

Naming Committee vote violated Illinois Open Meetings Act

Corryn Brock, News Editor

April 28, 2021

The vote by the Naming Committee that officially recommended a name change for Douglas Hall was in violation of the Open Meetings Act which states “all votes are conducted by roll call so each member’s vote on each issue can be identified and recorded,” because it did not originally follow the OMA.

Later Wednesday, a PDF of the chat log and link to the recording of the meeting was released along with a statement from Ken Wetstein, Vice President of University Advancement and ex officio convener of the Naming Committee:

“Several members of the committee, while discussing a motion to recommend the renaming of Douglas Hall, expressed an interest in casting their votes on that motion via ballot vote. The committee members discussed this option and concluded that they would cast their votes on the motion via ballot vote.

To facilitate that process, the Chair of the committee directed members of the committee to communicate their votes to me (the convener of the committee, a non-voting role) via the chat function of the Zoom virtual meeting platform. After receiving the chat communications from each of the voting members, I acknowledged the outcome of the vote (six to zero in favor of recommending the renaming Douglas Hall) by voice to the committee members. That vote – through Zoom’s chat function – was viewable only to myself. Upon advice of University Counsel, we understand that this vote through the chat function was improper, as it was not available to the public.

We believe posting the contents of the vote chat with the meeting’s recording is the best remedy.

... I apologize for this procedural oversight in the virtual environment. Please know I remain personally committed to ensuring that the activity of EIU’s Naming Committee remains as transparent as possible in our current, nontraditional virtual meeting environment.”

After some discussion amongst the committee during the meeting, Wetstein took the vote from the committee via Zoom messaging without a roll call vote.

When asked what section of the OMA the committee was taking a secret ballot vote under, Wetstein expressed he did not know what section of the act would allow for such a vote to be taken.

“I honestly am not chapter and verse on what section of the Open Meetings Act, however, I think the question might be moot since the vote was unanimous. I’m happy to discuss that with the representatives of the press, everyone knows who is in attendance and they know that the vote was unanimous,” Wetstein said. “Procedurally, I would offer if there’s any voting member of this committee at this time that believes that I have recorded the vote incorrectly, I would certainly invite them to make a motion to the chair for a recount and/or for a vote in open.

The committee then voted on retaking the vote as a roll call vote. Naming Committee Chair Angie Campbell, Mona Davenport and Carlos Amaya voted against retaking the vote as a roll call vote, Claudia Janssen-Danyi and Don Holly voted in favor of retaking the vote and Diane Burns abstained.

Before taking the vote Campbell said she did not want to retake the vote just because of outside pressure to do so, saying that not using a roll call vote was typical.

“It’s a unanimous vote, I understand that, I’m happy to (do a roll call vote) if we have to but, again, as Don suggested, if we were in any other meeting that’s traditionally the way it’s done, with a piece of paper and you pass it forward,” Campbell said. “At this point, I honestly don’t feel it’s necessary but if that’s what we need to do as a committee, and again I want to stress that, as a committee, not from outside pressure, but as a committee if we feel we need to do that I’ll move forward with a public vote.”

Burns requested it be put on the record she said the committee followed Robert’s Rules of Order.

A representative of The Daily Eastern News and a representative of the Journal Gazette / Times Courier requested it be put on the record that they objected to the vote due to the question of its legality.

A second vote was not taken.

Corryn Brock can be reached at 581-2812 or at cebrock@eiu.edu.