

Special Meeting of the Crystal Lake Township Board

Meeting held at 1651 Frankfort Highway, Frankfort MI 49635

April 6 2017

Meeting was called to order by Supervisor Amy Ferris at 7:00 PM.

Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Roll Call: Ferris, May, Nielsen, Sullivan, and Trentham were present, constituting a quorum.

Agenda: Ferris moved that the agenda be approved; Nielsen seconded: all ayes. Motion passed. The purposes of the meeting were: (A) to attempt further resolution of CLT policy issues and (B) to reconsider terms of BS&A online data.

Conflicts of Interest: Ferris asked if there were any conflicts of interest; there were none.

Public Comment: T. Ryder said she had filed a FOIA request regarding both the online record access and credit card payments and the public availability schedule for Treasurer Trentham and her deputy for 2017. According to the information she received, the tax department is scheduled in the office 3 days/week for 8 months of the year, but only 2 days/week in April, May and parts of June and August, and only 1 day/week for the other parts of June and August. Based on her calculations, Trentham was only working 264 hours for her \$19,380 salary, or approximately \$73.40/hour. Ryder said both Trentham and Deputy Goodman were “double-dipping” because Trentham works at other jobs when not in CLT’s office and Goodman works as treasurer at another township. She said she does not have a lot of trust at this time.

Policy/Personnel Issues: Ferris proposed that the structure for the discussion be: I. What are our goals here? II. Identify the problem(s). III. Identify possible solutions. IV. Take Board action.

For example, she asked if we were all agreed that our goal was to serve the public and to be the watchdog for the taxpayers’ money, as well as perform duties such as elections, etc. Sullivan suggested that these goals be incorporated at a later date into the type of Mission Statement that Ferris had in her previous Personnel Policy draft and in the Chester Township Policy recommended by MTA.

Ferris then asked what problems were getting in the way of delivering on these goals. Nielsen said no one had approached him about having problems with people not being available in the office. Sullivan suggested that the Board consider whether the work hour expectations outlined in a 2013 memo to prospective clerk and treasurer candidates were relevant now, since many of the previous problems have been resolved with new procedures and efficiencies in place; also, the MTA is clear that a Board cannot impose a minimum number of work hours on an elected official, it comes down to whether that person gets their job done. She said we need to consider the capability of the person doing the job e.g., both Trentham and her deputy are highly focused and efficient and accomplish more in less time than the average person, as well as additional duties. Ferris asked Sullivan if she had not previously agreed that it was difficult and time consuming to cover tax questions in Trentham’s absence. Sullivan said yes, but she believed many of those problems were now being solved by such new procedures as putting information online and giving the deputy clerk read-only access to the tax software. Trentham added that she was also exploring individual voice mail systems for messages, she also worked many non-scheduled hours, did not understand why she was being penalized, and wanted to know what wasn’t being done. Ferris said she was concerned about equitable distribution of work for everyone, including

the trustees and reminded Board members that they agreed to put together a list of duties not officially assigned, such as the cemetery work, blight, and cleaning services. Trentham challenged Ferris' role regarding the cemetery, blight, and handling money and both then disagreed over a number of allegations each said the other had made. Ferris explained what she had accomplished with the cemetery and efforts she had made to raise several of these issues in the past. May asked what tasks needed to be distributed; she objected that there was not enough being done to help people fix their blight problems other than going to court; she also said it was better to reach her by telephone than to email and that perhaps she didn't respond to Ferris' requests because she felt the messages were not specific enough. Ferris apologized if she was not clear. May asked why staff had to work so many more hours and Ferris said she just wanted people to work the hours that were posted. Questions were then raised as to whether the most recently scheduled hours had been properly posted. Ferris gave an example of one day at the end of the tax season when she and the deputy clerk were alone and spent an entire morning answering tax questions. Trentham said she hadn't known about this, but Ferris said it had been raised frequently. Trentham said that she didn't understand why Ferris kept raising the issue of her hours when she repeatedly said she couldn't change them and Ferris explained that she was trying to bring public and Board pressure to get her to be available Monday through Wednesday. May asked why those days and Ferris said they could be changed, but those had been the days the public had come to expect for the last 30 years. May said she didn't see why those days couldn't be changed as long as the schedule is posted. Trentham asked if her current hours were inconvenient to the public and Ferris referred to Ryder's earlier comments and said those hours were not appropriate for her level of compensation. Trentham said her posted hours were not the only hours she worked. Ferris then said she knew she could not tell Trentham what she had to do, but Trentham responded that Ferris was trying to micro-manage her, a statement which Ferris said she thought was meant to be derogatory and apologized if that was how Trentham felt, since she was only trying to serve the public. She pointed out that she realized that no one could require any specific hours, but she had received feedback that people just wanted the staff to be available as a team. Trentham said she thought we had been a good team until recently when the drama had led both deputies to try to quit, similar to the drama that caused so many problems with the previous administration. Ferris asked Trentham if she had ever raised her voice or sworn at her. Trentham said Ferris created friction, but she didn't want to get into personality conflicts at this point and asked why Ferris kept raising these issues when she admittedly could not enforce them. Sullivan restated Ferris' previous explanation that she was trying to bring public and Board pressure and Ferris said yes, she was trying to get the Board to address more equitable work distribution for the money being paid. May asked again what work was not getting done and Sullivan listed a number of tasks that Ferris has repeatedly said Board members should commit to: Cemetery, Blight, Junk Day, the Website, Fire Services, the Airport, Roads, and various meetings and conferences*; commitments have been sporadic; Sullivan said she agreed with Ferris that the Board should itemize these tasks each year, perhaps at budget time, as they do at Lake Township, and members should bring their calendars and commit at that time; assignment of duties should be based on individual preferences and availability, not tied by policy to [statutory] titles; she also suggested that Board members be given more advance notice before being asked to commit to specific meetings and conferences.

