

THE CHARTER TOWNSHIP OF OSHTEMO
Township Board Meeting
August 10, 2010

Township Board work session was held at the Township Hall. Supervisor Heiny-Cogswell called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

PRESENT:

Supervisor Libby Heiny-Cogswell
Clerk Deb Everett
Treasurer Nancy Culp
Trustee Grace Borgfjord
Trustee Dave Bushouse
Trustee James Grace
Trustee Scott McCormick

Also present were Township Attorney James Porter, Township Engineer Marc Elliott, Fire Chief Mark Barnes, and 3 interested people.

Public Comment

Bernie Mein, 10339 Skyview Drive, advised he could not attend the regular meeting and wished to comment on the trustee benefit issue; he had reviewed the ad hoc committee report, legacy costs need to be controlled, there should be no pension for trustees, other part time employees should be offered employee funded insurance, the Township should be the beneficiary for all life insurance policies, meeting pay should be defined and capped and 12 years is too short for lifetime benefits.

Jeff Leonard, 3144 Bramble Drive, commented he felt in general public opinion is not in favor of the benefit package for public employees and they should not receive lifetime benefits paid by taxpayers. Regarding the H Avenue sewer project, he commented he had met with Township Engineer Elliott and they had reached an agreement regarding placement of a lateral sewer lead to his property but he does not support mandatory connection.

KCSD Activity Report

Sheriff Rick Fuller was present and provided information on activity in the Township for July. The Board engaged in brief discussion regarding adding an additional deputy which was agreed to be reviewed mid year. Consensus was the Police Committee will meet with Sheriff Fuller, review options and return to the Board with further information.

Fire Department Intern Program

Fire Chief Barnes provided information regarding establishment of an intern program which would provide housing for three intern firefighters who would provide 24/7 staffing for Fire House No. 1; they would provide manpower at no cost when on duty and could run calls when off duty for a reduced pay rate from the paid on call staff. He commented he had seen this program successful in other areas. He advised the opportunity is available at House No. 1 due to the building having available space which would require some renovations. This item will be taken up on the regular agenda for action.

Other Comments

Attorney Porter provided an update on pending litigation advising the Kalamazoo County Road Commission has filed suit regarding the Township's issuance of the traffic control order and there should be a court date by September 25th.

Engineer Elliott provided updates on the West Main sidewalk in fill project, the H Avenue sewer project and Wickford/West Main water project.

The Board work session adjourned at approximately 6:00 p.m.

Supervisor Heiny-Cogswell called the regular meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

PRESENT:

Supervisor Libby Heiny-Cogswell
Clerk Deb Everett
Treasurer Nancy Culp
Trustee Grace Borgfjord
Trustee Dave Bushouse
Trustee James Grace
Trustee Scott McCormick

Also present were Township Attorney James Porter, Township Engineer Marc Elliot, and approximately 45 interested people.

Motion by Borgfjord, second by James Grace, to approve the July 29th special meeting minutes. Carried. Income to the General and Fire Funds of \$260,333.38 and disbursements of \$413,971.22 were reported. Motion by James Grace, second by Borgfjord, to accept the receipts and disbursements report. Carried.

CITIZENS COMMENTS ON NON-AGENDA ITEMS

Jim Ritsema, 1713 North 9th Street, inquired and was provided information regarding the status of adding an additional deputy.

Mari Beth Maurer, 8253 Gibbs Avenue, inquired and was provided information regarding the weed ordinance.

FIRE DEPARTMENT SERVICE RECOGNITION

Assistant Fire Chief Jim Wiley was recognized for 30 years of service; former Deputy Chief Tobey Karnemaat was recognized for 15 full time and 12 paid on call years of service.

ZONING ORDINANCE TEXT AMENDMENT – SECOND READING

A recommendation from the Planning Commission to adopt proposed text amendments to Section 76 of the Zoning Ordinance to permit other nonresidential uses in the R-3 Residence District to have the same size signs as is presently allowed for office and financial institutions in that district was before the Board for Second Reading.

Motion by Borgfjord, second by Culp to adopt the text amendments. Carried.

DISCUSSION- TRUSTEE BENEFITS

Supervisor Heiny-Cogswell commented compensation was approved by the previous board, under State law current board compensation cannot be reduced, loss of revenues and reduced workloads resulted in a 2010 budget reduction of 9% from 2009, trustee health benefit represents .6% of the overall budget, in the 16 years the policy has been in place, 50% of trustees actually took the benefit. She also commented her concern remains the long term best interest of Township residents, discussions which have ensued to date in the comprehensive benefits survey ad-hoc committee have provided good information and changing the compensation package is warranted; the question is how. She further commented in her opinion the benefits should be proportional based on some estimate of average time a trustee spends, make health insurance available to trustees for single coverage only at 50% of cost, the entire board has historically been a combination working and policy board, that is, not strictly a policy board that shows up and votes, all board members are equal in matters of legislation and budget decisions. She commented she would propose an ordinance forming a compensation commission for elected officials that would consist of five township residents approved by the full board; it would review compensation every two years and make a recommendation to the board. She felt by forming a commission, essentially the board would no longer vote on their own compensation, it would remove the politics from the board, focus board efforts on other important tasks, and make the board more cohesive.

