goodwin. We will do it with or without your help.

Christopher Concert
Shavertown

70 Years Ago
December 29, 1933

NEW YEAR, 1934

— Look at it as you will, 1933 was a wonderful year. We struck the depths and we climbed out with courage, determination and perhaps history will say, with wisdom to attack problems which many thought without solution.

ONLY YESTERDAY — On the heels of sunny weather which made Christmas seem like a spring holiday, heavy snows and sub-zero temperatures rode out of the arctic on raw, chill winds this week to give the Back Mountain its first taste of record breaking temperatures this year.

— Property owners or businesses planning on constructing sanitary improvements may take advantage of the recently established Civil Works labor.

60 Years Ago
December 31, 1943

SERVICE MOTHER DIES IN HOSPITAL

— Funeral services will be held this morning for Mrs. Mary Balavage, Trucksville, mother of three sons serving overseas, an immigrant from Lithuania, at the home of her daughter, Mrs. Benjamin Luzenski.

— The sudden Christmas Day death of Mrs. Mary Gwynne Whitby Hill, of Shaver-

town, was surprise to many. She was married to local florist, Herbert Hill.

— Girls of the office of Commonwealth Telephone Company and those who work with them, held their annual Christmas dinner party at Lundy's last night.

50 Years Ago
December 25, 1953

FIRES FLICKER OUT IN ONE ROOM SCHOOLS

— The new school at Sweet Valley opened its doors Tuesday morning to 160 pupils who had formerly been educated in six one-room school houses in Ross Township.

— Two cars crashed at the bridge near Devens' Mill in Dallas Saturday night. Three were taken to the hospital by Norti Berti, a witness to the crash.

— Outdoor Christmas displays throughout the Back Mountain were never more attractive nor elaborate than they are this year.

40 Years Ago
December 30, 1963

SKATING AT SUNSET

— Harveys Lake was making good headway toward freezing during that recent zero spell, but a wind broke up the ice. At this point the lake isn't quite solid enough for skating.

— Jackson police chief Robert Cooper was physically attacked as he investigated a two-car accident Christmas Eve.

30 Years Ago
December 27, 1973

COUNCIL ASKS FOR MONTHLY PAY

— Dallas Council is currently one of the few in the area that does not have compensated councilmen. Solicitor Charlie Lemmond was asked to draw up an ordinance that would request compensation of \$30 per meeting.

— Rep. Frank O'Connell Jr. is pushing for the awarding of a bid on a swimming facility project at Francis Slocum State Park.

— The second major snowfall of the season blanketed the region Friday, causing numerous accidents.

20 Years Ago
December 28, 1983

FOURTH GRADER DESIGNS CHRISTMAS CARD

— Leslie Scoble, a fourth grade student at Westmoreland Elementary, became the first elementary student this year to win the Christmas card contest.

— The homes of David Neiman, 32, Old Mill Road, Dallas and Rosemary Kravitz, 220 Davenport St., Dallas, are the winners of the 1983 Great Back Mountain Holiday Decorating Contest.

THE POST

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