

Bianchi voted into PEDDA

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PITTSFIELD -- After a three-month hiatus, the city's mayor has returned as a member of the Pittsfield Economic Development Authority.

The City Council endorsed Mayor Daniel L. Bianchi's appointment of himself to PEDDA, the quasi-public agency that oversees the development of the William Stanley Business Park, off East Street. Bianchi replaces community advocate Peter Fruet, whose term expired Dec. 31, but who continued to serve on a month-to-month basis.

"I've known him [Fruet] for years, and he was very understanding of my decision," Bianchi said in an *Eagle* interview.

The council's unanimous approval Tuesday night allowed Bianchi to keep a promise he made during last fall's mayoral campaign to have the mayor's office represented on the seven-member board.

Bianchi's predecessor, James M. Ruberto, had been on the board during his eight years as mayor, but resigned from PEDDA in September, filling the spot with a local businessman.

Ward 2 Councilor Kevin J. Morandi, whose ward includes the business park, endorsed the appointment.

"I feel with Mayor Bianchi on the board, it will open up the lines of communication" with PEDDA, Morandi said.

In the past, several current and former councilors have been critical of PEDDA for a lack of regular updates to the council and city residents on its progress in developing the 52-acre business park.

Bianchi believes his presence on the PEDDA board will make him more accountable for its actions.

"It's an important board with a lot of implications for the city and neighborhood," he said in a separate *Eagle* interview. "I want my feet held to the fire."

Bianchi is the fifth new appointment to PEDDA within the last year. In 2011, Ruberto named Fruet -- now succeeded by Bianchi -- to the board along with downtown developer George Whaling, Berkshire Community College communications director Christina Barrett, General Dynamics senior program manager Beth Mitchell, and

Michael Matthews, the CEO of Lee-based Tower Acquisitions, which owns communications towers nationwide.

Veteran board members, current chairman Gary Grunin and Mick Callahan, round out the panel.

Bianchi vowed to consider Fruet as a future nominee to PEDDA if the board expands from seven to nine seats. In order to increase membership, the City Council would have to file a "home-rule petition" with the Legislature, which originally established PEDDA.

Bianchi is confident lawmakers will approve the expansion.

"I've spoken to our [legislative] delegation, and it doesn't seem to be a problem," he told the council.