Ferris said that if the Board was ready to start talking about possible solutions, she would like to request that she be given access to the Quick Books files. Trentham questioned whether she was legally allowed to have such access and Ferris reminded her that she had originally been given [read-only] access years ago. Ferris also proposed that since there was not enough work for both the Treasurer and her Deputy that there was no need for the Deputy to work because the Treasurer should be available those hours and the Deputy is only statutorily required to fill in as needed. Sullivan explained that Deputies need to work on the various aspects of the job on an ongoing basis so as not to lose familiarity with it. When Trentham asked whether her Deputy should be available to help Ferris with Cemetery work, Ferris said no, that she had removed those duties from her, because it was getting too complicated and was being held against her. Ferris and Trentham then disagreed about whether the Deputy Treasurer was capable

of filling in for the Treasurer and Ferris raised the case when she said the Deputy was unable to tell a woman how much tax she owed on the last day taxes were due; Sullivan said she thought that was a misunderstanding, because the Deputy has been able to answer those questions for everyone else. Ferris said Sullivan had backed off from her previous position about the Treasurer's hours, perhaps because it was now controversial, but Sullivan said her motivation to change was due to the fact that since then, substantial steps have been taken to correct the problems. When challenged by May who said Trentham was doing a good job, Ferris asked how she could know that anyone was doing their job and May said she trusted each person to do their job and if someone complained, she would go to the appropriate person and ask them about it. Sullivan then proposed the Board could consider developing a complaint procedure whereby people put their complaints in writing so they can be dealt with directly as they arise. Ferris agreed, but then asked why we should use taxpayer money to pay a Deputy when a Treasurer was already being paid or why put it online or why pay for an expensive phone system instead of offering face-to-face service. Trentham asked if it would help if she worked four hours at a time instead of three to make up the extra three hours. Ferris moved that the 15 hours per month previously approved for the Deputy Treasurer be removed; there was no support. The motion died.

Ferris asked if anyone else wanted to add something to this part of the agenda. Sullivan said she would make sure that everyone had a copy of the Ottawa County Policy Manual. Nielsen said he had experienced a number of Supervisors in 30 years and thought everything was going fine until these last few months, but felt this Supervisor was difficult to deal with and was trying to impose her point of view, relying on what he believed was no more than a few complaints. Ferris restated her concerns and May and Trentham challenged her again on several points regarding work schedules and financial responsibilities.

BS&A Online Data and Change of Terms:

Trentham explained that with a number of website changes needed under the new online tax and assessment data system, it would be better to switch from the BS&A Subscription Option to the Pay-per-Hit Option, whereby taxpayers create their own personalized account to access their own data for free and the Township doesn't have to pay any subscription fee, but anyone who wants to access someone else's data would have to pay \$2.00. Trentham moved that the Board approve the BS&A Pay-per-Hit Option of online data access; Sullivan seconded; May asked about public access to the data and Ferris said she found this Option to be an improvement over the previous one; all ayes. Motion passed.

Public Comment:

D. Henhiser said the cemetery looked drab and colorless and he believed alternative decorations such as silk flowers should be allowed. He also said he didn't see a problem with Trentham and her hours. He believes the Assessor is not using appropriate comparables to assess his property, especially since they lost 40% of their trees due to disease. Ferris offered to help him proceed with his complaint about this.

C. Beidler asked if taxpayers would be required to get their tax information only from the online database and was assured that the existing paper-based procedures would continue.

T. Ryder said she thought the only solution would be a time clock that staff would punch in and get paid by the hour. Trentham said that would not be legal. Ryder then said the only recourse would be the recall process, since there was no trust about the hours worked. She said the Trustees were getting paid fairly good wages. She asked if there would still be a 3% fee for individuals to pay taxes by credit card online, but no charge to the Township for this. Trentham and Ferris said yes and assured her that both the tax and assessment data would soon be available online, as would the option to pay by credit card, but there would be no charge for the Township to pay for any of this.

R. Halliday said there was a lot of friction at this meeting and suggested that members get together one-on-one or as a group and perhaps get help from other organizations such as the Extension Services; he agreed it is important to watch how the taxpayers' money is spent; and although online services are good, people also like to come to the office and know staff are available during posted hours.

B. Harwood supported Halliday's statement.

J. Marble said she had worked in public service for many years and there should always be someone physically in the office during the posted hours.

L. Picklo agreed with Marble that staff should work in the office during the posted hours that the community expects, even if you don't have specific work to do that day; and staff should not be doing each other's jobs.

J. Wynn said she thinks the cemetery looks wonderful.

R. Schmidt thanked everyone for their work and said he liked what was done in the cemetery.

Meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Sue Sullivan, Clerk, reporting.

*Currently, Ferris handles Cemeteries, Blight, Newsletters, and Junk Day; Trentham handles the Website and the Airport; May handles the Planning Committee and the Airport, Nielsen handles the Fire Services and Roads.