Trustee James Grace commented he appreciated the Supervisor's statement, the public did not have access to the ad-hoc committee, and he had concerns with three areas of benefits; long term care, retiree coverage for future spouses, and length of service for retirement benefits. He further commented there are three full time officials and full time staff, trustees should have no benefits but should be compensated with pay, and he while he feels the Board could resolve the issue, is open to considering a compensation commission.

Clerk Everett commented the Board has historically had "working trustees", she is not opposed to reviewing the issue and consider the compensation commission and could support benefits being made available to trustees at their cost.

Trustee Bushouse commented the Board has continually reviewed and implemented means to reduce benefit costs and these have never been hidden.

Treasurer Culp commented trustees should run knowing it is a part time position, most have other insurance and does not feel it should be offered and could support having a compensation commission.

Trustee McCormick commented he would like to keep the health insurance, lifetime health benefit is too generous, and would support the idea of a compensation commission.

Trustee Borgfjord commented she would prefer the compensation commission; the Board needs to move

forward, time spent by trustees varies, they should be compensated accordingly, and she would support making insurance available to trustees at their cost.

Public comment included:

Dan Holmes, 10840 West Main, thanked Supervisor Heiny-Cogswell for her comments, felt part time elected officials do not deserve benefits, they could buy them, the private sector does not have such benefits, the compensation is excessive. He also questioned the assessing department's competence due to the tax appeals. Attorney Porter advised assessing is being done as mandated by State law, the Assessor must follow those rules.

Neil Sikora, 9643 West KL Avenue, commented he feels there is a lack of awareness by the Board as to how the issue is perceived by the public, trustees should not be considered even part time employees and should not be entitled to benefits.

Stan Rakowski, 7151 West G Avenue, commented he did not take the benefits while a trustee, a flat rate per year might be the answer and in response to his inquiry was advised the recommendation of a compensation commission can be overridden by the Board with a 2/3 majority vote.

Mari Beth Maurer, 8353 Gibbs Avenue, commented there is no room for excess spending, private businesses have reduced costs and benefits, public sector should be realigned with the private sector.

Kathleen Garland-Rike, 6180 Ashwood Court, commented it would make sense to compare what other townships have and thanked the trustees for what they do.

Jeff Leonard, 3144 Bramble Drive, commented he agreed with Trustee James Grace and Treasurer Culp, there is a disparity between public and private, does not agree with government employees having benefits after they retire.

Jim Ritsema, 1713 North 9th Street, inquired and was advised there are 21 full time employees and they do contribute to the cost of their benefits.

Charles Lawson, 1429 Cadet Lane, commented the average federal worker pay has increased 39% and private sector 8.8% since 2000.

Marvin Darling, 7210 West H Avenue, commented he depends on the board to instill honesty, this has been neglected and trustees should not have benefits. In response to his inquiry he was advised that by law a compensation commission cannot be paid.

Connie Houts, 3015 Wild Cherry Lane, commented she is appalled at the huge benefit package and people will run for office for the wrong reasons.

Brandt Iden, 6067 Danford Creek, commented he appreciates the board's service, would hope people would not run for benefits, he supports the compensation commission idea, he runs a \$13 million dollar business with four people by condensing and streamlining services.

Dan Thompson, 105 Echo Hills Drive, commented the criticism is not personal; the trustees work hard but feels the retiree benefits are excessive, is unclear where the issue is going but the Board needs to look at the big picture and make major changes and asked for the Boards' sentiment.

Justine Hertzell, 2484 Isle Harbor Court, commented the board is elected to make decisions and she would not want five other people making the decision. In response to her inquiry was advised a compensation commission is established by ordinance, is advisory, and could be decommissioned.

Margaret Masuzawa, 331 West Ridge Circle, commented she is confounded and not happy with the issue, was looking for the Board to discuss the questions outlined in the board packet.

Dan Wilkinson, 81 South Skyview Drive, commented the Board works for the public.

Sharon Lawson, 1429 Cadet Lane inquired and was advised the compensation commission would only determine compensation for the elected officials, compensation for staff would still be determined by the Board, changes in staff compensation can be made at any time, and some board members are paying back for their benefits.

Consensus was to direct the Attorney to provide a draft ordinance to establish a compensation commission for the August 24th meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS
FIRE DEPARTMENT INTERN PROGRAM

As discussed at the earlier work session, Fire Chief Barnes provided information regarding establishment of an intern program which would provide housing for three intern firefighters who would provide 24/7 staffing for Fire House No. 1; they would provide manpower at no cost when on duty and could run calls when off duty for a reduced pay rate from the paid on call staff. He commented he had seen this program successful in other areas. He advised the opportunity is available at House No. 1 due to the building having available space which would require some renovations.

Motion by Bushouse, second by James Grace to approve an expenditure not to exceed \$17,000 for necessary renovations. Carried.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Trustee Borgfjord reminded all of the upcoming Oshtemo Sunburst 5K on August 21st.

Clerk Everett reminded all of Oshtemo Fun Day to be held on August 21st.

There was no further business and the meeting was adjourned at approximately 9:35 p.m.

DEBORAH L. EVERETT
Township Clerk

Attested: LIBBY HEINY-COGSWELL
Supervisor