

Minutes Township Road District Truth in Taxation Public Hearing

STATE OF ILLINOIS

LAKE COUNTY

TOWN OF NEWPORT

THE ELECTORS OF NEWPORT TOWNSHIP met at the office of the Town Clerk at the Village Hall on December 17, 2014 for a Truth in Taxation Public Hearing in accordance with Section 35 of the Illinois Township Code, ILCS 200/18-55.

Members Present:

Beth Hartford, Trustee

Ronald Miller, Trustee

Diane Crittenden, Trustee

Corey Kirschhoffer, Trustee

Randy Whitmore, Supervisor

Rodger Edmonds, Highway Commissioner

Debbie Spurgeon, Clerk

Jerome Berens, Assessor

Call to Order: Supervisor Whitmore calls the Newport Township Road District Truth in Taxation Public Hearing of the Electors to order at 6:45 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance: Supervisor Whitmore led the assembled electors in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Roll Call: In attendance were Beth Hartford, Ron Miller, Rodger Edmonds, Jerome Berens, Diane Crittenden, Corey Kirschhoffer, Randy Whitmore and Debbie Spurgeon. Also present, Attorney Keri-Lyn Krafthefer of Ancel, Glink, Diamond, Bush, DiCianni & Krafthefer, PC.

Truth in Taxation Public Hearing:

Susan Frankenberger—Ms. Frankenberger inquired about the levy—what it is, how much it is and what it is for. Highway Commissioner Rodger Edmonds says the road district is currently operating on a surplus of money, but the road district levy was zeroed out by the previous highway commissioner, and the board did away with the Special Gravel Tax resulting in very little money coming in for the future. Trustee Beth Hartford corrects Edmonds, noting the Special Gravel Tax was turned off by Newport Electors at a special meeting, not by the board.

Similarly, it was the same process that allowed the tax to be turned on again in September of this year--- the electors present at the meeting voting. Edmonds cites declining funds as the reason he advocated for voters to reinstate the tax in September. He continues, with the help of his wife and his daughter he has levied for the full amount, but hopes to balance the budget and begin cutting back expenses. He notes the timing of reinstating the tax is because if it had lapsed for three years, a referendum of all Newport voters would have been necessary. Ms. Frankenberger asks what the money is going to be used for. Edmonds replies it is for anything needed for the roads. Hartford clarifies that there are two other road district levies---in addition to the special tax. Ms. Frankenberger asks what Edmonds would like his budget to be. Edmonds says his budget for the previous year was ~\$444,000. Hartford notes the road district will get ~\$550,000 with the levies as they are now. Edmonds says he hopes to begin creating a buffer. (From the audience, Mrs. Toni Edmonds adds that the net amount to the road district is significantly less.) Trustee Kirschhoffer comments on fluctuating fuel prices as a factor in maintaining the township roads, noting the pieces of Newport roadways are spread out over a wide area. Ms. Frankenberger believes the source of the problem is not the job that Edmonds is doing, but that Newport's non-contiguous bits and pieces of roadway highlight an impractical and inefficient situation. She further indicated that several years ago there was significant disgust for the way the [then] highway commissioner was handling things, and feels ending the special tax at the time was justified. Kirschhoffer interjects that repercussions of the voters' decision are being felt now. Hartford comments that it was the highway commissioner's poor handling of the road district levies which have had the greatest impact on the current fund shortages. Frankenberger says the legal situation with the previous highway commissioner, the legal fees caused by his attorney, and now having the same attorney representing the township is what really angers constituents. She called it really frustrating and adds that having to sit here and hear how much we are paying this lawyer--the lawyer who made all the money suing us--is a hard pill to swallow. Kirschhoffer states her agreement. Edmonds says he has a \$45,000 budget for attorney fees this year, but that he hasn't used a quarter of this. Hartford comments that a little over \$17,000 has been spent thus far. Edmonds says just because the money is budgeted for, doesn't mean he will use it. Frankenberger again states her frustration with the same attorney being hired that initiated the lawsuit against the township. Whitmore replies that he and Edmonds hired the winning attorney. Resident Tom Hartford interjects that no one won, least of all tax payers. Attorney Keri-Lyn Krafthefer asked Tom Hartford why the board appealed if she wasn't the winner. Mr. Hartford responds to Attorney Krafthefer that they appealed paying you. Whitmore says the lawsuit should have never happened. Beth Hartford notes the lawsuit was filed by Keri-Lyn Krafthefer and Dan Dziekan. Kirschhoffer says the board wants to regain the taxpayers trust and that she grew up in Newport and has a vested interest in the township.

Dave R—Mr. Dave R. is disappointed to hear how the supervisor and board talk to one another. Whitmore says it is his fault and he is sorry that he had to see it. Dave says it will make it hard for the board to work together if they cannot be respectful. Trustee Kirschhoffer says this is a completely divided board and it isn't going to change. Dave thinks this is probably a good thing, as various opinions are then represented. Trustee Hartford identifies the supervisor's earlier comments to Trustee Miller as completely inappropriate. Resident Dave says the board must get the hard work done, and has to be civil to one another. He added that the residents distrust the

board, the board members distrust each other and he gently admonishes board members for talking over his comments. [Apologies were made to Mr. R.] He urges the board to ‘do’ rather than talk, especially when it comes to saving money. He states there is so much pain over the choice of this lawyer and the cost of the attorney. He further comments he has never heard of needing an attorney to write the agenda. Trustee Hartford comments that legal spend on attorney fees the year before this administration took over was \$2,265. Dave asks the trustee to remind him of the current YTD spend for legal fees. She indicates it is slightly over \$17,000 for the current fiscal year, and since Whitmore/Edmonds took over in May 2013, the total is ~\$50,000. Resident Dave suggests replacing the attorney is a great place to begin demonstrating to taxpayers that there is a serious commitment to saving money. He also states it could be a great way to build trust among board members. He comments there are so many residents mad about this. Whitmore interjects that the legal expenses are why he ran for office. The resident counters that with one act, Whitmore and the board could solve two trust issues. Whitmore again cites the legal expenses as the reason he ran for the office. Resident Dave replies, two trust issues could be solved with one act. Trustee Miller asks the resident to state the act for the record. Resident Dave R. confirms he is referring to eliminating the current attorney. Whitmore says he would like to do this eventually, but not right now. The resident says this is how Whitmore can show us not tell us, he is serious about saving money. Supervisor Whitmore says an attorney is necessary. Trustee Hartford replies that an attorney is certainly not necessary at every meeting. The resident says he has noticed the supervisor asking the attorney generalized questions and in his opinion eliminating the attorney is a good way for Whitmore to show he is serious about running a good township. The supervisor asks if there were any other questions. No further discussion.

Adjournment:

Randy Whitmore requests a motion to adjourn the Newport Township Truth in Taxation Public Hearing. Motion to adjourn by Corey Kirschhoffer; seconded by Beth Hartford.

Voice vote: Ayes, all; Nays, none. Motion passed.

Adjourned at 7:07 p.m.

Dated the 17th day of December, 2014.

s/Debbie Spurgeon

Debbie Spurgeon, Township Clerk