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Adirondack groups uniting around APA chairman candidate

By JON ALEXANDER

There's a consensus candidate for the vacant seat of Adirondack Park Agency chairman among groups that are traditionally at odds with one another.

Officials said on Thursday that local governments and environmental groups are both pushing for Gov. Andrew Cuomo to appoint APA Commissioner Leilani "Lani" Ulrich to fill the controversial agency's leadership post.

The APA has been without a chairman since former Chairman Curt Stiles abruptly submitted his resignation in July, officially stepping aside in mid-August.

Speculation about who would replace Stiles has been running rampant since his departure.

"She'd be a good replacement," said Assemblywoman Teresa Sayward, R-Willsboro, adding that it remains unclear if and when Cuomo will act on the recommendations of both local governments and green groups.

Cuomo could temporarily appoint Ulrich to the post without state Senate approval, Sayward said.

He could also choose to wait until the Senate reconvenes and put a long-term nomination forward, if he agrees with those calling for Ulrich's appointment.

In her seven years on the board, Ulrich has become known for her willingness to build consensus about controversial issues and seek compromise positions that both environmentalists and local governments can accept.

"I think local government would be pleased with her as the choice," said Fred Monroe, executive director of the Adirondack Park Local Government Review Board. "I've heard she'd be willing to do it."

Ulrich would be the first woman at the APA's helm. Combined with APA Executive Director Terri Martino, they would constitute an all female-force in Adirondack regulatory policy.

Ulrich is one of the founders of the annual Adirondack Common Ground forum, a summer event in Long Lake that for the last four years has provided an open forum for local governments and environmentalists to discuss and debate regional issues.

"She understands the issues and gets along well with local government," said John Sheehan, spokesman for the Adirondack Council. "That's obviously critical to that position."

Unlike Stiles, who rarely allowed commissioners to enter into sweeping philosophical debates and who focused on the specific issue before the board, Ulrich regularly takes on the big-picture view.

"The number of years that it will take to get it right doesn't bother me," Ulrich said last year of required regulatory revisions that would allow a pair of locally popular mid-Adirondack Park fire towers to remain in place, even though their placement runs counter to the state Land Master Plan. "I don't like things taking forever, but I'd like to get it right."

The APA chairmanship is a critical full-time post at the agency. The chairperson is the agency's primary mouthpiece and negotiator with local governments, Adirondack citizens and green groups. The chairperson also sets the monthly agenda and oversees much of the APA's day-to-day operation.

Stiles' past as a former member of the Adirondack Council's board of directors often haunted him, resulting in criticism and mistrust among local governments.

Ulrich, as an APA commissioner, has regularly talked of the importance of snowmobile clubs in her hometown of Old Forge in Herkimer County.

Besides the vacancy in the chairmanship, four APA commissioners are currently serving on expired terms. If Ulrich were to be appointed chairwoman, the governor would have to appoint someone to fill her spot.

Calls to the governor's office about Ulrich were not returned on Thursday.

Read more: http://poststar.com/news/local/adirondack-groups-uniting-around-apa-chairman-candidate/article_38162246-dfc8-11e0-b6f7-001cc4c03286.html#ixzz1Y392dlIh