

A moderate takes over school board chairmanship

Dems hope Eleanor Conforti brings 'better balance' to board

A faction of the Democratic Party weighed in last week to elect veteran Democrat Eleanor Conforti school board chairwoman and to defeat Republican Jerry Cammarata in his bid for the top spot.

"We were concerned that the proposed slate of officers was not balanced in terms of political ideology and philosophy," said Tom Lamanna, chief of staff to Democratic Councilman Jerome X. O'Donovan.

Lamanna said the North Shore councilman urged Mrs. Conforti to pursue a candidacy in order to have better balance on the board.

"The perception was that the slate was overly conservative on some issues . . . When the issue of Staten Island independence is being considered we felt we needed to protect an image of balance in the community," said Lamanna.

A week before the vote, Cammarata had announced his intention to run for chairman, with Robert Sacchi for vice chair, Carmel "Bunny" Reddington for secretary and Salvatore Ballarino for treasurer.

The slate of four had counted on Mrs. Conforti's vote to win a majority on the nine-member board. But Mrs. Conforti swung to the other side, spiking their chances and bringing about the election of a more moderate slate of officers.

Also elected were James Chin, to the post of vice chair; Ellen Trapp, treasurer; and Ira Goldstein, secretary.

"It was not a Democrat versus Republican. It was moderates verses conservatives. It had nothing to do with partisan politics — it had to do with ideology and school policy," said Lamanna.

Lamanna was in the audience during the election along with well-known Island Democrats John Lavelle, Gov. Mario Cuomo's appointee to the secession commission; and Greenridge Democrat Anthony Pocchia, an attorney who ran unsuccessfully for Congress in 1990 and for the South Shore council seat in April.

Borough President Guy V. Molinari said Republicans steered clear of the officers' election.

"As borough president and one of the active members of our party, I was totally unaware that the school board was electing a new president (Monday) night until I read about it in the Advance," said Molinari. "We don't believe that political parties should try to impose their will on the school board."

Cammarata bowed out of the race seconds before the vote, saying he had been appointed by Molinari to serve on a citywide panel on school overcrowding. The letter informing Cammarata of the appointment was dated May 25.

School seat countdown

Time for musical chairs!

Two weeks ago, the Department of City Planning said there were 12 empty seats left in elementary and intermediate schools in South Richmond.

But as enrollment climbs in Island schools, so, oddly enough, do the number of empty school seats. City Planning now says there are 46 seats up for grabs.



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SCHOOL OF THOUGHT

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How does that add up?

Builders putting up homes in South Richmond must first get permits from City Planning certifying that there are enough school seats nearby to accommodate incoming children.

The school seat permits are only good for a year, so if a building isn't completed within 12 months, the school seats become available again — at least on paper.

On the flip side, school enrollment changes every day. On the South Shore, registers usually grow. But the Board of Education only relies on its October 31 registers when assessing how many seats are available. Those registers are outdated by Nov. 1, school officials say.

"The next day the number changes," said Leonard Del Rio, an assistant to Island District Schools Superintendent Christy Cugini. "If City Planning is updating their numbers every month, we should be allowed the same privilege. No question about it."

City Planning only deals with the Board of Education, so department spokesman Kevin Davitt suggested that local school officials work out their gripes with the central Board. Board of Ed Director of Strategic Planning Cheryl Hood-Francis said she is looking into the possibility of updating school enrollment figures.