

CHAMPAIGN COUNTY BOARD
COMMITTEE MINUTES

**POLICY, PERSONNEL, & APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE
PUBLIC HEARING ELECTED OFFICIAL VS. APPOINTED OFFICIAL FOR THE
RECORDER OF DEEDS**

Tuesday, June 9, 2009

**Brookens Administrative Center, Lyle Shields Meeting Room
1776 E. Washington St., Urbana**

6:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Tom Betz (Chair), Matthew Gladney, Greg Knott, Brendan McGinty, Alan Nudo, C. Pius Weibel

MEMBERS ABSENT: Carol Ammons, Kevin Hunt, Jonathan Schroeder

OTHERS PRESENT: Jan Anderson (County Board Member), Kat Bork (Administrative Secretary), Deb Busey (County Administrator of Finance & HR Management), Barb Frasca (Recorder of Deeds), Sasha Green (County Clerk's Office), Brad Jones (County Board Member), Alan Kurtz (County Board Member), Larry Sapp (County Board Member), Amanda Tucker (HR Generalist), Barbara Wysocki (County Board Member)

CALL TO ORDER

Betz called the public hearing to order at 6:01 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Bork called the roll. Betz, Gladney, Knott, McGinty, Nudo, and Weibel were present at the time of the roll call, establishing the presence of a quorum.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA/ADDENDUM

MOTION by McGinty to approve the agenda; seconded by Nudo. **Motion carried with all ayes.**

Betz asked the committee's permission to allow Naomi Jakobson to speak first though public participation was listed later on the agenda because she had other commitments. There was no objection from the committee.

Naomi Jakobson spoke in support of maintaining the Recorder of Deeds as an elected office. She described the Recorder's Office as one of offices most used by the public in Champaign County. Being an elected office makes the Recorder responsible to the citizens. Jakobson was the Recorder for 12 years prior to Frasca's election and felt this public office should continue as an elected position. She thanked the committee for letting her speak first.

Betz offered to allow anyone else from the public speak prior to the Recorder's presentation. No member of the public requested to speak first.

PRESENTATION IN SUPPORT OF ELECTED RECORDER OF DEEDS

Frasca commenced with her PowerPoint presentation on the history of the Recorder's Office and how it was created to protect the chain of inherited property. She spoke about the role of the Recorder in the protection of property rights by creating a record of ownership and how having this position be an elected official provides a certain type of safety net for citizens. The mission of the Champaign County Recorder's Office is the accurate and efficient recording of land records and miscellaneous documents. Frasca's goal was to make the office one of most helpful and easy to use offices in the state. She estimated the office records over 300 types of documents, many of which have different statutory requirements, and records an average of 35,000 documents per year. The office protects the chain of title for real property, records and protects real estate documents, and makes documents available for public notice and inspection. Most documents in the office can be viewed under the Freedom of Information Act. Frasca distributed cards about the Property Fraud Alert Program, a new program free-of-charge to notify property owners if a person fraudulently files a document against their property. She brought books of survey records, soldiers' discharge records, a deed record book, and a plat book to give the County Board members an idea of the type of records available in her office. Frasca recently hired a St. Louis firm to digitize the plat books that were becoming worn from use. The Recorder's Office is digitalizing old microfilm records and, once this is complete, plans to digitize the old books. The digitized records are helpful to people performing record searches. Any document can be recorded if it meets strict statutory requirements and Frasca confirmed her office checks the documents to ensure they conform to state and local statutes. A fee is collected and broken down into one of the 15 funds. Customers can submit documents to be recorded in person, electronically, or through the postal service. The document is scanned and returned immediately to customers in the office or mailed back to the customer. Indexing is verified by other sources and microfilming is done offsite. Frasca stated Champaign County is the second county in the state to electronically record documents. This development allows individuals and title companies to email a digital image of a document instead of sending a hard copy to the Recorder's Office. The benefits of the digitization includes saving paper for the office and saving fuel and time for the customer. This method further has the benefit of being a green way to record documents. When Betz asked about the backup system for the electronic records, Frasca explained the system three different backups. There are two backups through the County's IT Division and another backup in Rock Island.

Frasca continued to describe how the Recorder's Office has worked on indexing and imaging older files. The office's updates have included the digitalization and restoration of plats, bar code scanning to prevent errors, and offering customers an Internet subscription service. The Internet subscription service has helped to lessen the office's workload and is a revenue source. Frasca is looking into setting up an area in the office with wireless Internet access for customers. She explained how the Recorder's duties extended beyond the office to include being available to serve on panels and guarding the revenue stream from the grasp of the state legislature and Secretary of State.

In comparing the duties of the Recorder and County Clerk, because it has been suggested the two offices be combined, Frasca emphasized the County Clerk's Office has nothing to do with the Recorder's Office. She read the statute that says Illinois counties with populations less than 60,000 shall have a County Clerk who functions as Recorder. When a county's populations exceeds 60,000

then the county can opt to have a separate Recorder, but it is not required. Frasca explained a County Clerk can jointly be the Recorder in smaller counties because they have smaller workloads. The counties similar in size to Champaign County have elected Recorders. Frasca suggest that it would make more sense to combine other County offices, such as the Supervisor of Assessments, with the Recorder's Office. She mentioned some of the duties, such as parcel numbering or map-making, that could be transferred to the Recorder's Office from the Supervisor of Assessments' Office and GIS Consortium. Moving these duties from the other offices would take a County Board ordinance instead of incurring the costs of a referendum. Frasca was not saying she wanted to combine her office with another, but that the County Board had this option.

