

COMMISSION CONSIDERS BAN ON TWEETING

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Shelby County commissioners will settle this on Monday. But in committee sessions Wednesday morning there was a pretty lively debate about a proposed ban on tweeting during commission meetings.

Commissioner Terry Roland proposed the ban on that and the use of laptops and similar devices by commissioners.

And he cited a tweet several weeks ago from the commission's leading and pioneering tweeter, Mike Carpenter.

Carpenter's tweets during commission sessions have become a political staple with occasional controversy.

That was the case in October when during a debate over an ordinance to ban the roadside sale of animals, Carpenter tweeted an exchange between Roland and Commissioner Wyatt Bunker. Roland, who is from Millington, had a question about selling pit bull dogs. Bunker joked "Don't they eat those in Millington?"

The tweet took on a life of its own outside the commission including some outrage expressed by Millington Mayor Richard Hodges leading to Roland's proposal.

Carpenter was chairing the committee session but didn't comment. Meanwhile, he was tweeting:

"Discussing anti tweeting resolution. I'm tweeting as a protest."

Roland said he wasn't trying to "shut down freedom of speech."

"If you want to tweet, you can go outside to do it or wait until after the meeting is over," he said. "I think we need to pay attention to what we are doing."

Commissioner Henri Brooks called the measure a "kindergarten approach to conducting meetings."

"I can walk and chew gum," she added.

Commissioner Steve Mulroy called the resolution "micromanagement" that goes too far.

"I think it was Voltaire who said, 'I may disagree with what you tweet, but I will defend with my life your right to tweet it,'" he offered.

"That's how I remember it," Carpenter responded.

The resolution got a negative recommendation in committee on a 4-6 vote. Roland along with Bunker and commissioners Chris Thomas and Heidi Shafer voted yes.

The full commission takes up the resolution at Monday's commission meeting ... which we will be tweeting live.