

## THE ISLAND

# Councilman opposes BP's choice for planning panel

■ O'Donovan says he is against Molinari's reappointment of Merolo because the next borough president should pick his own person for the commission

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ADVANCE BOROUGH HALL BUREAU

Councilman Jerome O'Donovan said yesterday he will oppose the reappointment of John Merolo to the City Planning Commission.

"I don't want him reappointed," O'Donovan (D-North Shore), a candidate for borough president, said. "We'll go through the process. For good-government purposes, the next borough president should have the right to select the planning person."

Borough President Guy Molinari this week recommended Merolo be given a new five-year term on the commission, effective Sunday. Merolo, of Pleasant Plains, was appointed in June 2000 to finish the term of Anthony Giacobbe, who was appointed a Court of Claims judge. That term would have ended tomorrow.

In May, O'Donovan said naming

Merolo to a new term would prevent the next borough president from pursuing what could be a different agenda on planning and development.

Staten Island's next chief executive shouldn't be tied to a Molinari appointee whose term would extend beyond that of the next borough president, O'Donovan said at the time.

"I'm not that enthusiastic about Mr. Merolo," said O'Donovan yesterday.

O'Donovan chief of staff Thomas LaManna said Merolo "hasn't represented the interests of Staten Island. We continue to have resistance from City Planning on zoning issues. He's not visible, he hasn't been an advocate. He hasn't been accessible to community groups. There's been no push to have things done."

Said Merolo: "I think that's a politically motivated thing for them to say. I've been available to every community group that's asked me."

Areas where O'Donovan has sought action include a request for a master plan to address not only future zoning, but infrastructure needs; the strengthening of guidelines regulating hillside develop-

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ment, as well as the strengthening of guidelines correlating building permits and school seats, and support for a moratorium on the sale of city-owned properties.

Merolo said he expected the commission to present plans to strengthen the protection of natural areas by the end of the year.

said Merolo.

The appointment requires City Council approval. Last year, O'Donovan voted for Merolo to be seated on the commission. The Council Rules Committee, on which O'Donovan sits, will take up the issue soon.

LaManna said O'Donovan has the support of Council Speaker Peter Vallone "in proceeding to address this issue."

Molinari described Merolo as "extremely talented," and said O'Donovan would be "making a terrible mistake" if he opposes the reappointment.

According to the borough president, Merolo has been an "indispensable" part of Borough Hall's rezoning decisions since coming on board, including votes on two of Molinari's South Shore rezoning recommendations.

If Molinari had not requested that Merolo be reappointed, he would have served through the remainder of Molinari's term, which ends Dec. 31.

Merolo is married to Molinari's Borough Hall scheduler, Dana Merolo.

Pointing out how Molinari has said he expects Jerry Cammarata, his Board of Education represen-

tative, to toe the line politically, LaManna said, "He believes the appointee of the borough president ought to be responsive to the borough president. And we agree with him. How could it be he finds it consistent to strap the next borough president with an appointee on this critical panel who does not share, in our case, our agenda?"

Molinari pointed out that the five-year term of the planning commissioner is mandated in the City Charter and is by definition meant to outlast the four-year term of the borough president who makes the appointment. It was designed that way to provide continuity, Molinari said.

"He's trying to make political hay where there is no political issue," Molinari said of O'Donovan. He added he would be "disappointed in Speaker Vallone if he were to take up the O'Donovan cry. I will speak out."

Of his reappointment, Merolo said in a statement released by Molinari's office, "I was pleased to play a role in the final approvals of the rezoning of the South Shore and I am committed to ensuring the same success as the rezoning of the rest of Staten Island comes up for review."