Frasca described the fees collection in the Recorder's Office and how the office is a money-maker for the County. She stated her office is dramatically understaffed compared to other counties and she has made efforts to move expenses to the automation fund. She added that combining the Recorder's Office with another department would not likely save space due to the volume of documents. In conclusion, Frasca summarized the Recorder's Office as a technologically advanced office operated on a relatively small budget.

Betz thanked Frasca for making her presentation.

PRESENTATION IN SUPPORT OF APPOINTED RECORDER OF DEEDS

No presentation was made.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Rex Bradfield stated he provides engineering and land surveying services, thereby working with the Recorder's Office. He was disgusted that the Recorder's Office and Coroner's Office are being scrutinized because the County Auditor is defrauding the public out of his salary. He felt the political party is unimportant for the Recorder, Coroner, or Auditor as long as the offices are managed effectively and frugally. He described the improvements made by the current Recorder compared to previous Recorders who ran the office with little regard for customer service. Bradfield stated Frasca has turned her office into a model of efficiency with a friendly staff while performing professionally and being repeatedly reelected. He said the County Board's inability to manage construction projects belies their ability to appoint good management. Bradfield continued to share his opinion regarding the County Board's performance.

Betz stated this hearing was about the position of elected Recorder of Deeds. He wanted to make clear to the public that there is no motion before this body to abolish any office. Similar hearings have been held in past years raising the question of whether certain County offices should be elected or appointed. He emphasized the hearings are up whether the offices should be elected or appointed, not about whether a particular office holder is doing a good job.

John Farney spoke in support of keeping the Recorder, Coroner, and Auditor as elected offices so the public has the right to choose the people who run the government. He stated the Recorder has consistently shown that the office is one of the best run offices in the state and this hearing was a waste of time. He commented that the Recorder's Office has met the needs related to growth seen in the County over the last ten years while continuing to produce revenue that the office has generously used

to help support the General Corporate Fund, which the County Board has seen fit to spend and loan for purposes other than what the GCF was intended. Farney stressed the importance of public input through elections for the Recorder, Coroner, and Auditor. He said appointments are ripe for political cronyism, ineffectiveness, and waste; whereas the people have the option to vote a poorly performing official out of office every four years.

Jerry Watson, president of the Champaign County Farm, stated he appreciated the chance to comment openly on the offices and felt this type of review is a necessary exercise over time. He supported placing the question of whether the three offices should be elected versus appointed on the ballot.

Dannel McCollum said having non-policy making elected offices results in more government than citizens should be paying for in Champaign County. He hypothesized that a qualified office holder could be appointed as well as elected and this would leave the policy decisions with the County Board. McCollum said it was a waste of money to have an elected official in a job that a professional should do because partisan politics come into play. He recommended placing the question of the offices on a ballot and letting it be decided by the public.

COUNTY BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Betz asked for a committee member to make a motion to place the booklet distributed by Frasca on file as part of the public record. Betz encouraged people to send things in writing to make them part of the public record.

MOTION by McGinty to receive and place on file the booklet distributed by Frasca; seconded by Nudo. **Motion carried with all ayes.**

Weibel asked Frasca to clarify how many counties in Illinois actually have combined County Clerk/Recorder Offices. Frasca stated 22 counties out of 102 counties have a Recorder's Office separate from a County Clerk's Office.

Wysocki praised the Recorder's Office for incorporating advancements and asked for some specific examples of how Frasca has saved money for the County. Frasca explained that she put in a system where title companies had to enter a user name and password to make copies in the office. The title companies are then billed for the number of copies they make. The previous system involved the title companies self-reporting the number of copies they made in a book at the Recorder's Office. This change tripled the income generated by copies. Frasca described how electronic submission of documents for recording is faster for customers and takes less staff time to complete. She has also incorporated offsite microfilming from the scanned images.

McGinty thanked Frasca for the detailed information she provided to the committee. Regarding the concerns expressed by the public participants about the Auditor, McGinty expressed tonight's hearings are part of a healthy discussion about County government that really started three years ago when he and Knott brought up an initial ten-point plan. The purpose of these types of discussions is to make certain the County Board is being a responsible steward of public money and see that efficiencies are happening when the County Board is talking about making 6% cuts to departments next year. McGinty reiterated these hearings are not about individual office holders, the

Board is trying to do an intelligent analysis in its internal audit. He would be satisfied if the analysis comes back having determined that the offices should remain as elected because that is most efficient way to operate.

Weibel inquired what other panels the Recorder serves on, as Frasca mentioned in her presentation. Frasca said she was on the Electronic Recording Commission to start charging P-Tax forms to electronically recorded deeds. She has been asked to give speeches in Iowa about how the office's electronic recording system was set-up.

ADJOURNMENT

The public hearing was adjourned at 7:07 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kat Bork
Administrative Secretary

Secy's note: The minutes reflect the order of the agenda and may not necessarily reflect the order of business conducted at the meeting.