

Contra Costa supervisors may outsource selection of cemetery board member

By Hannah Dreier
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MARTINEZ -- Contra Costa County supervisors may hand off responsibility for deciding who should fill a vacant cemetery district board seat to an outside group because of nepotism concerns.

Supervisors John Gioia, of Richmond, and Federal Glover, of Pittsburg, said at a meeting Monday that they believe supervisors should take the unusual step of assembling a panel of officials from outside the county to interview the eight applicants for the seat on the Byron-Brentwood-Knightsen Union Cemetery District board.

The appointment came under scrutiny when the husband of Supervisor Mary Piepho, of Discovery Bay, was initially recommended for the position.

Gioia and Glover suggested that the board convene an interview panel consisting of board members from cemetery districts outside of Contra Costa. If this panel made the recommendation to the Board of Supervisors, they reasoned, it would eliminate any appearance of conflict.

The supervisors also discussed the possibility of creating a board policy for cases like these.

"The whole issue is probably long overdue when it comes to talking about family members," Glover said.

Mary Piepho normally appoints members of the cemetery board, with the other supervisors confirming her picks, but she recused herself when her husband, David Piepho, applied. Gioia recommended that the supervisors choose David Piepho, who was one of two applicants, but then decided to review the decision after

a Times editorial criticized the move because of the Piephos' relationship.

The appointment would allow David Piepho, who is not running for re-election to the Discovery Bay Community Services District board, to retain his seat on a powerful county agency that regulates local government boundaries. Piepho is one of two special district representatives on the board of the Local Agency Formation Commission.

While preparing background materials for the supervisors to review the cemetery appointment, administrators found that the Board of Supervisors' clerk's office had failed to advertise the position, and reopened the application period.

Seven additional people applied during the second application period, and the applicant who was considered along with Piepho originally withdrew his application. The initial application period lasted 10 business days.

The supervisors decided against an outright ban on family member appointments and said that they will continue to discuss the issue at the next Public Protection Committee meeting, which will be held in I



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ate November. The issue fell to that committee to review because Mary Piepho sits on the Internal Operations Committee, which would normally handle it.

"When you have two family members that are involved in a community," Gioia said, "I don't think that having a straight bar makes any sense."

Gioia and Glover will make their recommendation about the selection process for the cemetery seat at the Oct. 26 supervisors meeting.

Applicant Vickey Rinehart, a retired Knightsen schools superintendent who missed the deadline during the first round of applications, is pleased with the way the supervisors are handling the matter.

"I think they're trying to make this transparent," she said, "and that's really important."

Cemetery officials, however, are growing impatient with the drawn-out process.

Cemetery manager Mark White said the district is "limping along," and worries about what will happen if one of the two sitting directors is forced to miss a meeting.

Board President Barbara Guise also hopes the supervisors reach a decision soon, though they have no official deadline.

"It's such a simple task," she said.

Contact Hannah Dreier at 925-779-7174. Follow her at [Twitter.com/hdreier](https://twitter.com/hdreier).

The applicants

Applicants for the vacant seat on the Byron-Brentwood-Knightsen Union Cemetery District

board:

- **Gail Martin, retired construction secretary, Brentwood**
- **Patrick McHenry, retired funeral home director, Brentwood**
- **D. Bailey Neff, general contractor, Brentwood**
- **Robin Pastor, farmer, Knightsen**
- **David Piepho, firefighter, Discovery Bay**
- **Vickey Rinehart, retired superintendent, Discovery Bay**
- **Johnny Staton, property manager, Brentwood**
- **Martin Ed Young, grand jurist, Discovery Bay**

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