The Bonneville scene . . .

Sunday Apr. 15 1979

Commissioners ignore revamp of controversial zone board

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After a stormy three years, the previous controversial Bonneville Planning and Zoning Commission, headed by its aggressive chairman, Richard Skidmore, appears to have settled on a more responsive course.

This follows the predictions of earlier in the year when the new Bonneville County Board of Commissioners cut ties with its abrasive past and embarked on a new direction for more openness in government and lending a more sympathetic ear to the public.

Yet the county commissioners now seem to be glossing over enlarged membership appointments to the zoning commission, still not giving Swan Valley a voting voice, two issues that were paramount in the 1978 election campaign.

Much of the present county commissioner harmony is due to the pleasant and cooperative Clyde A. Burtenshaw, a Democrat, who was elevated to the chairmanship by his two Republican colleagues, Wylie Snarr and Tom Loertscher. This is highly unusual, as the majority party traditionally holds the chairmanship.

As result of the last election, Loertscher replaced the controversial Artell Suitter.

The three county commissioners, all staunch conservatives, say they get along well with each other and so far there has been no sharp disagreement, as marked previous county boards of recent years.

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Burtenshaw said the commissioners have now revised the tenure of the zoning members so that the terms of three expire in any one year while six remain holdovers. This was done after it was discovered that the terms of seven would expire this year because all their original appointments were for three years.

Burtenshaw said it was first thought the terms of seven of the nine members would expire June 1, but a check showed that this was not the case. It was discovered the terms of Skidmore and Marty Benham expire July 1; Robert Hoff, Ralph Steele, Ruby Sharp, Peggy Strain and Gordon Moir terminated Oct. 21; and Hermen Sargent and Marion Orme in 1980.

The commissioners quietly agreed the Skidmore and Benham terms will still expire July 1, but their successors will be appointed for three years, or until Oct. 1, 1982.

The Orme and Sargent terms expire Oct. 1, 1981.

Burtenshaw said Hoff, Mrs. Sharp, Mrs. Strain and Steele will later draw for the length of future terms. One will win a one year term, two two-year terms and one a three-year term.

The term of William A. Miller, who was named to succeed Gordon Moir who resigned last month, will run until Oct. 1, 1981. Miller is a former realtor, farmer and deputy in the assessor's office.

Under this system, the terms of three will expire Oct. 1 of any one year, which is a commendable change.

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Burtenshaw said there are no plans now for increasing the commission membership from the present nine to 12.

It was the surreptitious move under Suitter last year that cut the members from 12 to nine, prompting what appear justified charges, to get rid of two independent voices on the commission, Mrs. Brian (Lynn) Smith, a credit union employee, and Delbert Winterfeld, Swan Valley farmer. The third position was vacant at the time.

Suitter explained the move was to make the commission "more workable," but critics dispute this. It was named as one of the many reasons for Suitter's defeat in the primary by Loertscher, who used this as one of his main campaign issues. Mrs. Smith later was one of his main campaign workers.

The present commission also has failed to name a representative from Swan Valley on the commission. Whether it will do so in the future, Burtenshaw would not say. Loertcher said it might be considered later.

Winterfeld resigned just recently from the so-called Swan Valley advisory board to the commission, giving as his reason that he wanted to devote more time to his new certified seed operations which are keeping him busy. Winterfeld also agrees a Swan Valley representative should be named, but that he is not personally interested in an appointment.

Burtenshaw said the mayors of Swan Valley and Irwin are asked to recommend a replacement for Winterfeld to such a Swan Valley advisory board, which still has no vote on the planning commission, a merited complaint against the county commissioners.

Loertscher said he will suggest a Swan Valley representative to give the three county commissioner districts equal representation. This was one of his campaign pledges, along

Both Loertscher and Burtenshaw said the matter of reappointing Skidmore when his term expires July 1 has not been discussed.

The Post-Register

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Mrs. Smith said she is considering applying for reappointment.

The fact the commissioners revised the nine-member terms, however, would indicate they do not plan to expand the planning commission to 12.

Also the question is raised why a Swan Valley representative, such as Winterfeld, was not appointed to the Moir vacancy.

It's also mystifying why Miller's appointment is extended into 1981 arbitrarily when Moir's term actually expired this year.

At present the board membership is heavily concentrated to southeast of the city, with none north of Idaho Falls, the Swan Valley-area or west of Idaho Falls.

Moir, considered one of the better members of the board, said "It was a relief to quit the board."

In view of past controversies, it might be a better practice to avoid naming a chairman closely identified with the building and real estate trade, to avoid conflict of interests. Representatives of such industry can serve on the commission to give expert advice, althouth this advice can be obtained elsewhere.

Another suggestion has been the appointment of any attorney but the present commissioners apparently have not considered this alternative.

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Critics charge that frequently the county building inspector, Max Brinton, also a controversial figure, has made legal interpretations.

Burtenshaw, however, said no changes are being considered in the building inspector office.

However, Charles Borup recently was named as the Bonneville planner-coordinator.

In a recent meeting in discussing a mobile home ordinance, Borup remarked at the planning commission meeting "sometimes I get the feeling that we don't know who the planner is," obviously referring to Brinton's apparent reluctance to transfer such responsibilities to Borup.