

City GOP may challenge new apportionment panel

By Denise Allabaugh
Staff Writer

Luzerne County Sixth District Republican Chairman Stephen J. Urban believes Wilkes-Barre officials broke the law when they established a new Apportionment Commission to divide the city into five political districts.

Urban refused to select a Republican to serve on the new commission. He believes the first commission, led by Attorney John Moses, "did its job by drawing and voting on the original district lines," he said.

"I believe any subsequent commission is illegal and I will or would not participate in a process that is tainted," Urban said. "They're just stalling the matter."

Assistant City Solicitor Bill Vinsko denied that the new commission is illegal.

"He (Urban) had ample opportunity to address this in the courts if he felt this was illegal, but he never did so," Vinsko said.

Republicans are considering a legal challenge, said Christine Katsock, who unsuccessfully challenged Mayor Tom Leighton in 2004. She believes city officials established a new

commission because they didn't like the districts laid out by the first commission.

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Leighton and city council named six members of the new commission Thursday. The six will appoint a chairperson.

The appointments were another step in allowing city residents to vote for five council members instead of seven in 2007, a referendum city voters approved in 2001. Court challenges delayed the changes from taking place.

Council chose two South Wilkes-Barre residents: Democrats Chris Evans, who is employed by the Wilkes-Barre Area School District, and Vaughn Koter Jr., a pharma-

ceutical salesman.

Evans and Koter were the only two who expressed an interest, said Council members Kathy Kane and Tony Thomas.

Leighton appointed Democrats Joan Kwak, another South Wilkes-Barre resident and a retired teacher at St. Nick's/St. Mary's School, and Harry Miller, a Parsons resident, former city councilman and a counselor at West Side Area Vocational-Technical School.

According to Leighton, Democratic Party chairman Greg Fellerman chose Rose Frati, the wife of city planning and development director Butch Frati.

Leighton said he selected South Wilkes-Barre resident Ted Wampole to the commission because he was the only Republican who expressed an interest. The mayor sent a certified letter to Urban, who did not respond.

Urban did not respond to the letter because he does not believe city officials should appoint a new commission. He said he would have selected himself, Katsock or Walter Griffith, but he believes the mayor wanted a "less controversial individual."

"I would like to see the law that allows them to redraw districts," Katsock said. "There's nothing in the home rule law of Pennsylvania that says they can do what they're doing."