

**Evanston City Council
Closed Session Minutes
Aldermanic Library
Monday, June 25, 2007**

PRESENT: Aldermen Wynne, Bernstein, Holmes, Moran, Rainey, Hansen,
Wollin and Jean-Baptiste

ABSENT: Mayor Morton

STAFF: Julia Carroll and Herb Hill

PRESIDING: Mayor pro tem Tisdahl

START: 10:48 p.m.

Minutes

Closed session minutes of June 11, 2007 were approved as submitted.

Special Assessment 2246 Sherman – Padma Rao

This is the problem special assessment for alley paving. First Assistant Corporation Counsel Herb Hill had suggested dismissing her from the case so that she has no standing and was voted down. The tree is of great concern to Ms. Rao. Douglas Cannon called Elke Purze with a proposal. In situations like this the City puts a box around the tree. The proposal does not guarantee the tree will be saved. His proposal is that she pay \$150. Alderman Wollin said the A&PW Committee voted that the condominium board was to make the decision on the tree. 70% of the tree is on condo property and 30% is on City land. The City will reject the proposals and be in court tomorrow on this.

Township personnel

Mr. Hill reported various trustees have called in the past weeks about the assessor and deputy assessor. Elke Purze is to meet with Ms. Eckersall and Ms. Benjamin sometime this week to develop a severance package. The Deputy Assessor was terminated and there is no doubt that she could be terminated. They are investigating the pay status of the Deputy Assessor. A handbook for the General Assistance office is being used and may not apply. Payroll sheets are being gathered.

Staff visited the assessor's office two weeks ago which was deserted with no sign showing hours of operation. Various phone calls have been received from Diane Benjamin who reported she has two years of recorded harassing phone calls from Ms. Eckersall. Eckersall says that she did and did not want to terminate Benjamin. Ms. Benjamin claims that she has been stalked by Ms. Eckersall. There are a number of conflicting and confusing stories. Trustee Wynne commented this is not the first time that Eckersall has been accused of stalking.

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Trustee Rainey stated that she wanted an audit because they have no idea of what goes on in that office. They see expenditures on the bills list, but what does it mean in terms of activity. Mr. Kent does the spread sheets and there is an accounting manager in the township office.

Trustee Holmes received many calls and emails indicating people received assistance from Ms. Benjamin but never see the assessor in the office. She got a large pile of stuff, called constituents and asked who did the appeal. She that found many were not done.

Trustee Jean-Baptiste wants an activity audit because they are ending up with the short end of the stick. People say that Ms. Benjamin is helpful. He suggested they need a plan and thought that Commissioner Larry Suffredin will take up the slack. Trustee Rainey spoke with two city employees who were assisted by Ms. Benjamin There is no record of them being helped. Are people saying they got help filling out forms or obtaining tax relief. Trustee Rainey urged they get new auditors to look at the township books; noted they never have had an inventory of items purchased and no record of their existence.

City Manager Carroll will ask Matt Grady to follow up with Miller/Cooper. They can stop their work at the trustee's request and new auditors can be brought in.

Trustee Bernstein had asked Mr. Hill to research a prospective recall of an elected official in state statutes. He also asked if they could only fund the assessor's salary. Mr. Hill stated they have to fund the office. An intern had researched the law and there is no provision for recall in Illinois. Mr. Hill said they will first try to stop the escalation between Eckersall and Benjamin. Second is to evaluate the volume of work that was stated.

Trustee Rainey asked the significance of permits not being filed or entered. Trustee Bernstein explained the township processes all building permits and real estate transfers to the Cook County Assessor. They can find out how many appeals were filed. Building permits affect the valuation of property. Trustee Rainey asked why the City could not file the building permits. Hill's office will track down what was done and filed.

Trustee Moran suggested if they can get a read on what has been done or not done, they should tell Sharon Eckersall to resign

Trustee Hansen noted this is short term mediation and that they are funding a sham office. They have a responsibility but she did not know what it is.

Trustee Tisdahl suggested that they take \$50,000 and put it toward a person who could do the functions of the assessor's office.

There being no further business to come before Council, Mayor pro tem Tisdahl declared the meeting adjourned at 11:15 p.m.

Mary P. Morris, City Clerk

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