

RESUME OF MINUTES OF STUDY SESSION OF THE
COUNTY BOARD, CHAMPAIGN COUNTY, ILLINOIS
June 25, 2024

The County Board of Champaign County, Illinois met at a Study Session, Tuesday, June 25, 2024, at 6:02 PM in the Shields-Carter Meeting Room, Brookens Administrative Center, 1776 East Washington Street, Urbana, Illinois, with County Executive Steve Summers presiding and Angie Patton as Clerk of the meeting.

ROLL CALL

Roll call showed the following members present: Lokshin, Rodriguez, Sexton, Smith, Stohr, Taylor, Wilson, Esry, Farney, Hanauer-Friedman, Locke, Chair Carter – 12; absent: Michaels, Owen, Peugh, Rogers, Straub, Thorsland, Vanichtheeranont, Cowart, Fortado, Greer – 10. County Executive Summers declared a quorum present and the Board competent to conduct business.

READ NOTICE OF MEETING

The Clerk read the Notice of the Meeting, said Notice having been published in the *News Gazette* on June 13, June 20, and June 24, 2024.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA/ADDENDA

Board Member Esry offered a motion to approve the Agenda; Board Member Lokshin seconded. The motion carried by unanimous voice vote.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Champaign County Republican Chair Susan Mantell read a letter from Republican Auditor candidate, Alan Anderson, expressing his opposition to making the County Auditor an appointed position.

Champaign County Republican Chair Susan Mantell expressed her own concerns and opposition to making the Auditor position appointed.

Champaign County Auditor, George Danos spoke to his concerns and opposition to making the auditor position appointed verses elected.

COMMUNICATIONS

Board Member Wilson spoke of the Korean War Anniversary on June 25, 1980 and recognized and thanked veterans for their service.

Chair Carter suggested a review or study session for the elimination of the County Executive office. She also mentioned not being notified in person or e-mail about the meeting.

PRESENTATIONS/DISCUSSION

League of Women Voters representatives, Deb Busey and Trisha Crowley presented their study from 2022 about making the Auditor an appointed position.

Board Member Stohr referenced Dixon, Illinois regarding the case of embezzlement by a government employee and pointed to the benefits of having multiple eyes on financials.

The League of Women Voters referenced the model of Lake County, and their financial department would be a good example to follow.

Board Member Rodriguez asked about consolidation of power and the League of Women Voters suggested that the duties of Auditor would be better managed by financial professionals for day-to-day operations.

Board Member Locke asked about how to ensure independence with the office. The League of Women voters suggested entering into a contract to provide protections and independence.

Board Member Lokshin clarified the report was from 2022 and happened before any issues with current Auditor. She also stated that she's focusing on the position and not the person.

Board Member Hanauer-Friedman asked how did other counties restructure. The League of Women Voters responded that Lake County made the change 30 years ago.

Board Member Wilson inquired who else besides the League of Women Voters has studied this issue. League of Women Voters said they weren't aware of other studies. They referenced McLean County studied the same issue and came to the same conclusions as their study. The League of Women Voters also clarified the study was separate from theirs. They also stated that the League of Women Voters is interested in government, especially local/county government. Board Member Wilson responded and referenced former Champaign County Auditor Toni Fabri and the issues he had with his office. He also stated that the question went to the voters previously to determine if the County Auditor position should be eliminated, and the voters decided to keep the Auditor position. Board Member Wilson referenced previous Auditors Michaels and Farney who had no issues with their office and questioned whether the public had an issue or was it just the County Board and the County Executive's office.

Board Members Stohr and Lokshin discussed whether Peoria County still had an Auditor and Board Member Farney clarified they eliminated their Auditor position.

Board Member Stohr suggested that Lake County wasn't a good example to follow for Champaign due to the fact they might have more financial resources than Champaign County.

Board Member Esry stated he had concerns regarding the timing of the issue since there are two candidates on the ballot and that having this go to July meeting doesn't give a lot of time for voters to become informed on the issue. Various Board Members discussed timing issue.

Chair Carter asked the League of Women Voters if there was data from the public as part of the study. The League of Women Voters stated the public was interested in the issue and referenced Letters to the Editor that had been published.

Director of Administration, Michelle Jett gave a presentation on the statutory duties of the Auditor.

Board Member Farney stated he hasn't seen an outline or an organizational chart to help the Board understand how this might work. He also stated that he had an issue with timing since there are candidates for Auditor on the ballot for the November General Election. He also referenced the lack of Board Members at the meeting and lack of public attendance at the meeting. He indicated that the office right now isn't equipped to handle internal audits, and that right now it's an accounts payable office. Board Member Farney referenced Winnebago County and how they have their finance department structured and includes internal audits.

Board Member Smith referenced the Illinois Constitution and clarified language of may and shall as it relates to the County Auditor. He suggested that the Board look at the current job description and have it updated to have it be more in line with current duties and scope of work. He also indicated he had an issue with the timing and putting it on the ballot.

Board Member Lokshin thought they could update the job description, but it doesn't mean an elected is required to follow it.

Board Member Wilson referenced the accounts payable office and asked about current staffing levels. Board Member Farney compared Winnebago and Kankakee Counties that they handle accounts payable by County Admin and the Auditor focuses on audits.

Chair Carter asked for a study session with the League of Women Voters to look at other offices that could be eliminated. Executive Summers clarified that the Caucus chairs are the ones that call the study sessions.

Board Member Hanauer-Friedman asked what the Auditor would do if staff were handling the accounts payable and day to day functions. Board Member Locke clarified that the external auditor's role is to verify the numbers are true and accurate. She stated internal audits provide oversight.

Board Member Taylor indicated that she thought the timing was good because of presidential election and that most people are engaged and vote during that election cycle.

Board Member Rodriguez asked if what Board Member Farney suggested was possible with an accounts payable department. Director of Administration Michelle Jett said it was possible and there would be benefits, like consolidation of purchasing across the county departments.

Board Member Esry referenced timing issue with early voting starting in late September and the budgeting process happening in August. Suggested that the Auditor issue be a super majority vote versus a simple majority.

Board Member Lokshin and Hanauer-Friedman suggested there isn't going to be a perfect or right time. She agrees with Board Member Taylor that this is the right time due to the Presidential Election. She asked for information about structure or an organizational chart.

Chair Carter stated County Executive's office isn't capable of pulling this all together in time to review before the vote. She also stated that she doesn't believe there will be a cost savings and that there is too much coming at voters on the ballot.

Board Member Farney asked what were next steps and when would the Board vote to put it on the ballot. Director of Administration Michelle Jett said she would pull information together that was requested by various Board Members for the July County Board meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

County Executive Summers adjourned the meeting at 7:48 PM.



Aaron Ammons, Champaign County Clerk
and ex-Officio Clerk of the Champaign County Board
Champaign County, Illinois