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City council OKs voting districts

WILKES-BARRE — City council voted Thursday to accept five new voting districts for next year's election.

The vote comes five years after voters passed a referendum to reduce the number of council seats from seven to five and elect them by districts.

The new districts pit Councilman Jim McCarthy and Councilwoman Kathy Kane against each other in one district and Councilmen Bill Barrett, Phil Latinski and Mike McGinley against each other in another district.

"You never want to run against your friends, but the people will decide," McGinley said after the meeting.

Council members also voted to freeze their salaries and the mayor's salary for three years beginning in 2007.

The ordinance will be repealed on Jan. 1, 2010 and the 1990 ordinance which allows raises for elected officials will restart. Mayor Tom Leighton's current salary is \$79,911. The council chairman is paid \$14,699 and the other six council members receive \$13,199.

Responding to published comments from former city council candidate Walter Griffith that the pay freeze is a "smokescreen" to get council members re-elected, Kane said Griffith is always trying to get himself elected.

"It is always very easy to shoot from the hip and take the role of the underdog as Steve Urban does as a minority commissioner," Kane said. "As I told Mayor (Tom) McGroarty years ago, you attract more bees with honey than you do with vinegar."

City Wide Towing Operator Bob Kadluboski told Assistant Solicitor Bill Vinsko that he wants to know, in writing, why the 1990 ordinance which allows raises for elected officials is legal. He asked how they could change the city charter without putting it on the ballot. He also asked how they can count part-time service on council toward full-time pensions.

Vinsko said the 1990 ordinance is legal and council has a right to set the salaries. Health care for council and pensions are in the city charter and "council cannot do anything about that," he said.

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